



## USD 497 News Release

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May 26, 2026

### Superintendent Statement Jeanice Kerr Swift

#### Negotiated Agreements Approved for 26-27 School Year

We are proud this evening to achieve a significant milestone with the approval of both the Certified and the Educational Support Professional employee agreements, and in wrapping up this work prior to the end of the school year.

I am deeply grateful for the teamwork modeled over many weeks of long meetings, proud of the courageous work to face the organizational challenges inherent in our times: fringe benefits and compensation within limited, public resources - it's a triple threat that forces either innovation or stagnation in organizations.

The team effort mobilized by our employee group leaders, by lead negotiator Samrie Devin, and district administrator team, as well as Members of the Board of Education, specifically Members Byers, Jones, and Lancaster - though all Members were fully engaged in this work - serves as a model of how to navigate, innovate, lead and thrive. We are all better for this work; it is based on years of developing and deepening relationship and team, as this affirmative outcome demonstrates.

The increases we achieve in bringing these agreements are historic: **a \$51,000 annual beginning teacher salary and a \$20/per hour starting wage for educational support professionals, and a total compensation increase across employee groups of \$7,905,000.** Taking these steps, alongside ensuring a second daily professional planning time for teachers at all levels, achieved last school year, will continue to 'raise the level of play' in Lawrence Public Schools, supporting educators for the benefit of our students, and the enrichment of our Lawrence community today and into the future.

Achieving this milestone tonight, however, is only an initial step as we move forward together. We are committed to continue to innovate to achieve our shared goals of a world class education for our students, delivered by an extraordinary team of professionals, to attract and retain the talent, experience and continuing excellence the Lawrence Public Schools has long been known for, across Kansas and around the world.

#### **Negotiated Agreement Updates**

Certified: The proposed certified negotiated agreement updates for 2026–2027 include several significant investments in employee compensation, benefits, safety, and working conditions for certified staff. Key provisions include strengthened safety language that authorizes proactive staff intervention when student or staff safety is at risk and provides reimbursement for damaged

personal medical devices incurred during intervention. The agreement also establishes a new Special Education Subcommittee to identify and address issues impacting special education staff. Additional updates include expanded leave protections for employees injured by students or patrons, the addition of Indigenous Peoples' Day as a paid holiday, and revised variance language at several schools to address duty day schedules, collaboration time, IPS/SEL delivery, and staffing needs.

The agreement's largest fiscal impacts are tied to salary and benefits. The salary package raises the certified staff base salary by \$6,217 to \$51,000; guarantees at least a \$3,000 increase for all full-time certified employees; and applies both vertical and horizontal movement on the salary matrix. The district is proposing a transition from a fully insured medical plan to a self-funded model with stop-loss coverage in response to a projected 32% premium increase, while maintaining the same provider network and overall coverage structure through Blue Cross Blue Shield of Kansas. A new employer-paid Core PPO plan will be introduced for full-time employees, with optional buy-up plans available at employee cost. Additional benefit vendor updates include changes to legal/ID protection and employee assistance providers. The agreement also adds several new coaching and extracurricular stipends.

Educational Support Professionals (ESP): The proposed agreement updates include several operational, compensation, and employee support changes for the 2026–2027 school year. Key provisions include the creation of a joint Professional Development Committee to evaluate ESP training and advancement opportunities; strengthened health and safety language that allows staff to intervene proactively in unsafe situations and provides reimbursement for damaged personal medical devices; clarification of seniority and involuntary transfer procedures; and expanded leave protections for employees injured by students or patrons. The agreement also adds Indigenous Peoples' Day as a paid holiday and establishes eligibility criteria for summer holiday pay for qualifying staff.

The most significant financial and workforce impacts relate to benefits and compensation. The district is proposing a transition from a fully insured medical plan to a self-funded model with stop-loss coverage in response to a projected 32% premium increase, while maintaining the same provider network and overall coverage structure through Blue Cross Blue Shield of Kansas. A new employer-paid Core PPO plan will be introduced for full-time employees, with optional buy-up plans available at employee cost. Additional benefit vendor updates include changes to legal/ID protection and employee assistance providers.

Compensation changes include a new wage matrix increasing the ESP base pay from \$15.46 to \$20.00 per hour, with additional wage increases across classifications and reclassification of several positions into higher pay levels. A Salary Matrix Committee will also convene during 2026–2027 to review education credit and longevity considerations.

Board Approved Administrator Salary Pool Increase (26-27 SY)

Board approval was granted for a 2.91% increase to the administrative salary pool for the 2026-2027 school year.

The 2026-2027 total increase in allocation for each employee group is as follows:

Certificated Staff: \$4,620,000 (**8.32%** increase to Certified Salary Pool) with a district cost of \$5,006,000

Education Support Professionals (ESP): \$2,480,000 (**11.87%** increase to Classified Salary Pool) with a district cost of \$2,680,000.

Administrative Staff: \$202,000 (**2.91%** increase to Administrative Salary Pool) with a district cost of \$219,000.

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