



USD 497 News Release

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Board Approves Pay Increases and Negotiated Agreements with Certified Employees and Education Support Professionals for the 26-27 School Year

Ratification of Tentative Agreement – Certified

The Board of Education unanimously approved the tentative agreement with the Lawrence Education Association on behalf of Certified Employees for the 2026-2027 year.

The certified salary pool will receive a 8.32% increase, totaling approximately \$4,620,000, which includes increasing the base salary to \$51,000 as well as horizontal and vertical movements. With employer costs the total cost to the district is approximately \$5,006,000.

Additional Information on the Certified Agreement: 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.

Ratification of Tentative Agreement – Education Support Professionals (ESP)

The Board of Education unanimously approved the Tentative Agreement with the Lawrence Education Association on behalf of Education Support Professionals for the 2026-2027 school year.

The Education Support Professionals (ESP) salary pool will receive a 11.87% increase, totaling approximately \$2,480,000, which includes increasing the starting hourly wage to \$20.00 per hour as well as horizontal movement. With employer costs the total cost to the district is approximately \$2,680,000.

Additional information on the ESP Agreement: 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.

Administrator Salary Pool Increase (26-27 SY)

The Board of Education unanimously approved 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.

Superintendent’s Report

Dr. Swift shared a wide range of updates and highlights from throughout Lawrence Public Schools, including:

- Highlighted commencement ceremonies and graduation celebrations held across Lawrence Public Schools from [Community Transition](#) and [Project SEARCH](#) to [Lawrence Virtual School](#), [Lawrence High School](#), [Free State High School](#), with Adult Education coming up this Thursday. Families and community members can continue exploring graduation highlights, stories, photos, and celebration coverage at the [Lawrence Public Schools Graduation Page](#).
- Shared news of **Mallory Johnson, Secondary Therapeutic Classroom (STC) teacher at Community Connections at Pinckney**, for being [named the 2026 recipient of the](#)

[Excellence in Teaching Award](#), known locally as “The Bobs Award,” and received a \$10,000 prize through the Lawrence Schools Foundation. The recognition celebrates educators who demonstrate extraordinary instructional skill, deep commitment to students, and a profound impact on the lives of children and families.

- Announced Lawrence Public Schools **district finalists for Kansas Teacher of the Year:** (Secondary Teacher of the Year) [Deborah Woodall-Routeledge, band teacher at Southwest Middle School](#), and (Elementary Teacher of the Year) [Jacey Yanek, kindergarten teacher at Quail Run Elementary School](#); and the district’s nominee for **Kansas Master Teacher Award**, through Emporia State, [Angelia Perkins, art educator at Lawrence High School](#).
- Students in [Lindsey Cramer’s classroom at Kennedy Early Childhood Center recently welcomed children’s author and illustrator Lindsey Yankey](#) for a creative and engaging visit centered around storytelling, imagination, and the art of illustration, and an up-close look at the artistic process behind her children's book, *The Dinosaur Seed*.
- 6A Spring Sports State Post-Season Summary:
 - [Boys Tennis: Micah Ward captured the 6A State Championship](#) with a first-place finish, while teammate **Ishaan Rao** earned a fourth-place finish in the state tournament.
 - [Girls Swimming & Diving](#): 5th place overall team finish for Free State High School, and a state championship for freshman Ella Marsh from Free State High School in the Girls 200 Yard Individual Medley.
 - [Boys Baseball](#): Free State High School Boys Baseball played Olathe Northwest @ Blue Valley West on Thursday, May 26, in the [State Quarterfinals](#) for the chance to move onto the Semifinals which will be played at Wichita State University on Thursday evening.
 - [State Track and Field Meet](#) is scheduled for May 29-30 in Wichita.
 - [Boys State Golf Tournament](#) is scheduled for May 26-27 in Topeka.
- Announced June 1 kick-off of [Summer Meals for Kids programming during June and July this year](#). These meal opportunities, funded through the USDA’s Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), help ensure students continue to have access to nutritious meals while school is out of session.

Lawrence Public Schools will host a public meal site at Sunset Hill Elementary. Children ages 1-18 can receive free meals while adult meals are \$5 served Monday through Friday, June 1 through July 24, from 12:00-12:45 p.m. Please note there will not be meals served on the summer holidays: June 19 and July 3. Families may also register to receive weekly summer meal kits containing five days of breakfasts and lunches to prepare at home.

[Read](#) and [watch](#) the full Superintendent’s Report online.

Meal Prices 26-27 School Year

Cynde Frick, Executive Director of Finance, and Julie Henry, Director of Nutrition & Wellness, provided information in consideration of adjusted meal prices for the 26-27 school year.

The presentation included breakfast and lunch student participation trends, current meal costs, food service fund balance status, and an overview of the USDA-funded summer food service program (June 1-July 24).

[Click here for presentation slides containing additional information.](#)

The presentation was information-only and no board action was taken.

Consent Agenda

The board approved a consent agenda including approvals for AssessPrep, comprehensive assessment management platform (\$61,754.40 annually, for 4-year agreement); HighScope PreK Curriculum, research-based early childhood curriculum (\$40,424.99 total); Legacy Classic Acoustic Shells, for Free State HS Orchestra (\$27,494.44); Dell Computers (quantity of 35, not to exceed \$100,000); Elementary Supplies for 26-27 (\$62,550); band and orchestra instruments (\$65,634.73 total); recommended Fee Schedule for 26-27 school year; Meal Vending Machines, Choice Campus at Centennial and Lawrence College and Career Center (4 units, \$73,100 total); financial audit services, Gordon CPA (not to exceed \$32,485); personnel report; monthly vouchers; financial reports; donation report; and meeting minutes (May 11, 2026).

Consent agenda was approved with a 7-0 vote.

Board Reports

Board President Gordon-Ross extended his congratulations to the Class of 2026, and expressed his sympathies and condolences to the family of Dr. Quentin Rials.

Member Kimball provided a legislative update, which included interest by the State Board of Education on the impacts of screen time on students. The Kansas Legislature's Education Funding Task Force meets this week, and is expected to focus on how to account for student achievement on the calculation of school funding.

Member Kimball and Member Jones summarized a recent meeting of the Policy Committee and previewed summer work to ensure compliance with new legislation.

Member Cadue-Blackwood noted an upcoming meeting by the Douglas County Commission to explore alternatives to truancy services.

Member Jones noted the recent formation of a coalition of four school districts to address special education shortfalls in state funding obligations.

Access a link to the [full meeting agenda](#) online.

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