



USD 497 News Release

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Board Hears Student Support Services Presentation on Authentic Family Engagement

Enhancements 2026, Part III – Authentic Family Engagement Update

Kristen Ryan, assistant superintendent student support services, provided an informational presentation to the board about the importance of authentic family engagement and a recommendation for the dual capacity-building framework for family-school partnerships, developed by Dr. Karen Mapp. Ms. Ryan was joined by Kiley Lockett, director of mental health; and Tina Mitchell, director of equity, student and family engagement.

Four core beliefs for meaningful family engagement were affirmed: All families care and have dreams for their children; all families have the capacity to support their children; family and school staff should be equal partners; the responsibility for building and sustaining partnerships rest primarily with school staff and especially school leaders.

The presentation also previewed the opening of a Family Engagement Center (at the Educational Services Center location, 110 McDonald Drive) in Fall 2026. The Family Engagement Center will serve as a one-stop site dedicated to support families through wraparound services, academic assistance, barrier removal, and increased equitable access to resources for all families.

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

Superintendent's Report

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

- Last week, **Cordley Elementary** hosted a surprise visit from **U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor**. **Justice Sotomayor** read excerpts from her children's book, *Just Shine!*, and visited with K-5 students and staff.
- [USDA Food and Nutrition Service Deputy Under Secretary Patrick Penn and Mountain Plains Region Acting Child Nutrition Director Josh McDaniels joined KSDE Child Nutrition and Wellness Director Kelly Chanay for a visit to Community Connections at Pinckney and Hillcrest Elementary.](#) They were briefed on the district's bakery and hands-on learning opportunities for students, followed by enjoying breakfast service with students at Hillcrest.
- Paraprofessional Appreciation Day was acknowledged last week (1st Wednesday in April), with gratitude extended to the vital role paraeducators play across Lawrence Public Schools.

- Congratulations to **Spring ACE Award Winners** [Hillcrest Elementary School paraeducator Nathan Perkins Rock](#) and [district I.T. support specialist James Jarvis](#). Both received surprise visits and recognition by the Lawrence Schools Foundation.
- **Four Lawrence High School student artists** were recognized for earning gold medals in three different categories nationally from **Scholastic Art Awards**:
 - **Leila Albaugh - Painting**
 - **Wren Jay - Painting**
 - **Lynorah Roberts - Mixed Media**
 - **Rilo Scholz - Jewelry**

More than 100,000 works of art from students across the U.S. and Canada advanced to the national stage, with only the top 1% of submissions awarded Gold Medal status. National Gold Medal recipients are invited to be honored through a formal awards ceremony at Carnegie Hall in New York City and are featured in a national exhibition and annual publication, highlighting their work among the top student artists in the country.

We are proud of the sustained strength of the arts in Lawrence Public Schools. Over the past six years, Lawrence High School students have earned more than 250 regional and national Scholastic Art Awards, demonstrating a consistent tradition of excellence in visual arts education.

These students explore their art in the beautiful classrooms of extraordinary art teachers **Todd Poteet, Angela Perkins, and Emily Markoulatos**. We congratulate these students and their teachers for this exceptional accomplishment and celebrate the arts advantage offered in Lawrence Public Schools, and the continued impact of the arts to help students express, connect, and excel.

- **Students in the Geometry in Construction course at Free State High School** recently applied their learning through a hands-on project benefiting Douglas County Youth Services. [Students worked collaboratively to remove an existing greenhouse structure and design, build, and install a new prefabricated greenhouse on site.](#) This project required students to apply skills in construction, mathematics, teamwork, and problem-solving in a real-world setting.

The new greenhouse will support agricultural programming and provide opportunities for students to engage in hands-on learning experiences. It will also contribute to the district's broader Farm to School efforts by supporting plant starts for school gardens across Lawrence Public Schools.

- **Young adults from [Community Connections took first place at the 2026 Johnson County Community College Job Olympics](#), earning an impressive 48 medals.** Competing against more than 500 participants, CCAP students earned medals from career readiness and workplace skill events, including categories such as job application, job interview, product matching, stocking groceries, sorting mail, bag stuffing, and making change.
- **[Kindergarten Orientation is scheduled for Wednesday, April 22.](#)** Families of incoming kindergarten students are encouraged to complete enrollment in advance and are invited to visit their child's school to meet staff, learn about daily routines and curricula, and receive tips in preparing for a successful transition into Kindergarten in August.
- An announcement was made of the transition to a new board document tool, [Diligent Community](#) (previously BoardDocs). It was noted that while the interface looks a little

different, the purpose remains the same for online management of board meeting agendas, and comprehensive archive of previous meeting documentation and board policies.

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

Consent Agenda

The board approved a consent agenda including approvals for Lawrence High School boiler replacement engineering services (\$26,750); Xello college and career readiness platform annual renewal (\$25,610); personnel report; donation report; financial reports; monthly vouchers; meeting minutes (March 23, 2026); and Imagine Learning Edgenuity Licenses renewal for 26-27 SY (\$55,000). Consent agenda was approved 7-0.

Board Reports

Board President Gordon-Ross summarized a recent meeting of the Facilities Committee, and highlighted construction work at the Choice Campus at Centennial Campus.

A legislative update was provided by Member Kimball from the final week of the 2026 Kansas Legislature. An education budget was passed, with significant shortfalls for special education funding. Several policies were passed with multiple unfunded mandates and increased reporting requirements for public school districts. She shared a variety of ways in which community members can engage with their elected officials and advocate for public education. Member Kimball also previewed that the State Board of Education will be naming a new Commissioner of Education on Tuesday, April 14.

Member Byers summarized a recent meeting of the Equity Council, and a presentation on high quality instruction delivered by Dr. Cole Amaya last week; Member Jones noted the Policy Committee actively reviewing recent Kansas Legislature action, and potential policy impacts and adjustments for Lawrence Public Schools; and Member Lancaster summarized ongoing work and discussion of the AI Advisory Group.

Executive Session

The board met in executive session to discuss negotiations with no action taken.

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

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