



USD 497 News Release

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Board Hears Teaching and Learning Enhancements for 2026 and Approves Track Replacements at Free State High School and Lawrence High School

Enhancements 2026, Part II – Teaching and Learning

Dr. Cole Amaya, assistant superintendent teaching and learning, updated ongoing work of the teaching and learning department specific to the intentional design of coherent systems to support quality, consistent learning experiences for all students.

Efforts underway in advance of the 26-27 school year include supporting teachers in the implementation of high-quality instructional materials (HQIM); launch of a balanced assessment framework embedded within the scope and sequence of the curriculum; real-world learning opportunities for students; development of individual plans of study (IPS); establishment of differentiated diplomas; alignment of Career Technical Education pathways; and re-envisioning of programming offered at the Lawrence College and Career Center.

[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:

- **Southwest Middle School's** Maci Perrins, placed 4th in the State Spelling Bee as a 7th grade student. She is a 4-time winner of the Douglas County Spelling Bee.
- [Prairie Park Elementary hosted a fun and engaging Winter Olympic Games](#) at their school, involving Physical Education and Art classes. Thanks to Prairie Park's Mike Martin, PE Teacher, and Randa Lewis, Art Teacher for planning and facilitating a rewarding experience for students.
- [Students at Liberty Memorial Central Middle School explored future career pathways during a dynamic Career Day experience](#) featuring both community professionals and student presenters. Local professionals included an archaeologist, nurse practitioner, chemist, criminal investigator, photographer, social worker, and others who shared firsthand insights into their careers, providing students with a real-world perspective on a wide range of opportunities.
- Congratulations to **Free State High School** students for their outstanding performance at the DECA State Conference: Neel Sabarwal – 1st Place, Personal Financial Literacy; Allen Shao – 1st Place, Principles of Finance; Ruth Yang – 2nd Place, Principles of Business Management; Carter Dinges – 4th Place, Principles of Finance; Grace Mosconi – 5th Place, Principles of Entrepreneurship; Dale He – 5th Place, Principles of Finance. Special appreciation was

extended to business teacher Kimberly Hawks for her leadership and support of these students.

- **Langston Hughes Elementary** facilitated input sessions held with staff members and site council representatives to solicit thoughtful feedback on future needs of the building, with themes heard specific to safety, access, flow, and design of learning spaces.
- Dr. Swift also shared **leadership appointments and updates for the 26-27 school year** (effective July 1, 2026):
 - Kristen Ryan, Assistant Superintendent of Student Support Services
 - Samrie Devin, Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources & Employee Relations
 - Denise Johnson, Principal of Prairie Park Elementary
 - Zach Harwood, Principal of Choice Campus at Centennial & Lawrence Virtual School
 - Mark Preut, Lead Principal of Student Support Pathways

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

Track Replacements at Free State and Lawrence High Schools

Dr. Larry Englebrick, deputy superintendent, highlighted proposed work to coordinate replacements of the 400 meter running tracks at Free State High School and Lawrence High School during Summer 2026.

The board approved (7-0) a recommended bid from ACI Boland Architects in partnership with VSR Design/McConnell and Associates, for a total project authorization of \$1,730,237. Replacements would be paid from facilities and operations capital outlay funds, which cannot be used for classroom salaries.

In response to interests from FSHS students and community, Dr. Swift and Dr. Englebrick will visit with the FSHS team to review the anticipated schedule for replacement work, in collaboration with the contractor, and update the school community on the timeline.

Consent Agenda

The board approved a consent agenda including approvals for architectural visioning and planning support services (not to exceed \$42,000); asphalt and concrete maintenance and improvements (\$284,105.92); personnel report; monthly vouchers; donation report; financial reports; and meeting minutes for March 9, 2026. Consent agenda was approved 7-0.

Board Reports

Board President Gordon-Ross summarized his attendance at a meeting of the Lawrence Schools Foundation board; and highlighted items presented for board consideration on the Consent Agenda for architectural visioning and planning support services, and asphalt and concrete maintenance and improvements.

A legislative update was provided by Member Kimball from the last week of the Kansas Legislature, including education budget concerns, projected shortfalls of special education funding, a "bell to bell" (arrival to dismissal) ban of student cell phone access during the school day, and other potential legislative changes under consideration.

Member Jones previewed work of the Policy Committee to review and consider adjustments as a result of the newly passed student cell phone ban.

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

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