



USD 497 News Release

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Board of Education Hears Superintendent Report and Approves Purchase of Preschool Playground Equipment

Superintendent's Report

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

- Recognition of last week's [Leadership Luncheon: State of the City event](#), hosted by Leadership Lawrence and the Lawrence Chamber of Commerce. The district's partnership with city leadership was highlighted, as well as the important connection between strong cities and strong schools.
- [Lawrence Schools Foundation](#) was acknowledged for their annual retreat, focused on strategic alignment, long-term fundraising priorities, and continued key partnerships that directly benefit students and staff of Lawrence Public Schools, in addition to recent volunteer work to support a grant-funded [Backpack Meal Program](#). 185 backpacks were filled with shelf-stable items to provide nourishment support to students after school and during Spring Break.
- Student-led advocacy efforts of Free State High School students participating in [AP Day at the Kansas State Capitol](#), joining peers from across the state highlighting the impact of Advanced Placement programs; and a group of student leaders from Community Connections at Pinckney representing Lawrence at [Advocacy Day](#) hosted by the Kansas Council on Developmental Disabilities.
- Recap from last Friday's Crosstown Showdown basketball games, which included a \$15,000 check presentation from Truity Credit Union to fund "[Truity Fuel Zones](#)" at both Lawrence High School and Free State High School. The donation helps to provide student athletes with fuel needed to perform, recover, and succeed throughout the competitive season.
- On Monday at West Middle School, staff and community volunteers helped to facilitate "[Reality U[®]](#)," which is an interactive program designed to bring a bit of "reality" for students through a 75-minute interactive and engaging personal finance simulation. Students imagine their life as 26-year-olds and complete an online lifestyle survey. This information is used to create a unique and individualized future scenario.

This event actively engages students to help them understand the importance of how their performance in school today impacts their future. This simulation was also a great opportunity for community volunteers to participate in a real-world learning experience and have positive interactions with our students.

- Lawrence High School Intertribal Club and Native American Student Services hosted their annual Powwow on Saturday, February 21, a powerful celebration of culture, heritage, and community. Students, families, and community members gathered to honor Native traditions through dance, music, and shared storytelling. A special highlight was Lawrence High School student, Louis, serving as the Head Man Dancer.

Special acknowledgement was expressed to David Farve, Shayla Chickaway, and all the NASS community, as well as Lawrence High School's Intertribal Club Sponsor Heidi Woods, for organizing the event. Events like this provide meaningful opportunities for cultural learning and respect, and they reflect our commitment to honoring Indigenous voices and histories within our schools.

- **Community Conversations** are actively taking place throughout Winter 2026. These community engagement opportunities will serve as opportunities for feedback to be received and assist with the district's update of the strategic plan (www.usd497.org/future).

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

Board Reports

Board President Gordon-Ross highlighted February's Facilities Committee briefing on upcoming projects; Jayhawk Rotary's recognition of Lawrence Schools Foundation as a featured community partner; and multiple school visits, including to West Middle School's grant-funded "Reality U" interactive financial planning simulation for 8th grade students.

Gordon-Ross also highlighted recommended bids that appear on the Consent Agenda for approval, included updates to the stadium press box at Free State High School (\$390,500); middle school theatre safety improvements (\$522,100); and preschool playground equipment at Deerfield and Prairie Park elementary schools (\$114,363).

Member Kimball provided a comprehensive legislative update from "turnaround week" (half-way thru the current session of the Kansas Legislature) specific to public education, including restroom configurations; cell phone ban; school to home communication restrictions; limitations specific to bond issue communications; funding of public education; and the shortfall of special education funding.

Consent Agenda

The board approved a consent agenda including approvals for Free State High School press box remodel; middle school theatre updates; preschool playground equipment (Deerfield and Prairie Park elementary schools); personnel report; monthly vouchers; financial reports; board meeting minutes (February 23, 2026). Consent agenda was approved 7-0.

Executive Sessions

The board met in two executive sessions. One to discuss negotiations; and one to discuss potential litigation with legal counsel present. No action was taken.

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