



USD 497 News Release

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Board Hears Back-to-School Report for the 2026-27 School Year

Back-to-School 2026-27

At Monday's Lawrence Board of Education meeting, Superintendent Dr. Jeanice Kerr Swift presented highlights on the district's preparations for the 2026-27 school year, including [the district's Back-to-School webpage](#)—full of resources for district families—preparations at district facilities, student transportation, hiring and onboarding new staff members, implementation of a family engagement framework, and integration of new instructional tools for teachers and students.

[Click here for the informational presentation slides](#)

Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Dr. Swift highlighted several recent accomplishments and initiatives across Lawrence Public Schools.

Among the highlights:

- Lawrence Public Schools is proud to recognize Free State High School students and staff for their outstanding achievements recently at the [2026 Starlight Theatre Blue Star Awards](#), one of the nation's premier high school musical theatre recognition programs.

Free State students and educators earned three Blue Star Awards:

- **Piper Northrop – Outstanding Lighting Design**
- **Harper York – Outstanding Performer in a Featured Role for her portrayal of Grandma**
- **Free State High School Orchestra – Outstanding Orchestra**

These accomplishments reflect the dedication of an outstanding team of students and staff. Special recognition goes to **Free State Assistant Director of Choirs Olivia Henning, Free State Theatre Director Bryce Jones, Free State Music Director Lauren Thiessen**, the professional and student musicians in the pit orchestra, and the many students who contributed both on stage and behind the scenes.

- Congratulations to the five individuals selected for induction into the [Lawrence Lions Alumni Association Hall of Honor](#), an honor recognizing graduates and community members whose lives and careers have made lasting contributions to their professions and communities. This year's inductees include **Kim Murphree, John Nalbandian, Jim "Punkin" O'Connell, Dr. Quentin Lamerle Rials (Class of 1995), and G. Craig Weinaug (Class of 1970)**.
- Updates from the [2026 AVID Summer Institute](#), where Lawrence Public Schools educators strengthened instructional practices and continued planning for districtwide AVID

implementation. Dr. Swift also recognized six recent West Middle School graduates who served as AVID Student Ambassadors during the national conference.

- Lawrence Public Schools recently hosted an ESP Paraeducator Hiring Fair as part of our continued efforts to recruit outstanding employees to support students across our classrooms. The open-house event welcomed 32 candidates, providing opportunities for principals and special education administrators to meet individually with prospective employees, discuss available positions, and learn more about the valuable experiences each candidate could bring to our schools. Recruitment efforts continue as the district prepares for the beginning of the school year.
- Lawrence Public Schools principals and district leaders recently gathered for two days of Back-to-School professional learning focused on preparing for another successful year. Building on last year's work around clarity, culture, and capacity, this year's learning was grounded in the theme: In Partnership for Students: With Intention and By Design. Throughout the two days, leaders explored effective instructional leadership, strengthening a culture of dignity and belonging, refining systems to better support students, using data to guide continuous improvement, and deepening partnerships with families and the community.
- Dr. Swift recognized the cross-functional team of district staff who recently completed professional learning through the Harvard Graduate School of Education's Creating Effective Home and School Partnerships Institute, supporting the district's ongoing commitment to strengthening family engagement. The Stronger Connections Grant funded this impactful professional development and strategic planning initiative.
- Dr. Swift provided an update on renovation progress at the Choice Campus at Centennial, where flexible learning spaces are being created to support personalized student pathways. Dr. Swift also noted the district's continued preparations to welcome staff, students, and families for the new school year.

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

Consent Agenda

The board approved a consent agenda including approvals for participation in the Child Nutrition Programs for the 2026-27 school year; adoption of the Kansas Public Employees Deferred Compensation Plan (KPEDCP); three-year renewal of ClassLink site licenses and ClassLink Analytics Plus software from ClassLink, Inc. (\$138,735.72); three-year renewal of Mosyle Manager mobile device management software (\$293,859); Renewal of FlexPoint 6-12 Virtual School Curriculum (\$77,675); Renewal of Follett Destiny Resource Management Software (\$21,852.28); Renewal of Frontline Professional Learning Management System (\$34,771.41); annual elevator service agreement - KONE, Inc. (estimated at \$36,000); annual HVAC preventative maintenance services with P1 Service, LLC (\$250,215); approval of the 2026-27 District Leadership Organizational Chart; financial reports; monthly vouchers; personnel report; and meeting minutes (July 13, 2026).

Consent agenda was approved with a 5-0 vote.

Board Reports

Board Member Kelly Jones discussed the Policy Committee's work on Policy JCDC Student Personal Electronic Communication Devices, and continued work to plan out strategies for future policies around dignity and social media.

Board Member Shannon Kimball discussed the Policy Committee's work on updating policy regarding staff member use of social media channels to be compliant with new state law.

New Business

Policy JCDC Student Personal Electronic Communication Devices

In December 2024, in fulfillment of the district commitment to prioritize teaching and learning across all classrooms, Lawrence Public Schools implemented [Board Policy JCAA - Cell Phones and Electronic Devices.](#)

In implementing the prior policy, we worked across the district to prioritize teacher instruction, student learning, and the primacy of the classroom, by removing the distractions of student use of personal cell phones and other electronic devices. The policy removed the allowable use of cell phones during instructional times.

In compliance with KS HB 2299, law effective July 1, 2026, the Board reviewed a new policy [JCDC, PK12 Student Personal Electronic Communication Devices.](#)

With this policy, Lawrence Public Schools will join all Kansas school districts in implementing a personal electronic communication device-free school environment, extending throughout the school day across all campuses. Personal electronic communication devices must be securely stored in an inaccessible location during the school day.

To ensure the district is in compliance with KS HB 2299, Policy JCDC will stipulate that the use of personal electronic communication devices is prohibited during the school day for all students at all grade levels.

Members of the Board convened a first reading of Policy JCDC Student Personal Electronic Communication Devices in preparation for a vote at the next Board of Education meeting on August 10, 2026.

Policy JCDC was approved for a first reading with a vote of 5-0.

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

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