



USD 497 News Release

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Board Adopts Policy JCDC Student Personal Electronic Communication Devices and Hears Part II of Back-to-School Report for the 2026-27 School Year

Special Recognitions

At Monday's Lawrence Board of Education meeting, the Board recognized recent West Middle School graduates and AVID Student Ambassadors for the national [AVID Summer Institute](#) conference, and welcomed new building leaders to USD 497.

School Finance and Budget Review

Executive Director of Finance Cynde Frick presented an overview of school finance and budget basics in preparation for upcoming decisions on the 2026-27 budget.

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

Part II Back-to-School 2026-27

Superintendent Dr. Jeanice Kerr Swift presented highlights on the district's final preparations for the 2026-27 school year, including back-to-school communications and family engagement, staff preparations, transportation, facilities improvements, and readiness to welcome more than 10,000 students back to school.

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

Superintendent's Report

Dr. Swift shared several highlights with the Board as the district prepares to welcome students back to school.

- Dr. Swift highlighted [the 3rd Annual Kids Expo](#), hosted by the Lawrence Schools Foundation, which brought approximately 2,500 to 3,000 students and family members to the Educational Support Center for free shoes, backpacks and school supplies, haircuts, health screenings, food, activities, and connections with more than 75 community vendors and organizations.

Dr. Swift thanked Dena Johnston and the Lawrence Schools Foundation team, Jamie Sinclair, Michelle Jennings, and the many district staff, school leaders, community partners, and volunteers who supported the event. Additional backpacks, shoes, and classroom supplies remain available for students and schools with additional needs, and remaining shoes will become part of the district clothing closet at Community Connections at Pinckney.

- The district's Nutrition & Wellness team served 112,787 meals over the summer, including breakfasts and lunches, with an increase of more than 3,100 meals served (2.8%) over last summer. Dr. Swift thanked the Nutrition & Wellness team and community partners, and reminded families that the [2026-27 Free and Reduced-Price Meal application](#) is now available and must be completed each school year.
- The district is adding Virtual Phone to [ParentSquare](#), its official family communication platform. The feature gives each staff member a dedicated local calling number to call or text families directly from the app or a web browser, without using a personal cell phone, separate hardware, or an additional login. Virtual Phone also strengthens documentation and privacy protections through automatic call time-stamping and logging, optional notes and transcription, and staff-defined office hours that route after-hours calls to voicemail.
- Dr. Swift welcomed district staff back for the new school year, noting that after a summer of preparing classrooms, improving facilities, and welcoming new colleagues, all staff returned to their buildings to reconnect and prepare to welcome more than 10,000 students. She highlighted this year's district focus — **together in partnership, with intention and by design** — and the district's commitment to classrooms, schools, and workplaces where students and staff experience dignity and belonging.
- Dr. Swift welcomed students and families back for the new school year. Transition Day for kindergarteners, sixth graders, and ninth graders entering new school levels is Wednesday, August 12. The first full day for K-12 students is Thursday, August 13, with the district's youngest learners transitioning into the classroom the following week, on August 18.

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

Consent Agenda

The board approved a consent agenda including donation of a 180-square-foot property easement at Liberty Memorial Central Middle School to the City of Lawrence for pedestrian and street improvements associated with the Massachusetts Street Multi-Modal Improvements Project; emergency generator repairs at Billy Mills Middle School by Foley Equipment Company (\$30,693.83, plus a 10% contingency of \$3,069, for a total project cost not to exceed \$33,762.83); HVAC upgrades at the Educational Support Center by Kruse Service, LLC (\$233,174, plus a 10% contingency of \$23,317.40, for a total project cost not to exceed \$256,491.40); a five-year Memorandum of Understanding with Dwayne Peaslee Technical Training Center, including annual payments of \$41,172 for designated instructional, office, and laboratory spaces; a one-time purchase of 131 classroom rugs for PreK-5 classrooms (not to exceed \$76,000); annual renewal of PowerSchool software and technical support (\$400,000); annual renewal of Cisco Support Services from Logicalis (\$43,197.12); purchase of 300 Pearson eDynamic Learning student licenses for Lawrence Virtual School (\$43,200); annual renewal of the Laserfiche Cloud document management system from SumnerOne

(\$21,702.30); Special Education contracted staffing services with AMN, Brightstar, Sunbelt-Blazerworks, Supplemental Health Care, The Stepping Stones Group, Therapy Travelers DBA Epic Special Education Staffing, and ZEN (estimated total of \$2,225,000); July 2026 donation report; monthly vouchers; personnel report; and meeting minutes (July 27, 2026).

Consent agenda was approved with a 7-0 vote.

Board Reports

Board Member GR Gordon-Ross discussed the Facility Planning Committee's work, and highlighted the ongoing progress for several projects including renovations at the Choice Campus at Centennial, the Free State High School press box, and track improvements at both high schools.

Board Vice President Yolanda Franklin discussed the Equity Advisory Committee's work packing snack packs to be distributed to families at the Family Engagement Center during the 3rd Annual Kids Expo.

Old Business

Policy JCDC Student Personal Electronic Communication Devices - Second Read

Following its first reading on July 27, 2026, the Board reviewed Policy [JCDC, PK12 Student Personal Electronic Communication Devices](#), on second reading. With this new policy, Lawrence Public Schools will join all Kansas school districts in implementing a student personal electronic communication device-free school environment, extending throughout the school day across all campuses. Personal electronic devices must be securely stored in an inaccessible location during the school day. This new policy prioritizes 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.

With adoption of the new policy, the Board also retired the district's prior policy, [Board Policy JCAA - Cell Phones and Electronic Devices](#), which had removed the allowable use of cell phones during instructional times since December 2024.

Policy JCDC was approved for adoption on second reading, and Policy JCAA – Cell Phones and Electronic Devices was retired with a vote of 7-0.

New Business

Neighborhood Revitalization Request: 714 Vermont St.

The Board considered the district's participation in a proposed Neighborhood Revitalization Area (NRA) for the redevelopment of 714 Vermont Street, which would renovate a former garage and climbing gym into approximately 13,834 square feet of Class A office space.

As part of the redevelopment, the project developers have requested participation from the City of Lawrence, Douglas County, and Lawrence Public Schools in a Neighborhood Revitalization Area (NRA). The request is for an 80%

property tax rebate for a period of 10 years on the increased assessed valuation resulting from the redevelopment project.

The City of Lawrence Commission and the Douglas County Commission have each approved participation in the Neighborhood Revitalization Area at an 80% rebate for 10 years. The Lawrence Public Schools Board of Education was asked to consider participation in the proposed Neighborhood Revitalization Area.

The Board approved the district's participation with a vote of 7-0.

Board Policy IIBGC – Staff Online Activities (First Reading)

The Board reviewed proposed revisions to [Board Policy IIBGC – Staff Online Activities](#) on first reading, with possible final approval at the August 24, 2026 meeting. Additional guidance will be shared with district staff members in the coming days.

The proposed revisions are intended to align district policy with current Kansas law, strengthen protections for students and staff, and clarify acceptable uses of social media and other online communication platforms. The updates distinguish between public, one-way communication used to share school information and prohibited two-way or private interactions with students through social media platforms. They also reinforce the expectation that employees use board-approved communication tools for official district business while continuing to permit appropriate instructional and educational communications through district-approved platforms.

Policy IIBGC was approved for a first reading with a vote of 7-0.

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

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