



USD 497 News Release

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Board Adopts 2026-27 Budget and Reviews Graduation Rate and Postsecondary Success

2026-27 Budget, Revenue Neutral Rate and Local Option Budget

During Monday night's meeting, the Lawrence Board of Education held public hearings related to the district's 2026-27 budget and Revenue Neutral Rate. The Revenue Neutral Rate is the tax rate that would generate the same amount of property tax revenue as the previous year. Because the district's proposed budget exceeds that rate, the Board considered a resolution authorizing the district to exceed the Revenue Neutral Rate.

The Board also considered the district's 2026-27 budget, developed using building needs assessments and state assessment data and informed by academic data, district curriculum, staffing, facility needs, and other priorities supporting student success.

Finally, the Board considered the annual Local Option Budget resolution, which would certify the district's Local Option Budget, also known as the Supplemental General Fund, at 33% for 2026-27.

The Revenue Neutral Rate resolution, 2026-27 Budget, and Local Option Budget resolution were each approved by a 6-0 vote.

Graduation Rate and Postsecondary Success

Members of the district leadership team reviewed the 2025 Graduation Rate Report and postsecondary success information. The presentation included a snapshot of 2025 data, graduation trends since 2019, and next steps in the district's implementation of high school programming to improve student outcomes.

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

Superintendent's Report

Dr. Jeanice Kerr Swift shared several highlights with the Board from across the district:

- [Kansas State Board of Education](#) Chair Cathy Hopkins, Kansas State Board of Education Member O'Brian, and Lawrence Board of Education Member Shannon

Kimball visited Deerfield and Hillcrest elementary schools for a firsthand look at aligned elementary curriculum and the intentional use of technology and technology-free learning experiences.

- Lawrence High School and Free State High School students had the opportunity to explore postsecondary pathways today. They participated in **College and Career Day at the Lied Center**, where representatives from more than 40 colleges, universities, and programs were available to directly speak with students about their futures.
- **Six Lawrence Public Schools seniors, Ben Jackson, Connor Coons, Davian Copeland, Rhett Sullivan, Sadie Reynolds, and Sejun Yun, were announced as Semifinalists in the 2027 National Merit Scholarship Program.**

These students are among more than 16,000 Semifinalists nationwide, representing less than 1% of U.S. high school seniors. They now have the opportunity to advance to Finalist standing and compete for approximately 6,700 National Merit Scholarships to be awarded next spring.

We congratulate Ben, Connor, Davian, Rhett, Sadie, and Sejun on this outstanding academic achievement and are incredibly proud to have them representing Lawrence Public Schools!

- Lawrence High School junior [Zoey Barber was recognized as the Kansas State High School Activities Association \(KSHSAA\) East/Southeast Kansas Female Athlete of the Week](#) during the first KSHSAA-sanctioned season of girls flag football in Kansas.
- Dr. Swift highlighted the sold-out Lawrence Schools Foundation Community Education Breakfast, which raised more than \$124,000, and the launch of the new Lawrence Schools Foundation Skilled Trades Fund.

At the breakfast, four seniors were recognized as [2026 Student Champions: Emery Lacle and Ben Lyles of Free State High School, and Baden Masenthin and Aaden Chee of Lawrence High School.](#)

We appreciate the Lawrence Schools Foundation and the many community partners whose generosity, advocacy, and investment continue to create meaningful opportunities for our students and staff.

- Dr. Swift highlighted the recent Fiesta de Hillcrest event. Held primarily in Spanish, with volunteers also available to provide English translation as needed, the [Fiesta de Hillcrest created an opportunity for families to connect with one another, build relationships with Hillcrest staff, and learn more about resources and support](#) available through Lawrence Public Schools and the wider Lawrence community.

- Dr. Swift provided an update on student transportation and the continued partnership between Lawrence Public Schools and Durham School Services. An estimated 1,600 students have been routed for bus transportation to date. This is up from 1,400 as last reported on August 24, 2026. The district continues to work with families, schools, the Family Engagement Center, and Durham School Services to address individual family needs as well as bus registrations that continue to come in.
- **The Lawrence Public Schools Family Engagement Center remains available as an additional support site, with staff and translators available to assist families at (785) 330-1900.**
- Looking ahead, [five additional preschool classrooms will open September 17,](#) followed by **AVID Day and Portfolio Day on September 18.** There will be **no school for early childhood through grade 12 on September 25** while teachers participate in professional development.

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

Consent Agenda

The Board approved a consent agenda including the renewal of the district's Webex Meeting subscription through the 2028-29 school year (\$42,492.17 from the General Fund), reducing the number of licenses from 1,350 to 250 and resulting in projected savings of \$153,707.83 over the life of the contract; renovations to support the colocation of Transportation Services at the Facilities and Operations campus, including two bus service bays, an access ramp, and driver center space (not to exceed \$86,250 including contingency from Capital Outlay funds); monthly vouchers; interim financial reports for the period ending June 30, 2026; August donation report; personnel report; and meeting minutes (August 24, 2026).

Consent agenda was approved with a 6-0 vote.

Board Reports

Board Member and former Board President GR Gordon-Ross shared an update from the Facilities Committee, which highlighted the Facilities and Operations team's work to address work orders over the past several months and efforts to introduce online payments.

Gordon-Ross also attended the Langston Hughes Elementary School Site Council meeting, where members discussed school goals, family engagement efforts, and the positive impact of the district's new reading curriculum.

Board Member Shannon Kimball highlighted the Board Policy Committee's work to review Board Policy IDAD – Title I Programs.

Board Member Matt Lancaster shared an update from the Special Education Subcommittee, including work focused on training for educational support professionals. Lancaster also attended the Prairie Park Elementary School Site Council meeting, where members discussed school goals, family engagement efforts, and responsive classroom practices.

Board President Bob Byers attended the most recent Equity Advisory Council meeting, which discussed the National Day of Remembrance for U.S. Indian Boarding Schools, observed annually on September 30.

New Business

Board Policy IDAD - Title I Programs: First Reading and Adoption

At its September 3, 2026 meeting, the Board Policy Committee reviewed **Board Policy IDAD - Title I Programs**. Updates were made to the language to align the district's policy with the Kansas Association of School Boards' policy model.

Board Policy IDAD - Title I Programs was approved on first reading with a 6-0 vote.

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

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