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November 2024
NEWSLETTER



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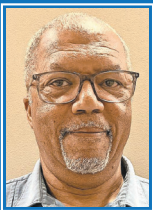
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SUPERINTENDENT'S MESSAGE

"What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all its children."
- John Dewey



Hello, Lawrence Community,
We appreciate the hard work of our students, teachers and teams, school families, and community partners to sustain our strong start to this school year through this second quarter.

Interacting with our community's children is a joy! The kindergartners pictured here welcomed me with open arms on a return visit to Quail Run Elementary School after I had spent time substitute teaching in their delightful classroom.

It has been wonderful to join many of you in conversation this fall. I appreciate all of the voices around the table and the school experiences and thoughtful insights shared.

Please note that our community survey remains open through November 22. I hope that you will take little time to make a big difference by sharing your input as we plan for the future of Lawrence Public Schools.

Many thanks to all who have attended a conversation, either at a school or at one of our community gatherings, and to all who have already participated in our survey. We also are grateful to our partners at The University of Kansas for

survey analysis.

Please watch for an update to the school board on Monday and a full report to follow in January. I look forward to sharing what we have been hearing and learning in conversation this fall. We will also be identifying some next steps for aligning our work with the thoughts and direction, experience, needs, and aspirations of our students, staff, parents, families, and greater community.

During this American Education Week, we especially value our partnership and thank you for your support of our more than 10,000 students and the remarkable staff who serve them each day.

I hope that you and your loved ones enjoy special times spent together next week. Since it is our fall break, we will anticipate, with gratitude, our opportunity to welcome students and staff back to school in December.

Sincerely,

Jeanice Kerr Swift
Interim Superintendent of Schools
Lawrence Public Schools



Jeanice Kerr Swift
Interim Superintendent

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USD 497 Executive Director of Communications Julie Boyle and Multimedia Communications Specialist Andrew Beaven produce this newsletter in partnership with the Lawrence Journal-World.

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Board Meeting
Calendar

The Lawrence Board of Education meets at 6 p.m. on the second and fourth Mondays of each month, unless otherwise announced, at 110 McDonald Drive.

Upcoming Meetings:

November 25	March 24
December 9	April 14 & 28
January 13 & 27	May 12 & 27
February 10 & 24	June 9 & 23



Find it at
www.usd497.org

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- New Student Registration
- Job Openings
- School Menus
- Free and Reduced-Price Meals Application
- Consent for Disclosure (Fee Waiver) Form
- Student Handbooks

Superintendent Search

Lawrence Board
of Education
2024



At press time, the Lawrence Board of Education was set to interview firms interested in assisting with its national search for a long-term superintendent to begin serving our district on July 1, 2025. Board President Kelly Jones said that the board’s goal is to announce the successful candidate in March. She added that this timeline provides ample opportunity for expanded community engagement to guide the board in hiring the best person to lead our district and serve our community moving forward.

Because of the limited time between former Superintendent Dr. Anthony Lewis’ June 29, 2024, resignation and the start of the school year, the board decided to conduct a search for an interim superintendent to serve through June 30, 2025. The board hired Dr. Jeanice Kerr Swift, effective August 30, 2024. A 36-year educator and educational leadership consultant, Swift most recently served as superintendent of the Ann Arbor, Michigan public schools for over a decade. Jones has publicly invited Swift to apply for the long-term superintendent position.

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Building on Last Year's Progress

Improvements in math, chronic absenteeism, and the number of recorded behavior events are among highlights of the 2023-2024 district progress report. It includes academic, attendance, behavior, discipline, and restorative practices data, and notes the important role of social-emotional learning in supporting student achievement, growth, and success. For nearly 20 years, our district has focused on examining disaggregated data to look for disproportionalities and opportunity gaps. The board's equity policy requires quarterly equity updates.

"We look at everything we do through an equity lens as we work toward transforming culture, ensuring instructional practice, and aligning the system to best serve all students," said Interim Superintendent Dr. Jeanice Kerr Swift.

Swift noted that schools across the country, including Lawrence Public Schools, are facing a challenging time with higher levels of need. An example is more students qualifying for free and reduced-price lunches, the state's measure of "at-risk."

"The needs – academic, social, emotional, and behavioral, have never been greater," she said. "We are not where we want to be, and we are not where we were."

Review the full equity report at www.usd497.org/SchoolBoard.

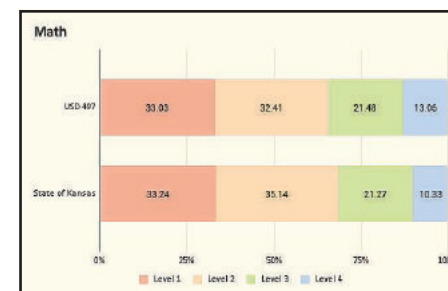
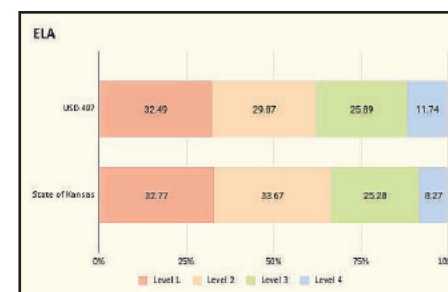
Report Highlights:

The Kansas Assessment Program measures student performance at four levels: students showing a 1) limited, 2) basic, 3) effective, or 4) excellent ability to understand and use skills and knowledge needed

for postsecondary readiness. The percentage of our students scoring at Levels 3 and 4 held steady in English language arts, increased 2.5% in math, and decreased slightly in science over three years.

In 2023-2024, average daily attendance (91.3%) improved slightly and chronic absenteeism decreased with 27.6% of students missing 10% or more of school days for any reason. Student behavior events dropped 12.19%, and 83.1% of behavior events were addressed with restorative practices.

Dr. Swift said that nationally, schools tend to spend a lot of time on lagging indicators (of progress), such as graduation rates. "I am really interested in leading indicators," she said. "For example, how many of our freshmen are on track to graduate?"



"The infrastructure has been built. We need to keep a close eye on leading indicators," said Swift. "While many systems have declined (in academic performance scores) during this time period, I am grateful that ours is stable."

Boundary Discussion

When Free State High School opened in 1997, the Lawrence Board of Education carefully considered where to place the high school boundary line with an eye toward balancing enrollment, including the socio-economic and racial and ethnic balance of the student populations. The 15th Street high school boundary line – with students living north of it attending Free State and students residing south of 15th St. going to Lawrence High – accomplished a fairly even balance for years; however, shifts have occurred over time.

Current high school enrollments are 1,781 students at Free State and 1,431 at LHS, a difference of 350 students. The school board charged its Boundary Advisory Committee to study high school boundaries and make a recommendation to achieve a better balance. The committee has met since September, examining enrollment, demo-

graphics, transfers, transportation, and other data.

The committee consists of district and building administrators, teachers and staff, parents, community at-large members, and representatives of the city planning and development office, First Student, and the Boys and Girls Club of Lawrence. It has developed two options. One would expand the LHS attendance area to the north and east, creating an "L" shape with the back of the "L" lying on the southern border of the district. A second option would develop a middle school feeder system. At the present time, middle school populations split as students advance to high school.

Working only with current enrollment data, the committee recommended to the board in October that it contract with demographics consultant RSP



and Associates to provide enrollment and boundary analysis and mapping assistance. The school board, having worked with RSP for more than a decade on enrollment projections, encumbered up to \$45,000 for RSP to support the committee's needs.

At its first meeting in November, the committee identified what data and analysis its members want from RSP, including a heat map to show real-time enrollment and demographics data as boundary adjustments are made to the options under discussion; an analysis

of the balance of high school enrollments if the current 15th Street high school boundary line were shifted to 13th or 14th Street, five-year enrollment projections, and high-resolution maps illustrating the committee's boundary proposals.

Since high school boundaries have not been reviewed in 27 years, committee members agreed they want to "take our time and do this right." The committee postponed two public input sessions scheduled November 13-14, opting to wait to receive the information requested from RSP and meet to review, analyze, and incorporate changes into its boundary change proposals. The committee will reschedule public input sessions at both high schools and plans to use the community feedback gathered to inform its recommendation to the board.

Review Boundary Advisory Committee meeting materials at www.usd497.org/Boundaries.

NASS Prepares for Growth

Did you know Lawrence Public Schools serves more Native American students than most school districts in the state? Students identifying as American Indians and Alaska Natives make up 8% of our school district's enrollment. This is heavily influenced by Haskell Indian Nations University, which currently enrolls more than 900 students representing 128 Tribal Nations.

Since 1972, our district's Native American Student Services (NASS) program has provided educational opportunities and support for American Indian/Alaska Native children and youth. The goal of NASS is to enhance and provide support to the students' overall growth and development through cultural and academic programs.

David Farve, NASS program coordinator,

said that about 376, or 5.6%, of the more than 831 Indigenous students representing more than 73 tribal affiliations in Lawrence Public Schools, are currently verified with NASS to receive services. Farve shared that these students represent tribes from Alaska to Florida and New York to California.

NASS receives federal Title VI and Johnson O'Malley (JOM) funding to support the unique cultural, language, and educationally related needs of American Indian and Alaska Native students. Farve said that JOM eligibility requirements recently changed to enable NASS to serve more students. To receive services now, students must have at least one parent or grandparent (living or deceased), who is a member of a federally recognized tribe.

Goals of NASS, according to Farve, are to be a resource for students in need, build



LHS Intertribal Club's Homecoming float.

relationships with students and families, incorporate cultural activities to establish a sense of belonging, connect with Intertribal Clubs, and listen to students about what's important to them.

"Our job, ultimately, is to do what we can for the students, protect them at all costs, and make them feel safe," said Farve.

Among activities NASS supports are Intertribal Clubs at both high schools, Billy Mills Middle School, and Cordley,

the first elementary club in our district. Farve said that additional clubs are under development at West Middle School and Hillcrest and Schwegler Elementary Schools. Other NASS supports include student engagement, one-on-one follow-up, and after-school tutoring.

"We all know that representation matters," said Dr. Jeanice Kerr Swift, interim superintendent. "We are honored by the presence of Native Americans in our district – as students, staff members, and as community members. We are honored by that representation. We are all richer for it.

"I believe it presents not only an opportunity, but also a responsibility to support and be sure that all who come to our district and that our Native American students are served well by Lawrence Public Schools," said Swift, adding that the program and diversity of the community helped attract her to Lawrence.

Board Discusses Cell Phone Policy Changes

With a goal of ensuring productive, respectful, and safe learning environments, the Board Policy Committee is discussing policy and procedural changes regarding the appropriate use of cell phones during the school day. The changes aim to achieve a balance between the benefits of technology with the need for an effective and engaged learning environment.

Board President Kelly Jones noted that existing cell phone policy protects elementary and middle school instructional time from distractions of student cell phone use and supports high school teachers' discretion in determining whether students may use phones in class.

The 2024-2025 Student Handbook contains current cell phone policies. Elementary policy refers to district Acceptable Use Guidelines and that students may use personal mobile devices in the manner directed by building staff and administration. Middle school policy

requires cell phones be put away and out of sight at all times during the school day, excluding lunchtime. High school policy states that cell phones may be used before school, between classes, during lunch, and after school, but otherwise only with explicit teacher permission.

The board and administration support high school teachers in making the choice not to allow cell phones in class. They also understand high school staff members' concerns with current policy, liability, and student distractions, misuse, and harmful use of cell phones at school.

After discussing the issue with our school community, board members and district and school administration have a goal of implementing procedural changes in January. Not constituting a ban, these changes may require that personal electronic devices be turned off and stored out of sight during school hours, with limited exceptions for academic needs and during school emergencies.

The Kansas State Board of Education established a Blue-Ribbon Task Force on Student Screen Time to develop guidance for PreK-12 schools. It approved recommendations for personal devices, screen time and mental health, and parental oversight of district-owned devices. You may read about those recommendations at www.ksde.org. They were presented to the

Kansas State Board of Education last week and final action is expected in December.

The U.S. Surgeon General last summer called for a warning label – similar to those on packs of cigarettes – on social media to alert users of its association with harmful effects on adolescents' mental health.

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District and Schools Foundation Honor & Support Staff

GREAT THINGS ON HORIZON FOR EXEMPLARY NEW TEACHERS

"She is driven to teach," said Cordley Principal Becky Reaver of Makia Austin, Lawrence Elementary Horizon Award winner. "It is within that very special goal of helping kids be successful, that she lives and thrives."

Honored as an exemplary new educator in her second year of teaching, Austin believes that all children can and will learn and celebrates the ability and nurtures the capacity in every child to find success, no matter what. "She has the ability to think like a teacher and a student, enabling her to see herself through her students' eyes and offer a deeper level of empathy and understanding," added Reaver.



Makia Austin

The district nominated Austin and Lawrence Secondary Horizon Award



Allison Gates

winner Allison Gates, a West Middle School special education teacher,

to KSDE's Kansas Horizon Award program. LEAP partner Truist Credit Union presented each teacher with \$500.

Gates' colleagues wrote in her nomination letter that she was born to be a teacher! "As a high school student, she advocated for inclusion of all students, and then spent her college years working with adults with special needs.

"There isn't a day that goes by when Allison is not thinking about what she can do to help students...Our scholars just want someone to give them a chance. Someone to believe in them, set high expectations for them, and support them in reaching those expectations. She does all of this, and so much more," the nomination read.

FOUNDATION HONORS CLASSIFIED STAFF

When a small crowd entered the Southwest Middle School cafeteria during the eighth-grade lunch period, school custodian John McCrary was sweeping the floor. Assistant Principal Jason Kingman turned on a microphone and introduced the interim superintendent, and McCrary swept. Dr. Swift took the microphone and welcomed Lawrence Schools Foundation Executive Director Dena Johnston, and McCrary continued sweeping. Only when Johnston announced his name did McCrary stop sweeping, drop his broom, and celebrate!

"In addition to his professional responsibilities, John is known for his warm and approachable personality. He builds strong relationships with staff and students alike, always offering a friendly smile or a helping hand. John takes pride in knowing the people he works with and makes everyone



John McCrary

feel valued and a part of the Bulldog community," said Jason Kingman, Southwest assistant principal/athletic director.

The Foundation presented its A.C.E (Acknowledging Classified Employees) Award and \$500 to McCrary, just as it had done, with the help of some

students, the week prior, surprising Dionne Chavez, Quail Run instructional support assistant.

"Dionne is the epitome of a lifelong learner. She has gone above and beyond what is expected or asked of her to increase her knowledge and application of best practices in small group reading



Dionne Chavez

instruction," said Cynthia Emery, Quail Run interim principal. "Relating to students is another strength of Dionne's. Even students who are reluctant to work in class are excited to go to intervention group time with Dionne. She has high expectations for all of her students, and it's obvious they feel safe and loved in her care."

FOUNDATION GRANTS SUPPORT EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS

We love it when the Lawrence Schools Foundation visits schools to present educators with funds to support their students' educational experiences! The Foundation awarded more than \$21,122 in Innovative Teacher, MusicWorks!, School Assistance, and Carl Knox Staff Development Grants this fall, in keeping with its mission to inspire learning, enrich teaching, and enhance opportunities for all students, educators, and staff in the Lawrence Public Schools.

Elementary art teachers received a School Assistance Grant to purchase clay and glaze to enhance their art classes and students' experiences with kilns.

"The yearly clay project is a favorite in our art rooms. Students learn and discuss the history of how clay, a natural material, has been used for centuries for both functional and decorative purposes in every region of the world. Working with clay is an engaging growth mindset and sensory activity that requires trying and trying again," said Catherine Meihaus, New York Elementary and lead elementary art teacher.

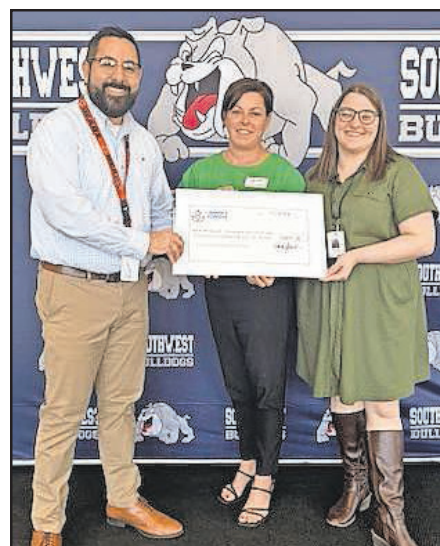
LMCMS Band Director Brayden Yoder-Mulkey received a MusicWorks! grant to provide equipment for students to access external midi devices and microphones to support songwriting, do-it-yourself instrument recording, and beat making.

"This project will provide students with the tools to explore musical concepts in a modern fashion. As a STEAM school, (LMCMS) deserves the equipment to explore music technology. The iPads are an extremely powerful music-making tool when equipped with the right accessories," said Yoder-Mulkey.

Secondary students involved in band will be working with guest clinicians



LHS Biology Teachers



Vasquez, Johnston, and Parker



Todd, Abeita, and Conyers

this year. Middle school music educators received a \$3,600 grant for their small group instruction/enrichment project to bring in guest clinicians to work with all students at all grades on flute, clarinet, saxophone/low reeds, high brass, low brass, and percussion. Both High School Music Departments received a MusicWorks! grant for their students to work with guest clinicians.

"Working with a variety of directors and clinicians expands students' understanding of music and performance. It allows them to experience different styles of directing and to work on their music in new

ways, with new rehearsal strategies, broadening their perspective and skill set," said Mike Jones, LHS Director of Bands.

Katie Henry, eighth grade English language arts teacher at WMS received a \$360 grant for her project-based learning picture book project. It will enable students to create and publish books to engage elementary students at Sunset Hill.

Samuel Vasquez and Lindsey Proctor, SWMS social studies teachers, received grant funding to support their history unboxed projects for sixth graders. Their goal is to make

learning hands-on with stories, crafts, and activities from around the world, bringing lessons to life and making learning history fun.

LHS biology teachers Christina Podany, Lisa Ball, Marci Leuschen, and Julie Battaglia received an Innovative Teaching Grant to purchase 3-D water molecule models to enhance their life science classes and lab experiences for students.

"Students will actually be able to feel the polarity of water molecules due to powerful magnets in the models. The 3-dimensional aspect of the models will help students visualize and understand what is happening spatially when water molecules interact with other molecules," said Leuschen.

Becky Armstrong and Kimberly Cottrell, LMH Health Project SEARCH coordinators, received a \$1,600 grant for a virtual reality program to assist students attending Community Connections at Pinckney in improving social skills and communication and increasing independence, self-advocacy, and job readiness.

Foundation donors Nancy Todd and Carladyne Conyers created the Carl Knox Staff Development Grants in honor of their father, Dr. Carl Knox, a former Lawrence superintendent of schools. They had the opportunity in October to meet two recipients: Sara Abeita, FSHS biology teacher, and Trish Neuteboom, SWMS creative arts/speech and drama teacher. They will use this funding to participate in the National Association of Biology Teachers and the Educational Theatre Association Conferences, respectively.

Congratulations also to these grant recipients: Stephanie Nesseth, SWMS; Joe Waldron and SRO Corporal Kacey Wiltz, FSHS; Maren Santelli, LHS; and WMS seventh grade teachers.

2025 Legislative Agenda

The Lawrence Board of Education approved its 2025 legislative priorities in October, well in advance of the January start of the Kansas legislative session. Priorities include advocacy of full funding of special education as required by state law, increased base state aid per pupil, rejection of proposals to spend public tax dollars on private education, and returning to a parent opt-out process for student surveys that inform health, wellness, and safety initiatives.

"Yes, we made some progress last session (on special education funding), but last year, our district covered 53% of our special education services out of general or supplemental funds," said Board Past President Shannon Kimball. "While we are very grateful for the additional funding and that additional commitment, there is still a very long way to go."

Noting that the general school finance formula sunsets in 2027, Kimball added, "It is very important that our priorities call out that the problem is not the formula; the problem is the amount of money that has been appropriated to fund the formula."

Other key legislative priorities include embracing academic freedom and the teaching of critical thinking skills, repealing statutes that target and discriminate against students and staff, supporting a long-term, sustained commitment to state funding for the KPERS retirement program; and providing universal free meals to all students.

The school board also identified priorities that support each goal area of our district's strategic plan and align with those of the Kansas Association of School Boards. See the full list of 2025 Legislative Priorities at www.usd497.org/SchoolBoard.



Performing Arts Facilities Study

Excellence in the performing and fine arts serves as one of the hallmarks of the Lawrence Public Schools. Our students excel in music, cheer and dance, theater, speech, debate, and visual and media arts.

The Lawrence Board of Education in September received a report detailing an architectural evaluation of secondary school performing arts facilities completed by ACI Boland and partners. It includes results of the examination of the condition of performance spaces, finishes, flow of movement, code compliance, and acoustics; seating, lighting, audio/video, and electrical equipment; and overall management.

The firm also collected input from middle and high school principals and performing arts staff. ACI Boland architect Doug Loveland, a Lawrence High alumnus, said that no staff member said that they wanted leading-edge equipment. He said that, instead, they want robust, durable, functional, and teachable equipment and spaces. Loveland also shared that due to replacement schedules, most Lawrence middle school students are currently learning using better equipment than they will have when they advance to the high schools.

The report included a list of recommendations for improvements to district performance arts facilities totaling \$6.5 million. The same improvements completed over a span of more than eight years, the

report notes, would cost more or approximately \$7.2 million, including 6% inflation.

"I am glad we have prioritized this work and taken a look at what our needs are and the input of staff," said Past President Shannon Kimball, who serves on the board's Facilities Planning Committee.

Deputy Superintendent Dr. Larry Englebrick told the board that the 130-page performing arts centers evaluation

will be followed by an athletics facilities study, and a more comprehensive look at other infrastructure-related capital improvement needs. These include roofs, heating and cooling equipment, boilers, asphalt and concrete, and building exteriors.

"I wish I could say that within our budget we could fund these improvements," Englebrick told the board. "I have a feeling we are going to be quite surprised at the total that comes up."

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Lawrence Public Schools Gives Thanks!

Lawrence Public Schools has a lot to be thankful for this fall. Our district is fortunate to enjoy the support of a community that values public education, invests in its schools, and supports teachers and staff in providing the best educational experiences possible for our students. The Lawrence Schools Foundation's staff: Dena Johnston, executive director, Jamie Sinclair, coordinator, and Michelle Jennings, bookkeeper, and board of trustees build and nurture many of these relationships with community donors and partners.

These are but a few of the kindnesses shown our schools this fall. Read more in the Lawrence Schools Foundation's Annual Report at www.lawrenceschoolsfoundation.org.

Linda Klinker and our friends at Cans for the Community donated \$1,000 to support the School Nutrition Student Meal Support Fund. Matched by a local business, this gift was applied to negative lunch account balances of school families experiencing financial hardship.

Thank you, Judge Chris Kopecky, for thinking outside the box. Lawrence Municipal Court Services collected 1,000 school supplies during its 2nd Annual School Supplies for Fines campaign, allowing individuals to donate supplies in lieu of traffic and/or parking fines.

Lawrence Education Achievement Partner Story Hill Church donated pre-packed backpacks to help prepare students for the school year.

JEO Consulting Group, LMH Health Gift Shop, Maximus, Megan Lilly with Haven for Haircuts, and Dollar General donated school and hygiene supplies and pre-packed backpacks.

The Foundation received a generous



Lawrence Schools Foundation Kids Expo

donation of more than a hundred pairs of new shoes for students from our partners at The University of Kansas.

The Lawrence Rotary Clubs enabled the Foundation to deliver snack donations to all elementary schools for students who may need some nourishment during the school day. An additional grant of more than \$8,000 from the Lawrence Noon Rotary Club will support another student snack drive in the spring.

Envista Federal Credit Union pledged \$10,000 again this year to support Third Grade Theater Arts Day with the Lied Center of Kansas. All third graders will spend a day learning from professionals about all kinds of performing arts skills, such as choreography, production, makeup, puppetry, circus skills, and acting. These collaborative, hands-on activities introduce students to interesting new career paths and demonstrate the intense preparation

performers undertake behind the scenes.

Landmark National Bank donated hygiene supplies to the Foundation to provide support to students and families in need. Both high school football teams and spirit squads, including the middle school cheer teams, also hosted a highly successful hygiene supply drive.

It is hard to put into words our gratitude for the Foundation's work with the community on the Douglas County Back2School Donation Drive. Partners include the Salvation Army of Douglas County, Corps Community Center, United Way of Kaw Valley, ECKAN, Eudora Schools Foundation, Walmart, and other businesses, churches, and volunteers. This annual effort enabled the Foundation to provide more than 1,200 backpacks filled with school supplies to our schools, so they were ready and waiting for students to start their school year.

How do we begin to thank all who made the Foundation's First Annual Kids Expo such a tremendous success? We appreciate the outpouring of love and support provided students. Donations included 600 pairs of new shoes and socks, 300 backpacks filled with school supplies, 500 hygiene supply kits, 72 free haircuts, and free health screenings and immunizations. More than 50 community organizations provided support and information about resources and services available to continue to lift up school families.

These partners also brought the food and fun: Lawrence-Douglas County Fire Medical Services, the Lawrence Police Department's school resource officers, Lawrence Public Library's bookmobile, and inflatables and yard games from Envista Federal Credit Union and Kansas Athletics Truity Credit Union grilled 700 free hot dog lunches and Kona Ice served 800 snow cones.

The Foundation's signature event, the Community Education Breakfast, kicked off our school year in September. This "breakfast of champions" celebrates how our community champions its public schools - big time!

"One of the many things we love about Lawrence is that our community truly values education and supports our Lawrence Public

Schools. Thanks to the generosity, sponsorship, and attendance today, the Foundation has set a new record by raising nearly \$100,000 at this year's event!" announced Johnston at the event. "Over the last five years alone, through the generosity and support of our community donors, the Foundation provided funding for school grants, programs, awards, and scholarships in excess of \$8 million!"



Truity Credit Union donates \$40,000 to the Foundation.



Johnston and Dr. Swift honor Foundation student champions. (Courtesy Min/Max Photography.)

Master LEAP Partner Truity Credit Union presented a \$40,000 gift during this sold-out event that inspired attendees with recognition of student champions Daijah Preston and Ryan Weishaar of FSHS, and Cameron Hardie and Aubrie Magnuson of LHS. The high schools chose to honor these four seniors for excelling in academics, athletics, activities, leadership, and service.

A two-time state volleyball champion at LHS, who grew up to become the first female athletic director and vice president of intercollegiate athletics at Point University in Georgia headlined the event. Named among "Sports Illustrated's 100 Influential Black Women in Sports" and the SSAC's Athletic Director of the Year, Jaunelle White (LHS Class of 1996), said that she had good memories of her time in Lawrence Public Schools.

"I was blessed with the best teacher," she said of her fifth grade teacher at Sunset Hill, Juanita Anne Barbee. "She really cared and would do anything and everything to support us, but she was not one to be messed with."

"I would not have accomplished what I have so far without the education I received in Lawrence Public Schools," added White. She said that her lasting friendships from high school are "the best gift." White lost her husband in 2022 and said that she was lifted during that time by the support from her family and friends in Kansas.

The high school bands and spirit squads, Free State orchestra members, and Harrison Leiszler, Firebird violinist, performed at the event.

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Points of Pride: Student and Staff Success Stories

Readers are Leaders! According to Jennifer Gorup, Quail Run Elementary and lead elementary librarian, across our 11 elementary schools and the Kennedy Early Childhood Center, students have checked out 35,675 books so far this school year. Way to go, readers!



LEAP Partner Sunflower Bank, represented by new Lawrence Branch Manager Alex Rushmeyer and Karen McGrath, presented the district with a check for \$1,548.92 from its ABC program. Foundation/LEAP staff Jamie Sinclair and Dena Johnston joined Elementary Curriculum Director Denise Johnson and Executive Director of Communications Julie Boyle for the check presentation.

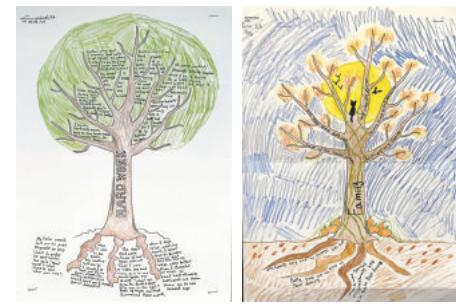


The FSHS Marching Band recently competed at the Southern Plains Marching Festival in Andover, Kansas. The Marching Firebirds placed first in its division of 11 bands. The color guard also finished first. Out of all 22 bands competing, the FSHS Marching Band earned the title of Grand Champions! Congratulations, Marching Firebirds, under the direction of Eric Bradshaw and Michael Solomon.



FSHS presented 31 students with the Phoenix Award, recognizing outstanding efforts in demonstrating Firebird core values of respect, responsibility, and excellence in their academic and personal achievements. A staff member must nominate the student for the quarterly honor.

Interim Superintendent Dr. Jeanice Kerr Swift read "I am We: A Book of Community" at Cordley's CharacterStrong Community Assembly. This special gathering celebrated a month of student learning about responsibility.



SWMS eighth graders in Kendra Metz's Student Success class identified their most important values. They thought about the roots of their values, powerful experiences that helped them solidify their values, and drew these as the roots of trees. They considered ways to put their values into action, adding these ideas to the tree branches.



Vicki Stair's word challenge helped Deerfield fifth graders hone their spelling and writing skills. Students were given a definition and tasked with spelling the corresponding word in just 60 seconds, with the goal of increasing the number of words the entire class can correctly spell in five minutes every day over the course of a week. Despite having some particularly tricky words, such as manatee, khaki, monument, ceiling, and theory; students were up to the challenge. They helped classmates with difficult words and showed lots of excitement after every correct answer. Next, they practiced their writing by creating a short story based on a photograph. Their paragraph had to include the words seriously, certain, rebellious, selection, and invisible.



Cordley students danced their way to a first-place trophy at the Boys and Girls Club of Lawrence Lights On! event at Haskell Indian Nations University. Langston Hughes and Hillcrest finished second and third. Participants in the 12 after-school club sites worked for weeks with a choreographer and BGC staff on their dance routines to a mashup of hits, learning teamwork along the way. (Photo by Backstory Photography)

Lawrence Virtual School elementary students, families, and staff had a wonderful time together finding the perfect pumpkins on a trip to a pumpkin patch. While they see each other online every school day, it is always wonderful when they get together face to face.



The Douglas County Juvenile Detention Center's Day School welcomed the mobile laboratory from the Kansas Department of Health and Environment to visit and work with students. The program, funded by a state grant for grades K-12 science, enabled scientists to work with students on extracting DNA from different items.

FSHS worked with our Nutrition and Wellness team to host dietetics and nutrition master's students from K-State. The college students were on a three-day tour of Kansas farms, learning about how local food makes it from the farms to students. At FSHS, the group toured the kitchen and talked about food production, school gardens, procurement, and local, state, and federal policies that impact child nutrition in schools. After touring the school, they traveled to Juniper Hill Farms, a district Farm to School partner, to see where some of our students' food is grown. The group was impressed with the friendliness of our staff and students, the cleanliness of the school, and the variety of food options offered to students every day.



Envista Credit Union presented \$1,000 to LHS after hosting a Cash Grab booth at The Chamber's Taste of Lawrence Mixer. Individuals entering the booth caught as much cash as possible during a limited time and designated a school to receive a donation.

On National White Cane Day, Woodlawn fourth graders participated in an afternoon full of STEM activities provided by the Kansas State School for the Blind. They engaged with technology and activities to bring awareness about individuals who are visually impaired. Alyssa Vinson, teacher of the visually impaired, worked with the students to plan this intentional and inclusive event.



Kansas Governor Laura Kelly recently announced a grant of more than \$1 million for the City of Lawrence's Safe Routes to School program. This city partnership with Lawrence Public Schools, Lawrence-Douglas County Public Health, and the Lawrence-Douglas County Metropolitan Planning Organization is a comprehensive approach to making neighborhoods safe and accessible. The grant will fund sidewalk and bicycle lane improvements to reduce traffic congestion and air pollution and increase the opportunity to be physically active and build community cohesion.

Cordley celebrated Indigenous Peoples Day in many ways, including a special morning announcement of the Native American Tribes and Nations of all of its staff and students. Some staff members and students, such as Jonah Wesley pictured here, wore their regalia and shared details about their culture. First grade parents, Marlon Wesley and Jennifer Bonilla, shared their personal stories to support student learning.



Schwegler fourth graders hone their multiplication skills during lessons on factors and multiples.



Maren Nelson's class was given a list of numbers 1 to 100 and worked together to identify and highlight each multiple for a given number. Meanwhile, Noah Davis' students competed in a game in which opponents took turns choosing a number on their sheet and covering every factor of that number. Players scored points based on the sum of all those factors until none remained.

A scavenger hunt helped sixth graders familiarize themselves with the historic, three-story LMCMS building. Working in groups, they answered questions and found the nurse's clinic, student services, the bathroom on the 6th grade floor, and the Mustang seal, among other people, places, and things.



At Kennedy Early Childhood Center, making new friends is a lot of fun and is an important part of growing and learning.



The USDA partnered with the Kansas Department of Agriculture to award a \$100,000 Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Program Grant to Lawrence Public Schools. The funds will support the creation of a district-supporting bakery at Community Connections at Pinckney. The bakery will engage with the local food system, prioritizing the use of local grains; enhance student lunches, and provide job training for students with disabilities in transition from high school graduation to independent living.

New York Montessori scholars work together to explore many different learning activities, books, and materials at their own pace. They create art, build, read, write, sort, play, and discover.



Anne Borgmier's kindergartners at Prairie Park spent their first days in school learning how to sit criss-cross,



mountain, mermaid, and mountain-mermaid on the carpet, so their legs don't stick out and trip someone. And, if they accidentally trip someone, they learned that it's okay and to say that you're sorry. These kinders or kinder stars, as we call them, practiced lining up, walking quietly in the hallway so as not to disturb others, and finding various places in their new school.

Blair Waite's drama and communication arts classes at LMCMS made costumes out of non-clothing material to show their creativity and understanding of costume design.



Riverhawk Runners! Woodlawn students wrapped up the fall Marathon Club season with



a combined 288 miles of running or the distance from Woodlawn to Wakeeney, Kansas! The Marathon Club will return in the spring. A huge thanks to parent and staff volunteers who helped keep our course safe and running smoothly, as well as our PTO. We'll see you in the spring for miles and smiles!

The BMMS Intertribal Club had a fantastic time at KU's Spencer Museum of Art exploring the "Native Fashion" exhibit that remains open until January 5.



These Schwegler students were among the young artists whose work was selected for display during October's USD 497 Elementary Art Show at the Lawrence Public Library.





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Schwegler put a lot of big grins on happy faces at its fall Carnival. Families, staff, and students enjoyed music, food trucks, a variety of games, a bounce house, an obstacle course, face painting, and balloon art. Participants could join a raffle for a chance to win one of the themed pumpkins designed by teachers and staff. Principal Dr. Jared Comfort stayed cool in the dunk tank.



The Kansas State Department of Education's Kansans Can Star Recognition Program honored Lawrence Public Schools with silver and copper recognition in social-emotional growth and academically prepared for postsecondary, respectively, in both 2023 and 2024. These are outcomes established around KSDE's vision for education – Kansas leads the world in the success of each student.

Lawrence Fire Station #2 hosted Parents as Teachers' Fire Station Group Connection, so families and their littles could see the fire trucks up close and learn fire safety and prevention.



Langston Hughes third graders decided the best way to learn about animal life cycles was to see it live. Three classrooms became temporary homes for a different animal species with students closely observing the development of their new guests. Michelle McLenon's class welcomed some eggs and watched excitedly as they hatched into a dozen baby chicks. Jillian Desmond's class witnessed caterpillars undergo metamorphosis and emerge from their chrysalises into beautiful monarch butterflies. Brianna Kent's class happily looked after mealworms and studied their transformation from little larvae into mature darkling beetles.



Early Childhood Education Pathway students in Dr. Kelly Welch's class recently completed their scientific study of prenatal development. They examined Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and researched the different effects of alcohol on the embryo. Students followed a rigorous, controlled research design, formed hypotheses, and tested them as they manipulated eggs with different substances, including rubbing alcohol. Students discovered that without harmful substances, the eggs grew in weight and length, but when exposed to alcohol, the eggs became significantly smaller. Students then described how exposure to substances during pregnancy affects a child's lifelong abilities to learn.



FSHS AVID seniors challenged SWMS eighth graders to a game of kickball. The seniors really took it to the middle schoolers with a score too embarrassing to report, but there was much fun and ribbing, with a spring challenge thrown down.



Julie Schwarting, FSHS biology teacher, was named the 2024 recipient of the Outstanding Biology Teacher Award for Kansas! Each year the National Association of Biology Teachers attempts to recognize an outstanding biology educator (grades 7-12) in each of the 50 states, Washington, D.C., Canada, Puerto Rico, and overseas territories.

Lawrence-Douglas County Fire Medical Services supported Quail Run's bike safety education in Rodney Hess' P.E. class by providing helmets for students. The first graders were excited to work with firefighter Andy Krzanowsky to open and wear their new helmets and learn to ride bikes.



FSHS AVID elective students welcomed friends and family to a pizza dinner and a chance to see what their students are working on in class. AVID Coordinator Mattithyah Bergersen said that 180 people came to celebrate Family Night and students enjoyed having AVID alumna Thayu Kimori present to share her experiences.

Lisa Ball's AP Environmental Science students showed off their green thumbs as they expanded the native pollinator garden at LHS. The Kansas Native Plant Society donated verbena stricta, stiff goldenrod, rough blazing star, and spider milkweed as part of a Plant a Prairie grant.



More than 150 middle schoolers participated in a hands-on, cross-curricular Future City Leadership Retreat, learning from professional architects, engineers, urban planners, and KU professors. The students of Dani Lotton-Barker, SWMS; Jessica Miescher-Lerner, WMS; Devin Heath, LMCMS; and Paula Nordstrom, BMMS; applied practical STEAM concepts to building parts of a city from recycled materials and designing and assembling mouse-trap cars.



The Growing Food Growing Health Garden season at WMS came to an end with the last Free Market at Edgewood Homes in late October and with more than 5,000 lbs. of student-grown produce shared with our community. Five student gardeners came together as a team with their adult garden assistants over the course of the growing season, working in blazing hot weather, a few rain storms, and always battling weeds and bugs, growing vegetables, and developing compassion and leadership.



Special thanks to Silver Lake Bank, the Merc Co-op, Farm to Market Bread, South Baldwin Farms, Juniper Hill Farms, Mellowfields, Pearl Clark Community Garden, K-State Research and Extension Master Gardeners, and individual supporters. We're growing food, growing health, growing youth leaders, and growing hope for the future. (Excerpt and photo from the Growing Food Growing Health Newsletter, Community Mercantile Education Foundation, Nancy O'Connor, executive director.)

A New York fourth grader meets Jazzy Ash during the Jazzy Ash and the Leaping Lizards concert at the Lied Center. All third and fourth graders attended this school-only performance and learned about the traditional songs, rhythms, rhymes, history, and development of jazz.



Special thanks to the LHS Class of 1971 for a \$3,000 donation to support LHS families with negative student lunch account balances.



FSHS journalism took 27 students to the 2024 KSPA Fall Conference at KU Memorial Union. The day was full of sessions with high school journalism advisers from across the state, faculty and staff from the KU William Allen White School of Journalism and Mass Communications, and other industry professionals. Jared Shuff is their journalism adviser.



As part of their good citizenship unit, Hillcrest third graders created a drive to collect donations for the Lawrence Community Shelter. Staff and students left a large donation box in the hallway, which they filled with all of their gathered items. Their donations included food, clothes, and hygiene items such as toothbrushes, soap, paper towels, shampoo, etc. Thank you, Hawks, for spreading kindness and supporting a great cause in the Lawrence community!

FSHS earned Bronze recognition on the 2024 AP School Honor Roll!

LHS students celebrated Homecoming Week by committing to "Kindness Just Because." During their lunch time, students gathered signatures for this community-building initiative. Great job, Lions!



LHS Portfolio Day gave a lot of talented students a chance to connect with friends, learn about college and career opportunities, and show off their hard work. Hundreds of scholars attended presentations with visiting universities that provided detailed insight on school programs, unique courses, and the vast scope of potential career paths in the arts. Young artists also met with college representatives to showcase their portfolios and receive practical feedback on building their skills further. Meanwhile, culinary classes worked throughout the day to prepare and cater food for their classmates during the event.



Students saw practical applications for their creative work and some examples of former Chesty Lions who went into careers in creative fields. There was an extensive number of mediums and pathways highlighted, including 3D printing, illustration, software and user-interface design, commercial photography, special effects and cinematography, product design, video game development, concept art, stage craft, animation, and more. Their art teachers are Todd Poteet, Angelia Perkins, Emily Markoulatos, and Jennifer Dixon-Perkins.

Sunflower students in grades 3-5 took part in a book tasting! Students made their way through five different stations filled with books from a particular genre. They chose a new-to-them title to sample and rate, with the option to check out the book if it hit the spot. Many cries of "I didn't know we had this book!" filled the library as students excitedly worked their way through the stations. This is just one way your LPS librarians are championing development of the reading culture in our schools on a daily basis. Amanda McCoy is Sunflower's teacher librarian.



We love farm to school season! Look at this fruit and veggie bar at FSHS, featuring cantaloupe from Jirak Family Produce, Cummings, KS; peppers from Juniper Hill Farms, Lawrence; and grape tomatoes from Table View Farm, Lawrence. This fall, the Nutrition and Wellness Team is sourcing 13 different local products from five farms within 50 miles of Lawrence.

Alyssa Works, a junior at the Lawrence College & Career Academy, spearheaded a campaign for September's Suicide Awareness and Prevention Month. She provided ribbons and safety pins for students and staff to wear and engaged her peers in conversations regarding risk and preventative factors as well as the need to seek help. She and Reign Poole-Lewis are pictured here in front of LCCA's Sources of Strength Wheel.



All New York Elementary and Montessori students and staff gathered with friends and family on the playground in celebration of International Day of Peace. The Knights joined each other in a circle and sang a beautiful rendition of "Light a Candle for Peace."

The swimmers and divers of the KU Athletics SAAC organization spent some time at Deerfield and presented us with a \$250 check. This was an awesome experience for all the kids, both big and little!



Kendra Luna's class at Sunset Hill was all smiles as they spent English language arts time honing their reading skills. The first graders split up into four stations to practice their writing, work on their word sheet, read a book to themselves, or join Luna at the teacher table. The Eagles went around the room and filled out their word sheet with words posted on the walls having short "a" sounds like tan, plan, stack, tax, and back. Meanwhile, Luna had scholars read aloud and learn pronunciations, including some tricky words like use, the, she, and of.



During our Wednesday clubs, Andrew Madl, Mid-America Bank vice president of the Lawrence Market, visited SWMS. He shared his knowledge about what students would need to consider to start a business.

The LHS Art Club traveled to the KU Natural History Museum, where students were given a behind-the-scenes tour of how the art and displays are conceived and created. We met with the museum public relations manager as well as the display artists and illustrator. Students saw the workshops, prototypes, works in progress, and finished products before taking some time to draw from pulled private specimens and the museum's public collection. Todd Poteet is their art teacher.



With their students out of school, our early childhood and elementary teachers participated in professional development with the theme "Be the educator your students need you to be." Their learning focused on a variety of required and optional topics, many of which were led by their colleagues. Topics included our new math curriculum resource, structured literacy, the science of behavior, Apple technology, mental health and wellness, trauma-responsive schools, special education, teaching English to speakers of other languages, restorative practices, AVID strategies, inquiry design, and data screening and collection.

Interim Superintendent Dr. Jeanice Kerr Swift greeted teachers, thanking them for training to stay up with current practice and to be highly capable in the technical aspect of teaching. "That side is balanced with the other side of teaching, which is that passion and commitment. I believe it is a calling to impact the lives of children. It is a magnetism. When I am in your classrooms, I feel it," she said. "Your students see it too."

Dr. Swift added that 50 years of research identifies one component that makes a more powerful and impactful difference to students than all of the other things schools do combined. "That's a highly capable teacher," she said. "I am here to share with you this morning my deepest gratitude because you are doing the work that nothing else we coordinate can do and that is directly impacting children. You are changing the world by positively impacting the lives of children."

L V S elementary staff, students, and families gathered in South Park for a Park Day! It was a beautiful day to be outside, make friends, and enjoy some fun together.



Congratulations to eight National Merit Semifinalists: Amaya Gab, Malcolm Karman, Richard Li, Noah Pultz-Earle, Elinor Russo, Anwen Williams, and Lois Xie of FSHS, and Elise N. Rathmel of LHS.



Over 1.3 million juniors in about 21,000 high schools entered the 2025 National Merit® Scholarship Program by taking the 2023 Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test. The nationwide pool of semifinalists represents less than one percent of U.S. high school seniors.



If you looked to the sky over FSHS, you may have caught a glimpse of what appeared to be unidentified aerial phenomena; however, this was actually just Oather Strawderman's Physics class doing some rocket science. The class took to the soccer field where they launched compressed air rockets using ordinary bicycle pumps and measured the air time for each one. Students assembled and tested their air-powered projectiles with internal end caps of increasing size to create greater pressure and higher launch distance. The class plans to plug their findings into a formula to determine the launch velocity of the projectiles and will later be able to predict velocity, launch angle, time, and distance for any launch.



Congratulations to Trish Averill-Neuteboom, SWMS creative arts and drama teacher and recipient of the Lied Center of Kansas Performing Arts Center's annual Impact Award. This honor recognizes an outstanding educator who has a deep and meaningful impact on students by bringing the arts into their lives. The Lied Center will announce a performing artist recipient of its annual IMPACT Award in the spring.

Parents as Teachers held its first Open House Group Connection. Community partners and agencies, including Lawrence Public Library, Speech Solutions, Community



Children's Center, Infant/Toddler Services of Douglas County, Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, and Heartland Health were on hand to answer questions and provide information about their programs. Families were excited to learn more about resources available in the community, and their kiddos were excited to PLAY!



Fifth graders in Amber Sidwell's class at Prairie Park put their heads together to figure out how to organize 60 shipping containers on a cargo ship using math. Students were asked to come up with five expressions representing different arrangements they could use to fit their containers onboard and draw a visual display of their best solution. Classmates worked with one another brainstorming ideas, assisted their fellow Bobcats with visualizing their expressions, and shared laughs while advocating for their suggested arrangements.

Zach Saltz's Animation class at LHS began learning about one of animation's most important principles – anticipation! Students created a short animation that demonstrates an action and the preparation just before the action. Students drew each frame by hand and took inspiration from online references, drawings from their notebooks, and life. They came up with examples like characters jumping, throwing, dunking, and swinging a comically large mallet.



Nicole Corn's kindergarten class at Sunset Hill worked on counting collections of objects. Students counted each object with one-to-one correspondence. The class has talked about different strategies for counting, such as moving each object, pointing to each object, or placing them on a ten-frame or number chart to count.



We have been busy at Sunflower! We celebrated AVID day. Our Sunflower Staff Choir performed the Respect song at our assembly, and our staff learned more about the AVID strategy of note-taking using the jot thoughts cooperative learning strategy. We are PREPARED to SOAR this year at Sunflower and off to a great start!



Anna Busby's science class at BMMS took to the lab to find out what causes the bubbly chemical reaction found in a bath bomb. Students tested common substances that make up a bath bomb to see which combinations produce gas. The class placed each substance in different sections of an ice tray, mixed them with one ingredient assigned to their table group, and recorded any unusually fizzy combinations. After sharing their observations, the class revealed baking soda and citric acid to be the carbonated culprits. Busby said that her curious students had their guesses, but needed to figure out how to get some evidence to support or refute their ideas, so they performed more hands-on testing.



Congratulations to FSHS for being named a finalist for the KSHSAA's Performing Arts School of Excellence. This marks the 4th year in a row Free State has earned this distinguished honor. In 2019-2020, the Firebirds won the award.

The awe and excitement was palpable for Hillcrest fourth graders at the Baker



University Wetlands and Discovery Center, where they received an up-close look at a wide variety of animals. Students eagerly asked questions and jotted down detailed notes on each animal they saw, such as a grey tree frog, a tiger salamander, an ornate box turtle, and a speckled kingsnake named Alvin. The keen-eyed scholars were quick to point out their state amphibian and state reptile. Many brave researchers cheerfully volunteered to not only pet the kingsnake, but hold it as well! Alvin enjoyed the attention.

It didn't take long for Kennedy Early Childhood Center students to learn about looking eyes, listening ears, lining up for breakfast, and many other ready-to-learn skills. Interim Superintendent Dr.



Jeanice Swift received a warm welcome on her visit, including a gift of a special sign from Lindsey Cramer's class. It says, "Welcome to USD 497, Dr. Swift! We are glad you came by to say hello. We can't wait for you to watch us grow." Students chose paper they thought best matched their skin color and made a handprint for the sign.

Congratulations to this year's Lawrence Lions Alumni Association Hall of Honor inductees: Dirk Wedd (Class of 1970), football coach; Gwen (Junior) Harwood Wedd (Class of 1970), longtime Spirit Squad director; Mike Browning (Class of 1964, Deceased), dedicated educator and community leader; Paul Carttar (Class of 1971), social impact strategist and innovator; and Lance Hill (Class of 1968), anti-racist activist and educator.

Savannah College of Art & Design visited the Advanced Portfolio Studio courses at LHS. Jenny Nguyen, assistant director of admissions, gave a presentation about the school, their programs, the admission process, and how to properly set up a portfolio for scholarships. She also spent time with each student, reviewing their portfolios and art journals. Students were thrilled to see and hear about their more than 100 art-based majors. Todd Poteet is their art teacher.

Five members of the WMS Junior Players: Lilly Last, Finley Aiken, Wren Paugh, Ellie Earl, and Charlotte Lamb, presented to local businesses at One Million Cups. They shared information about the Junior Players and solicited advertisements for theater show programs. They were overwhelmed, in a good way, by orders.

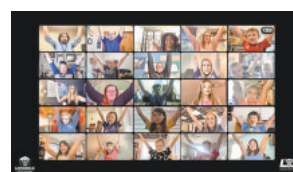
Two members of the LHS Symphonic Orchestra performed during lunch at Lawrence Memorial Hospital. Alex Velasco-Crates and Shea Spiess are a duo who spent much of their summer busking at the Lawrence Farmers Market and on Massachusetts Street. They were asked to perform to show appreciation to all LMH Health staff and promote positive mental health practices and wellness.

What are your top ten green things? Merrylinn Coggeshall's first grade class at Hillcrest Elementary



weighed in on this thought-provoking question by writing a list of their favorites. While Coggeshall helped students with their lists, others with questions waited patiently and worked together with their classmates to spell difficult words. The Hawks had no shortage of great answers like grass, frogs, apples, trees, and plants.

L V S ' s welcome assembly for elementary students included



fifth grade teacher Marcia Riggins leading the raucous flock of Griffins in the ever-popular LVS cheer. Staff introduced themselves, and Principal Zach Harwood spoke to students about the importance of having a growth mindset.