

Stronger Together



November 2023
NEWSLETTER



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SUPERINTENDENT'S MESSAGE

The Lawrence Community has a way of rallying together around important causes. Our children are the most important cause. They need us.

I meet monthly with a Student Advisory Council and reach out to these scholars at other times when I want their perspective. School systems sometimes do things for students, not with them. It is my belief that to improve student outcomes, we must talk to our scholars.

When I arrived six years ago, I immersed myself in the community. I met lots of people, including Liberty Memorial Central Middle School scholar Dwayne Dukes Thomas, pictured here in first, and now, sixth grade. A Listening and Learning Tour helped me gather community input that became the foundation of the district's first 5-year strategic plan in decades.

This newsletter highlights some of the progress made, celebrations, and ongoing challenges. We have been through a lot – COVID, budget cuts, school closures. When we face issues together, as a community, we can surmount challenges and celebrate triumphs. Our recent Futures Planning Community Engagement process and the board's subsequent financial decisions have helped

ensure sustainability for our district and prioritized investment in our educators.

With our dedicated school staff and families and our talented scholars, the state of our schools is strong; however, it can and will be stronger as we continue to work together. Our collective efforts will mold the future for our school community.

How can you help? I invite you to read about our expanded partnership with Big Brothers and Big Sisters and Boys and Girls Club of Lawrence. We have set a goal to ensure that every student has a mentor outside of their family. Mentorship provides numerous benefits for children and youth. I hope you will join us in this effort.

Just as a bundle of sticks is unbreakable when bound together, a community of learners, innovators, and leaders can come together and do remarkable things. We can overcome obstacles and emerge even stronger. When standing united, we are not just a school district. We become a force to be reckoned with, paving a brighter future for all of our scholars.

Stronger together!

Anthony S. Lewis, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools



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 13 & 27 • December 11
January 8 & 22 • February 12 & 26
March 25 • April 8 & 22
May 13 & 28 • June 10 & 24

- Review agendas at usd497.org/SchoolBoard.
- Write to the board at SchoolBoard@usd497.org.
- Sign up to speak at PublicComment@usd497.org before 6 p.m. on the date of the meeting.
- Watch meetings/archives at usd497.org/Webstream or on Midco channel 26.



Find it at
www.usd497.org

- Job Openings
- School Calendar
- School Menus
- Free/Reduced-Price Lunch Application
- News Releases
- Board Committee Updates



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Anthony Lewis, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools

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Newly-elected board members take office in January.

Our COMMUNITY'S PLAN for School Progress

OUR PROCESS



LISTENING & LEARNING TOUR



STRATEGIC PLAN



1 COHESIVE CURRICULUM



2 STUDENT-CENTERED
LEARNING



3 SAFE & SUPPORTIVE
SCHOOLS



4 EFFECTIVE EMPLOYEES



5 DATA-INFORMED
DECISIONS



OUR PROMISE



Lawrence Public Schools
will ensure that **students of
all races, backgrounds, and
abilities** achieve at high levels,
demonstrate proficiency in
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in math by eighth grade, and
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District Plans Innovative Future as it Celebrates Liberty Memorial's History

The community celebrates the Liberty Memorial Building's centennial this month. These events mark the rich history of the building's dedication as a memorial to local lives lost during World War I and its service as a high school, junior high, and middle school. Meanwhile, a Middle School Redesign Committee discusses plans for the Liberty Memorial Building's next 100

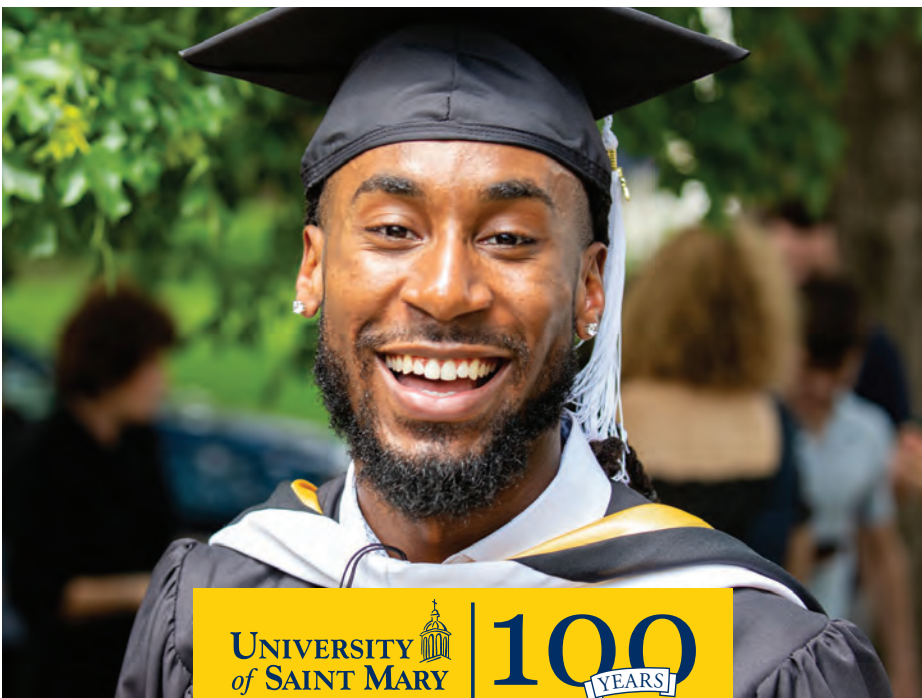
years, and its future looks bright!

"You guys are cooking something really good, and I am very excited to see it," said Bryndal Hoover, a Lawrence High junior and student representative to the school board. Hoover shared this sentiment after hearing a report from the Middle School Redesign Committee to the board in September.

The board wants to attract students from inside and outside the neighborhood and grow the school's enrollment. It directed the district in February to develop a committee to gather input, study, and recommend to the board in December a plan to repurpose Liberty Memorial Central Middle School (LMCMS) with a special curricular focus.

Redesign Committee members reviewed student course enrollment and career interest inventory data and staff and community survey responses. This data guided them to explore a Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math, or STEAM, curricular theme for the school.

Continued on page 5



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JACOB LAWRENCE & THE LEGEND OF JOHN BROWN

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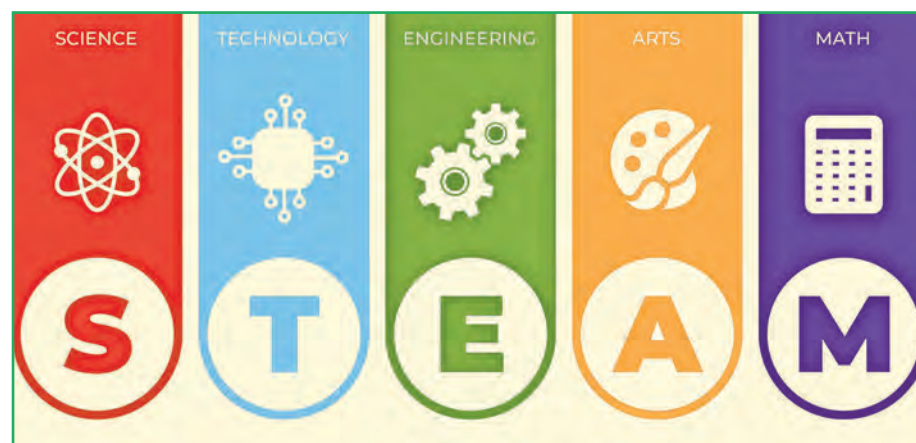
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Continued from page 4

Chief Academic Officer Patrick Kelly said that when the committee began meeting in April, it developed this statement to focus its work: "Design an innovative learning center at LMCMS that meets the board directive, attracts families and students, and has community engagement so that all students are ready for high school, college, and careers."

While making sure students in the LMCMS community may continue to choose to attend their home school, the committee's focus statement bears in mind a new state law, House Bill 2567, taking effect January 1, 2024. It enables nonresident students to attend any school with available capacity.

Laura Leonard, LMCMS English language arts teacher and a member of the Redesign Committee, explained that the group read every open response on 728 staff and parent surveys received. "Not every respondent felt like we need to have a redesigned middle school,"



she said.

"When we look at our test scores, when we look at our behavioral referrals, when we look at our Panorama (school climate) data, we are not meeting the needs of our students. We can do better because what we're doing right now isn't working for them," said Leonard, who is in her 18th year teaching at the school. "I am super excited to offer them something different, to redesign our school, looking at what our students,

families, and staff are telling us."

Board President Kelly Jones, who lives in the LMCMS neighborhood, thanked the committee for its report, adding that it was what she was hoping to hear. "I clearly heard a desire to serve the current community, so what you are doing is welcoming people in and welcoming people who are here... The direction from the board is to serve the community and welcome others who might also want to be a part of what I

think is going to be really amazing."

The Redesign Committee invited staff from the district's four middle schools to serve on STEAM working groups. They will discuss adjustments to the instructional schedule, course offerings, instructional programming, and community partnerships, among other areas. Working group members also will attend professional development, including visits to other schools with STEAM programming.

In addition, a teacher negotiations committee already has been meeting to examine middle school teacher plan time. Per the board's charge, its Boundary Advisory Committee also will reconvene to review attendance boundaries with an eye toward a more equitable socio-economic balance across the four middle schools.

The board expects a recommendation from the Middle School Redesign Committee in December.

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“The State of our Schools is Strong!”

During a public address in October at Liberty Memorial Central Middle School, Superintendent Dr. Anthony Lewis said, “The state of our schools is strong!” He asked for the community’s continued support with ongoing challenges and highlighted some of the district’s many accomplishments, including the following celebrations.

★ The district provides educational services on a continuum from birth to adulthood. The Kennedy Early Childhood Center serves 531 children and their families through its Parents as Teachers program, Pre-K readiness classrooms, early childhood special education services, and Infant Toddler Services of Douglas County.

★ To grow the enrollment of New York Elementary, one of its smallest schools serving the largest percentage of economically disadvantaged students, the district opened the first public Montessori school in Kansas. New York Montessori served 56 students ages 3-5 in its first year. It expanded this year to serve 101 students ages 3-6. With a current waiting list of families, the district plans to continue to expand the Montessori program as funding, staffing, and space allow.

★ The Kansas State Department of Education defines student performance at Levels 1-4 on the Kansas Assessment Program as showing a: 1) limited, 2) basic (on grade level), 3) effective, or 4) excellent ability to understand and use skills and knowledge needed for postsecondary readiness.

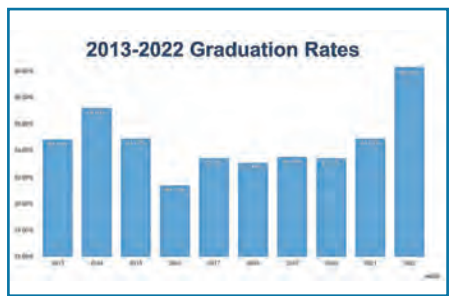
The chart below shows the performance of students in the grades tested, grades 3-8 and 10, in English language arts, math, and science in 2022-2023.

★ High school graduation rates are the highest the district has recorded in 16

years. In addition, the graduation rates of students in each identified racial/ethnic subgroup – African American, American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Hispanic, Multi-Race, and White – either increased or maintained during the last five years.

★ The district earned the Kansas State Department of Education’s Kansans Can Recognition at the Copper Level for students being academically prepared for postsecondary.

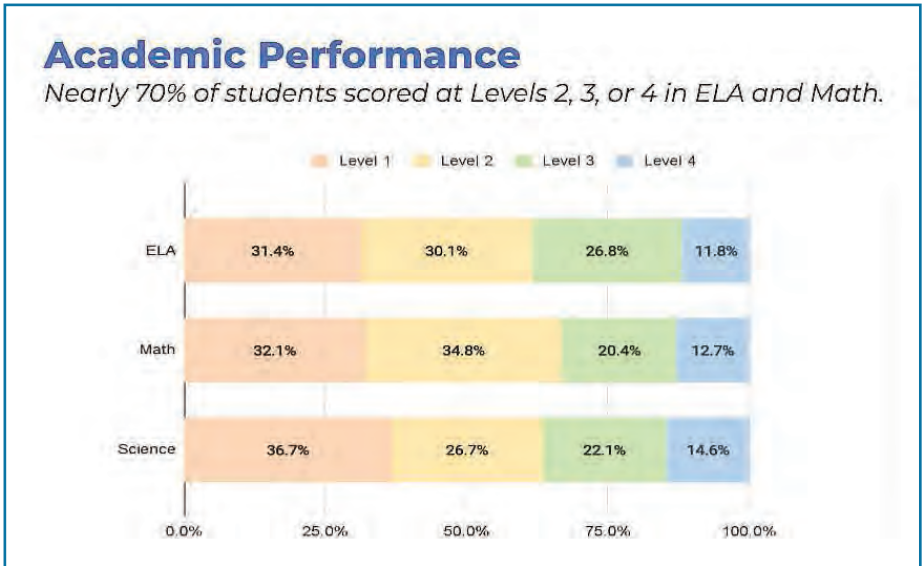
The number of students taking at least one Jayhawk Blueprint concurrent course for high school and college credit increased by



370%, from 89 in 2017-2018 to 418 this fall. More than 2,118 students have taken at least one of these transferable college courses at one-third of the cost of tuition since this district partnership with KU began.

The district offers 22 Advanced Placement (AP) courses and 23 career pathways with 48% of high school students taking a career pathway course. The number of students earning business and industry-recognized certifications has climbed from 56 students in 2017-2018 to 103 last year. During the past six years, 342 students have earned certifications, such as their Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) credential.

Follow Lawrence Public Schools on Facebook, X (Twitter), and Instagram for more district celebrations.



LVS Teachers Partner with Families & Students

One of the first in Kansas, the Lawrence Virtual School (LVS) opened in 2004 as a charter school with 169 students in grades K-8. LVS currently serves 600 K-12 students from across the state.

Accredited by the Kansas State Department of Education and the NCAA, LVS online courses follow local, state, and national curriculum standards. While the primary curriculum is delivered in an online platform, the district provides learning materials and technology.

LVS is unique for virtual schools in that certified teachers provide direct instruction and individualized student support. The school also offers a student council and a variety of student clubs, and hosts in-person family enrichment and student social activities, including student dances and a graduation ceremony.

One of the ways LVS teachers build strong relationships with their students and families is through a homeroom model. "It is a lot more work, but it is priceless," said Michelle Andersen, an LVS high school teacher, of getting to know students assigned to her homeroom, so she can better support their needs,

achievement, and success.

Chief Academic Officer Patrick Kelly said the district wants to serve as many students for whom the virtual school model works well. LVS staff work closely with families considering enrollment to ensure that the program is a good fit. This requires a commitment from family members to be actively involved partners in their children's education. Students who thrive in a virtual educational setting work well independently with a flexible, self-paced schedule.

In his first year with LVS, Principal Zach Harwood said that when reviewing information about the school, one piece of data really jumped out at him: graduation rates. LVS graduation rates have significantly improved from 52.1% in 2016 to 83.8% in 2022.

When speaking to her 125 classmates during the LVS graduation ceremony last May, Kelley Lowe said that no matter the various reasons they came to LVS, it became their school home. Lowe shared that she is grateful for the support she received from caring staff and called LVS an "uplifting, inclusive, inviting, and safe place" to learn.



The Lawrence Schools Foundation and Lied Center of Kansas announce the 8th annual, districtwide talent show for middle and high school students at 7 p.m. Sun., Feb. 4. Ovation! showcases the amazing talents of our students with proceeds benefiting the Foundation and Lawrence Public Schools. Held on the main stage of the Lied Center with full production, the community comes together to celebrate our talented youth with acts



ranging from instrumentalists and singers to dancers and aerialists. This year's student executive producer is Lawrence High junior Renee Dvorske. Get your tickets at www.lied.ku.edu and help us celebrate and support our youth.





Every Day Matters to Student Success

“District goals will not be a reality unless our students attend school, are actively engaged in the teaching and learning process, and build those relationships and that culture of learning here in our classroom environments,” said Dr. Cynthia Johnson, executive director of inclusion, engagement, and belonging.

Dr. Johnson introduced the theme “Every Day Matters” for the district’s advocacy for timely and regular student attendance. She said that student attendance is critical in accessing learning and building social-emotional skills and relationships with adults and peers.

The district’s Average Daily Attendance last year rose slightly from the year prior at 90.68% in 2022-2023 and 90.20% in 2021-2022. The goal this year is 95%.

Looking only at Average Daily Attendance data can hide another important issue affecting Lawrence Public Schools, as well as school districts across the country: chronic absenteeism. It is defined as students missing 10% or more of school days due to absence for any reason, both excused and unexcused. The district’s rate of chronic absenteeism last year was 29.7%, an improvement from 34.11% in 2021-2022.

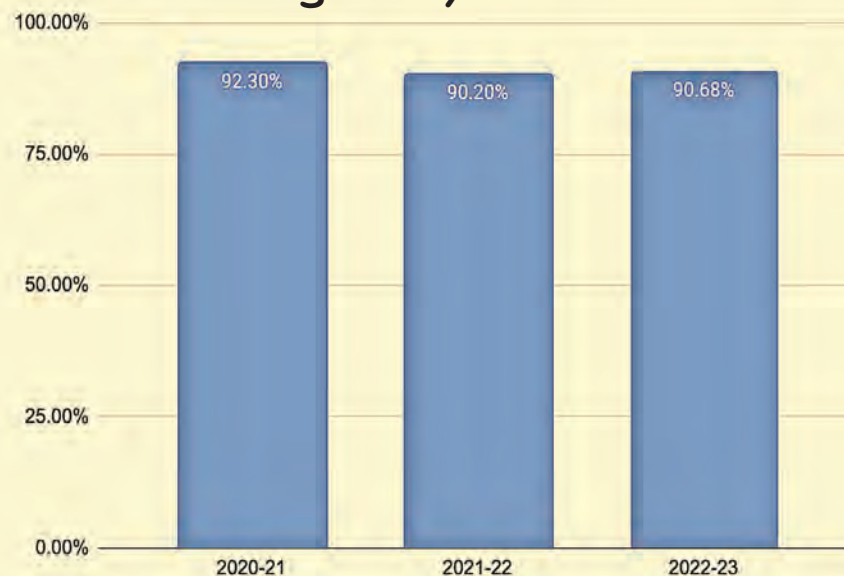
Dr. Johnson noted that research shows that chronic absenteeism affects students

of color, students with disabilities and limited English proficiency, and students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds at higher rates than other students. The district’s chronic absenteeism data for students in identified racial/ethnic subgroups mirrors the research. “Attendance is an essential ingredient for educational equity,” she said.

The district’s lead student and parent support facilitator, Jennifer Georgie, asked, “So how do we improve attendance?” She cited Attendance Works’ research-based proven strategies. They include engaging students and families, recognizing good and improved attendance, providing personalized early outreach, monitoring attendance data and practice, and developing a programmatic response to barriers to attendance. Georgie said that the district will be using all of these strategies as it highlights the importance of school attendance.

The district’s health services staff provide school families guidance for when students should stay home from school for health reasons, such as testing positive for COVID-19 or being diagnosed with the flu. A child with a temperature greater than 100 °F or exhibiting vomiting or diarrhea during the last 24 hours should stay home from school. Contact your child’s school nurse with any questions.

Average Daily Attendance



Truancy Prevention Services

Under Kansas law, a student is truant if they are absent without excuse for a significant part of the school day for three consecutive days, five days in a semester, or seven days in a school year. The district is required to report truancy to the Douglas County District Attorney’s Office.

Mark Preut, LHS associate principal, described how the school’s student services team looks for warning signs of attendance issues and works on preventing truancy. “We document all of

the steps that are taken before we get to the point of filing truancy for a student,” said Preut.

The district signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Kansas Department for Children and Families, Douglas County District Attorney’s Office, Douglas County Criminal Justice Services – Youth Programs, Center for Supportive Communities, and the O’Connell Children’s Shelter. The MOU serves as a formal expression of cooperation among these community

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partners focusing on truancy prevention services and support for students and families.

Pam Weigand, director of criminal justice services, shared that SupportEd truancy prevention services are provided for students K-8 by the Center for Supportive Communities and Criminal Justice Services. The O'Connell Children's Shelter Truancy Prevention Program serves high school students.

"This is a robust and collaborative way of working with our kiddos to keep them in school and out of our truancy program... and to keep them successful," said District Attorney Suzanne Valdez.

The district encourages school families to talk to their child's teacher or principal for support with student attendance. Visit AttendanceWorks.org for attendance research and tips.



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Let's Recognize Some Outstanding Staff!

This school year's theme, Stronger Together, recognizes the power of the collective efforts of this community of learners to support the achievement and success of all students. Lawrence Public Schools values each individual's contributions toward

meeting school improvement goals and achieving the district's mission of "ensuring educational equity and excellence so that students of all races and backgrounds achieve at high levels and graduate prepared for success in college, careers, and life."

The district regularly recognizes individual staff who model the outstanding characteristics and traits it wants to see in all team members. Thanks to community support from generous donors, the Lawrence Schools Foundation honors

educators and classified support staff throughout the school year. One of the businesses in the Foundation's Lawrence Education Achievement Partners (LEAP) program, Truity Credit Union, sponsors the district's annual staff recognition program.



Lied Center stage two educators from the audience of more than 1,500 employees. Family members waited anxiously to hear Dr. Lewis announce Michelle Barnes, Woodlawn fourth/fifth grade teacher, and Katie Biggers, Billy Mills Middle School math teacher, as recipients of the Lawrence Horizon Awards. These awards honor exemplary, novice educators during their second year of teaching.

Colleagues say that Barnes works hard to build a rapport with students and fosters a supportive and positive learning environment. "She is innovative and creative, constantly looking for ways to make lessons engaging and meaningful," her nomination read.

Biggers' nomination said that she has a unique way of making math concepts come alive in the classroom. "One of Katie's greatest strengths is her ability to connect with every student in her classroom. She is highly attuned to the needs of her students. It is no surprise that every student in Katie's classroom loves her," wrote Principal Dr. Andrew Taylor.

Truity Credit Union gave each teacher \$500. The district nominated them to the Kansas State Department of Education's (KSDE's) Kansas Horizon Award program.



Horizon Awards

Superintendent Dr. Anthony Lewis ended the Staff Back-to-School Kickoff in August on a high note. He called to the



Foundation A.C.E. Awards

The Foundation champions school employees from all areas of the district. Acknowledging Classified Employees, it presents A.C.E Awards and \$500 to support staff members. In October, the Foundation worked with staff and students to honor Rachel Thompson, Woodlawn's administrative assistant, and Willie McKinnis, a district adaptive physical education paraeducator.

"Working with Willie has been one of the best experiences of my professional career. He puts his heart and soul into serving our youth and is one of the most loyal and genuine human beings I have ever met," said Jayme Savage, Free State adaptive physical education teacher.

"Rachel is known for her dependability, ability to build



relationships with students, and unwavering composure. Everyone should get the opportunity to watch her in action; she reaches the students who need it most," said Jayci Roberson, Woodlawn principal.

The Foundation will present two more \$500 A.C.E. Awards in the spring. More information may be found at LawrenceSchoolsFoundation.org.



Lawrence Teachers of the Year

The district also will seek state recognition of two of its top educators through KSDE's Kansas Teacher of the Year program.

Schwegler students rocked the rafters of the school gymnasium chanting "Oswald! Oswald! Oswald!" when the superintendent announced third grade teacher Kristin Oswald as the Lawrence Elementary Teacher of the Year. "She is everything, everywhere, all at once," said a Schwegler



colleague. Another called Oswald "our go-to teacher" and "an exemplary educator."

Lori Byers, a gifted education teacher at Billy Mills Middle School, will represent Lawrence secondary schools. "It is clear in every interaction I have with our students — all of them, not just the ones she teaches — that they are the heart of her work," said Principal Dr. Andrew Taylor of Byers.

Truist Credit Union presented both teachers with \$1,000.



Lawrence Master Teacher

"A dream come true." That's how a parent described their child's first grade teacher, Jessica Brown, at Sunflower Elementary. After selecting Brown as the Lawrence Master Teacher in May, the district will nominate her for Emporia State University's Kansas Master Teacher Award.

"My daughter...loves Miss Brown and wishes that she taught all grades so she could be with her until she goes to college," wrote another first grader's parent in her nomination letter.

Truist Credit Union presented Brown with \$2,500.

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Mill Levy History

2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
52.984	53.122	52.840	51.070	52.229

- The budget mill rate, 52.229, is up 1.159 mills from last year & **lower than the three previous years.**

Kansas' Statewide
General Fund Levy: **20 Mills** ★



- Capital Outlay Fund:** KS maximum 8 mills.
- USD 497 voters in 2015 authorized in perpetuity the KS maximum **33% Local Option Budget.**
- Other funds:** Adult Education, Cost of Living, & Bond & Interest.
- Fund levy fluctuations are largely the result of increased Douglas County Assessed Valuations:

2019: \$1,254,650,237

2023: \$1,497,090,233



- Since the district must forecast revenues, it follows KSDE's recommended practice of maximizing budget authority.
- This allows flexibility to address unforeseen district needs & capture as much state aid as possible.
- Budget maximums do NOT reflect expected spending, which will more closely align with previous years' Budget Actuals:

2022-23: \$159,505,968

2021-2022: \$160,668,830

The district charges teacher/staff salaries to the General Fund & district/school administrator salaries to LOB.

This is a choice and has no bearing on taxes. Both funds support salaries & other general operating expenses.

SPEAKING OF SALARIES:

\$6.65M INCREASE

\$3.745M	\$2.58M	\$325K
+8.8%	+16.7%	+5.5%
TEACHERS	CLASSIFIED STAFF	ADMINISTRATION

Improving Staff Salaries

Balancing increased student needs and operational costs with limited funding, the district used a seven-month Futures Planning Community Engagement Process to guide 2023-2024 budget planning. This process included a Futures Planning Committee, community survey, public input sessions, and public hearings. The resulting recommendations led the school board to cut spending by reducing staff and closing two elementary schools.

In addition to increasing operational efficiency and putting the district on a path to sustainability, these spending cuts enabled investment in the board's top financial priority: providing competitive wages to recruit and retain high quality staff to serve all students.

Following successful contract negotiations with the unions representing certified educators and classified support staff, the board allocated a significant increase, \$6.65 million, to employee salaries. It included allocations to all three employee salary pools for raises: \$3.75 million or 56% for teachers; \$2.58 million or 39% for classified staff; and \$325,000 or 5% for building and district administrators.

Now, approximately 68% of classified support staff make \$15/hour or more after receiving raises of \$2.12-\$3.33/hour, depending on job assignment.

An updated salary matrix helped improve teacher salaries with raises ranging from \$400-\$11,000, depending on teachers' years of service to public schools.

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Points of Pride: Student & Staff Success Stories



Lawrence Public Schools celebrates National Merit Semifinalists **Steven Duan, Yejun Yun, Leonard Bass, and Jacob Loos**, of Free State High (FSHS); and **Owen Ackley and Marcus Souders**, Lawrence High (LHS). They are among 16,000 academically talented high school seniors with an opportunity to compete for more than 7,000 National Merit Scholarships worth nearly \$28 million to be awarded in the spring.

U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona launched his "Back to School Bus Tour 2023: Raise the Bar" in September in Kansas.



With a focus on K-12 and postsecondary partnerships, he invited Superintendent Dr. Anthony Lewis to speak during a stop at KU. Dr. Lewis spoke about preparing students for college and introduced four seniors - Abby Chappell and Jonas Hardin, FSHS; and January Jackson and Addy Welch, LHS - who earned several college credits in high school through the Jayhawk Blueprint partnership.

The Lawrence Municipal Court, Velocity Church, and Lawrence Rotary and Sertoma Clubs participated in school supply drives, donated 300+ pairs of socks and shoes for students, and planned an annual snack drive for students challenged to focus in class when they are hungry. "A strong educational system is the foundation of a prosperous community," said Dena Johnston, Lawrence Schools Foundation executive director. "They do all of this to help meet the needs of our school community."



New York Elementary's 2nd-5th graders pledged to show kindness during their CharacterStrong Kindness Kickoff and throughout the school year! When placed together, their pledge cards created an "I Am The Kind Kid" wall. Learning coach Summer Moeckel shared the photo.

Lawrence Public Schools will install a solar system atop Prairie Park Elementary. The south-facing sections of the school's metal roof, which has a 50-year life expectancy, make it a prime site for the installation. By investing capital funds in the short-term, the district will realize savings in its general fund long-term. The project will produce energy, reduce energy consumption and bills, and provide an instructional tool for students. The idea to explore renewable energy grew from a Futures Planning Committee recommendation.



Superintendent Dr. Anthony Lewis announced Principal of the Month honors during the first quarter for Sunset Hill Elementary's Jeremy Philipp, and Jenna Viscomi, building administrator of Community Connections at Pinckney.

Seven local farms and ranches and our school gardens make sure students enjoy fresh local food in their cafeterias. Local products this fall include beef, tomatoes, apples, jalapenos, radishes, mixed greens, peppers, watermelon, cucumbers, cantaloupe, and pears. Yum!

The National Farm to School Network selected **Pantaleon Florez III**, Farm to School and work-based learning coordinator and experiential learning specialist, as one of 13 practitioners from across the nation to become immersed in the National Farm to School Network's racial equity-based curriculum.



The Kansas State High School Activities Association recognized FSHS among six finalists for its Performing Arts School of Excellence award. FSHS won the award in 2019 was also a finalist in 2022. Congratulations, Firebird fine arts staff and students!



Native American Student Services began hosting "healing within" circles in September at its new location at Broken Arrow to support Indigenous students and provide a place and space to talk about mental health.

The City of Lawrence's Cultural Arts Commission announced six recipients of its 2023 Phoenix Awards for outstanding artistic achievements. Congratulations to **Lawrence High Director of Bands Mike Jones**, honored in the Musical Arts Educator category.



The Lawrence Lions Alumni Association in October inducted posthumously into its Hall of Honor: Debra Ann (H) Green, an LHS alumna and 31-year veteran teacher; Robert "Robby" Steinhardt, an LHS alumnus and front man of the iconic band KANSAS; and John Hutcherson Spearman Sr., an advocate for civil rights and equality.

Josh Spradlin, Liberty Memorial Central MS science teacher, joined many individuals climbing into the Envista Credit Union money booth at The Chamber's Taste of Lawrence Mixer to catch paper money and donate equivalent cash to their school of choice.



More than 200 Lawrence educators enrolled in a professional learning course for teaching reading called LETRS. The state of Kansas pays for the training, and the district pays teachers to attend. LETRS teaches the skills needed to master the foundations of reading and writing instruction—phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and written language.

Sunflower Elementary library media specialist Amanda McCoy presented "Don't Forget the Littles: Building a Library Program That Respects Our Youngest Learners" in October at the national conference of the American Association of School Librarians.



Walmart surprised all building principals in September with \$250 gift cards for school and classroom supplies, as well as cupcakes, balloons, and a celebration of its expanded partnership with the Lawrence Schools Foundation.



When BYU came to town to play the Jayhawks in football, the team conducted a book drive and donated 2,000 books to Native American Student Services. This led to a fun Literacy Night with a round dance, visits by both teams' mascots, Haskell men's and women's basketball team members reading to students, performances, and refreshments.



Kansas City television stations interviewed Southwest MS students, including Max Bolick and Savannah Lynch, during their visit to the White House Decision Center at the Truman Center. The Center was "big news" due to a visit by First Lady Dr. Jill Biden the following day.

A KU architecture class reached out to Hillcrest Elementary to design and construct a shade structure for the Ryan Gray Playground. Keith Van de Riet, associate professor, said the class will advance the students' education in drawings, conceptual development, computational design, and model making with the project serving as a case study.

Nick Mershon, a student at Community Connections at Pinckney, reacts to the news that he won a 2023 Outstanding Student Technology Award by Infinitic. Nick uses an eye-gaze operated augmentative and alternative communication device as he gets work experience as a greeter at LMH Health. The device makes it possible for him to communicate with visitors and give directions. Jaime Nickel, a teacher of the deaf, nominated Nick and shared the photo.



The Lied Center of Kansas presented **Melissa Smith, Assistant Director of Bands at Lawrence Free State High School and West Middle School**, with its educator IMPACT Award for distinguished service to arts education. Composer-musician Terence Blanchard received the artist IMPACT Award.



Lawrence Education Achievement Partner Truist Credit Union donated \$35,000 to the Lawrence Schools Foundation. The funds will continue to help support equitable access and opportunity for all students to take Jayhawk Blueprint concurrent credit courses. The money also will be applied to professional development opportunities for staff.



The district's Educational Support Center fielded six teams for the Junior Achievement Bowling "Boo-a-Thon" fundraiser supporting students' financial literacy.

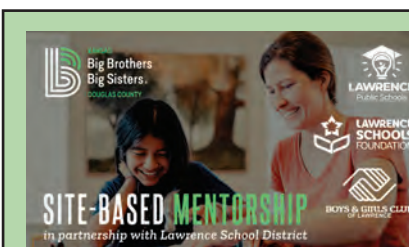


The New York Montessori Children's House and Lower Elementary joined 5th graders to sing and sign the song "Light a Candle for Peace" during a celebration of the International Day of Peace!



KSDE presented Kansans Can Star Recognition to the Lawrence Public Schools at the Silver level in students' Social-Emotional Growth and at the Copper level in students being Academically Prepared for Postsecondary.

The Northeast District of the Kansas Music Educators Association named Kate Stoltenberg, Sunset Hill music teacher, its Elementary Choir Teacher of the Year!



Working with the Lawrence Schools Foundation, Lawrence Public Schools has expanded its partnership with Big Brothers Big Sisters and Boys and Girls Club of Lawrence with a goal of identifying caring adult mentors for every student in the district. Research shows that children and youth with

mentors are more likely to improve their academic performance, have higher self-esteem, attend college or technical schools, and hold living-wage jobs by age 25. They are less likely to skip school, be involved in violence, abuse drugs, or repeat negative cycles.

The Bigs in Schools program requires a commitment of one school year. "Bigs" meet with their matched "Littles" for about 30 minutes during lunch, recess, or before or after school once a week. Contact Jeff Jack, BBBS area director, at JJack@KansasBigs.org or visit www.KansasBigs.org/Be-A-Big to learn more and sign up to mentor a student!



Congratulations to the LHS gymnastics team for placing second at state! The team is coached by Alexis Gonzales, Elle Weber, and Daneka Vann.



LHS Class of 1995 alumnus Jared Stone, an author and Emmy Award-winning television producer, spoke to a sold-out crowd at the Lawrence Schools Foundation's 21st Community Education Breakfast in September. Superintendent Dr. Anthony Lewis introduced four high school senior student champions – Dawson Bonnell and Sophie Racy, FSHS, and Ivori Jones and Jean-Luc Esperance, LHS, for excelling in and out of the classroom and for their leadership and service to their school communities.



Truity Credit Union established the Truity High School Fund through the Lawrence Schools Foundation. When its customers sign up for a High School Spirit Debit Card, all purchases made with the cards raise funds for the high schools. To date, Truity has donated more than \$70,000 to the high schools. In October, Truity presented checks to FSHS and LHS totaling \$20,000. Thank you, Truity!



FSHS Football seniors honored educators who significantly influenced their lives by presenting them with jerseys and the "My Jersey Your Impact Award." FSHS paraeducator Anna Miller was among honorees.



In collaboration with the Lied Center, the Midway Brass Quintet came to Kennedy Early Childhood Center to perform for the Pre-K classrooms. The musicians talked about their instruments and played a variety of music.



In honor of National Coaches Day, Jefferson's Lawrence Restaurants created a Lawrence Coach of the Year Award, accepted nominations, and presented the first award to Dena Johnston, FSHS Spirit Squad Coach, for playing a pivotal role in students' lives on and off the field. Coach Johnston will be honored on a plaque at the restaurants, celebrate with a team party at Jefferson's, and receive a gift card for free wings for a year.



The district collaborated with WANRack to launch its private fiber Wide Area Network (WAN) in August. The WAN will better serve the technology needs of the school community, expand capacity, improve reliability and security, and produce an estimated \$3 million in savings for the general fund during the life of the contract. A second phase of the project will provide internet connectivity to school families, helping to bridge the digital divide.

Kennedy Early Childhood Center preschoolers in Donna Lang's class enjoyed a trip to Schaake's pumpkin patch. Lang shared the photo.



Middle school scholars from across the district gathered for a Future City Leadership Retreat. They constructed buildings made with recycled materials to place in model cities of the future.

FSHS Debate's Sophie Racy and Conner Brown qualified for the prestigious Tournament of Champions hosted by the University of Kentucky in May.

A group of former school board members and staff, family, and friends of former Superintendent Randy Weseman donated plaques for installation at both high school outdoor athletic facilities. The memorial plaques honor Weseman's efforts to plan, secure community investment, and construct the facilities. FSHS Athletic Director Jered Shaw and former A.D. Steve Grant display one of the plaques.



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