



## USD 497 News Release

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### **School Board Approves Consultant Support for Boundary Advisory Committee's Work**

The Lawrence Board of Education on Monday approved encumbering up to \$45,000 for enrollment and boundary analysis and mapping assistance from RSP and Associates. Deputy Superintendent Dr. Larry Englebrick brought the recommendation to the board on behalf of the Boundary Advisory Committee. The board charged the committee to study and recommend a proposal to better balance high school enrollments.

The committee has developed two boundary options and wants additional data to assess the long-term impacts of the proposals. The committee will seek community feedback on the options during public input sessions Nov. 13-14 at Lawrence High and Free State, respectively.

Englebrick said that he expects that the analysis work requested of RSP will not require the full amount encumbered. RSP has worked with our district for more than a decade. He noted that they have already developed many of the tools they will use to analyze current data.

### **2023-2024 Equity Report**

The school board heard an equity report for the 2023-2024 school year and received a lengthy and more detailed written report. Both included progress toward academic goals in reading and math, a review of attendance, behavior, discipline, and restorative practices data, as well as the role of social-emotional learning in supporting student achievement, growth, and success.

“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 of this is higher numbers of students qualifying for free and reduced-price lunch, 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.”

Lawrence Public Schools started an intentional effort to look at disproportionalities in student achievement data in 2005. “Since then, we have woven the thread of equity into the fabric of everything we do in our schools,” said Leah Wisdom, director of recruitment, retention, and professional development.

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Our community's plan for school progress, our district's strategic plan, includes the promise of ensuring that students of all races, backgrounds, and abilities achieve at high levels, demonstrate proficiency in reading by third grade and math by the eighth grade, and graduate on time prepared for success in college and careers.

District Academic Goals in Reading and Math are as follows:

- By the end of the 2025-26 school year, 75% of students in grades K-10 will score as low-risk or on-track on the Spring FastBridge aReading or earlyReading assessment.
- By the end of the 2025-26 school year, 75% of students in grades K-2 will score as low-risk or on-track on the Spring FastBridge aMath or earlyMath assessment.
- By the end of the 2025-26 school year, the number of students in grades 3-8 and entry level High School math courses scoring at level 3 and 4 on KAP Math Assessment will increase by 10% each school year

James Polk, director of data and assessment, shared that our district's academic data has been largely stable over the past three years with consistent increases in math scores during that time. In addition, students performed above the state average on all assessments in 2023-2024; nationally, assessment scores have been declining.

Polk noted progress in the number of students identifying as Native American moving out of Level 1 (showing a limited ability to understand and use skills and knowledge needed for postsecondary readiness) in math and ELA. Students scoring at Levels 3 and 4 (showing an effective or excellent ability...) has held steady in English language arts over the past three years, increased 2.5% in math during that time, and slightly decreased in science.

"We continue to see an achievement disparity among student groups and in the overall data. Though this mirrors state performance, our instructional work and urgency is focused on narrowing disparities," he said, pointing to three key areas of focus for improvement: supporting teachers and their professional learning, diving deeper into data, and student interventions.

Other highlights of the report included a slight improvement in average daily attendance (91.3%) in 2023-2024 and a decrease in chronic absenteeism (27.6% of students missed 10% or more of school days for any reason). Behavior events (beyond "teachable moments") dropped 12.19%, and in four out of five behavior events, restorative responses were used.

Kiley Luckett, district mental health facilitator, said that social-emotional learning has a direct impact on learning. She said that our schools' work with CharacterStrong PreK-12 is creating a culture for learning, including with staff. "Social-emotional learning improves academic performance and reduces behaviors that serve as barriers to learning," Luckett said.

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Board members asked for additional data in the future, and in some cases, the same data, but presented in different ways.

“How can we tell that the good work we’re doing is making a difference?” asked board member Bob Byers, referring to static state assessment scores. “Yes, we’ve prevented the slide back, but we are not seeing the forward momentum.”

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.”

### **Recognition**

The board recognized and shared its gratitude with Lawrence High School fine arts educators, who highlighted their drawing, painting, metals, ceramics, media, and photography courses. Art teachers Todd Poteet and Angelia Perkins showcased postsecondary opportunities and career and technical pathways of study for students. They said that their students are involved in skill-building, in and out of school, and mentored throughout the creative process.

Their program also collaborates with community, state, regional, and national partners, including professional arts organizations, colleges, and universities. Both teachers shared that an annual Portfolio Day helps LHS students see possibilities for careers in the arts and that many of their students earn college scholarships and awards for their artwork.

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