EDUCATION: THE ULTIMATE SUPERPOWER!

#allstudentsoneteam

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SUPERINTENDENT’S MESSAGE

Thanks for saving me a seat!

I have the best seat in the house. Spending time in all of our schools makes my day! Actually, it makes my school year.

It feels good to hear our principals and school office staff greet our scholars by name as they arrive in the mornings. They ask about their weekends, their pets, their homework, or a new sibling at home.

Our scholars may get a high-five or a fist bump, and always a smile, from the custodian as they head to class, to lunch, or make their way back from recess or the library.

Observing classes, I see teachers and staff really getting to know what makes their scholars tick. They set high expectations and weave their scholars’ interests into their lessons.

Classroom procedures, including our ever-changing COVID-19 safety measures, fade to near invisibility as just another part of the classroom routine. Our scholars have assumed responsibility for their classroom community. They make good choices and compassionately reach out to help their peers.

Oh, their questions! Our scholars come to school bursting with the best questions and ideas for their teachers to build on to spur lively classroom discussions. No matter their age, our scholars set goals for themselves and help to monitor their own progress.

School families and community members give of their time to visit our classrooms. They share their cultures, creative talents, and career paths. Their unique lived experiences provide our scholars with new perspectives.

Some of the best times I have had this school year have been in the company of our scholars. Listening to the brilliant ideas they share during a student advisory council meeting. Hearing their beautiful voices and instruments blend during concerts. Watching them refuse to give up in a nail-biting, come-from-behind win. Touring the district’s Clothing Closet with the C-Tran students who take such pride in keeping it so well organized. Enjoying a stimulating conversation with Kennedy preschoolers over a pasta-and-meatballs lunch. Thank you, Payton, for kindly saving me a seat.

My profound thanks to our scholars, teachers and staff, administrators, school board, school families, and community. You have certainly made lemonade of this year’s lemons with your curiosity, resilience, leadership, dedication, patience, and generous support.

Sincerely,

Anthony S. Lewis, Ph.D.
A Listening and Learning Tour in 2018 enabled school district leaders to hear from the community. Residents shared district strengths and challenges, and their ideas for school improvement. Using this input, the superintendent and school board worked with staff to develop a five-year strategic plan. The plan reflects the community’s vision for the future of its public schools.

**OUR PROMISE**

Lawrence Public Schools will ensure that students of all races, backgrounds, and abilities achieve at high levels, demonstrate proficiency in reading by third grade and in math by eighth grade, and graduate on time prepared for success in college and careers.
Objectives of the Cohesive Curriculum theme of the district’s strategic plan include identifying what students should know and be able to do PreK-12+ and using instructional resources that honor and preserve students’ diverse cultural backgrounds. The district’s Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment team leads the curriculum review cycle, illustrated by the graphic on this page.

“Every content area is always in a state of review,” said Chief Academic Officer Patrick Kelly of continuous improvement.

PREPARE: Curriculum Specialist Annette Kenoly works with leadership teams for the content areas of social studies and world languages. They have collected data, including course enrollment, student grades, and teacher input. The teams met to establish norms, expectations, and outcomes and to discuss how to communicate progress to others. They audited the curriculum using the district’s Culturally Sustainable Resource Criteria. This tool guides staff in reflecting on historical accuracy, inclusivity, the presentation of alternative points of view, authentic cultural representations, racial stereotypes, and other criteria.

REVIEW/PLAN/ALIGN: Curriculum Specialist Kris Hase works with elementary teachers in the content areas of English language arts (ELA), science, and social studies. She recently led a team through a review of the district’s ELA resources. The team identified priority standards (what students are expected to know and be able to do) and looked at readiness, endurance, assessment, leverage, and depth of knowledge.

The team evaluated 14 resources, and then 18 teachers across three grade levels piloted the top three choices. Ultimately, the administration recommended and the board approved the team’s second choice, Benchmark Advance. Given budget limitations, a $583,300 cost difference over the six-year life of the contract tipped the scales in its favor.

IMPLEMENTATION: Assistant Director of Curriculum and Instruction Denise Johnson supports science teachers, as well as teachers in the content areas of fine arts, physical education, and health. For over a year, she has worked with secondary science teachers on a curriculum review. This process began during hybrid instruction last year. The team focused on teaching strategies, professional development, instructional shifts, and collaboration.

“The function of a rigorous curriculum is to raise the level of teaching so students are prepared with 21st-century skills,” said Johnson.

SUSTAIN/COLLECT: Assistant Director of Instructional Technology and Curriculum Shaun Hanson supports secondary math teachers while Curriculum Specialist Shelly McBeth works with secondary ELA. They supported these departments in the rollout of District Common Assessments, assisting teachers in using student performance data to work toward continuous improvement. McBeth describes this as a reflection process that enables staff to look back and find things they can do better.

Learn more about district curriculum at www.usd497.org/cia.
School Redesign Update

Four Lawrence schools continue to work in various stages of the Kansas State Department of Education’s Apollo Kansans Can School Redesign Program to innovate and break the mold. Redesign objectives seek to improve student success skills, expand family, business, and community partnerships; and personalize student learning, including by providing students relevant, project-based learning, internships, and civic engagement opportunities.

While the pandemic delayed the launch of some of their new ideas, it gave Broken Arrow, Deerfield, Hillcrest, and Free State High staff more time to plan, try some changes, and collect and evaluate data. After gathering ideas from students, staff, and school families, all four schools built their redesign teams, set goals, and began their research and exploration of innovations.

Broken Arrow has incorporated more movement and play-based options for primary students. Staff want to further personalize instruction with multigrade learning opportunities. Each school day begins with students having a choice of activities. The team continues to examine the school calendar to provide purposeful, learning-focused breaks. Data-informed decisions guide student behavior support aimed at uniting the building and empowering students.

“When we started this, it really created a way for us to think differently and also work together to really come forward with some new ideas for our students,” said Amanda Green, Broken Arrow learning coach.

Deerfield works to expand personalized learning with ability grouping. The staff has incorporated play-based learning, movement, mindfulness, and wellness breaks into student social skill development. A focus on increasing staff morale has led to increased planning time for teachers. The school community also wants to add outdoor educational spaces.

Hillcrest has redesign goals in four areas: structures and systems, purposeful play, community hub, and social emotional learning. Making the school a community hub could include providing a place for families to use Wi-Fi, do laundry, utilize the food pantry and other resources, have parent meetings, and other outreach efforts.

“In everything we are doing, we want to provide all students access to opportunities to excel,” said Sarah Kruse, Hillcrest principal.

Free State High’s redesign team has focused on achieving balance, providing relevance, and supporting students in building habits of success. The most visible, sweeping change at Free State has been the school’s flexible modular or Flex Mod schedule. It has provided more time for hands-on, lab classes and flexible student independent learning time.

“This was a full implementation year in Flex Mod, and if you have talked to anyone who has lived through it, it has been quite a steep learning curve,” said Aimee Landwehr, Free State social studies teacher.

After reviewing data and surveys, Free State will adjust its schedule next fall. It will maintain independent learning time, eliminate overlapping classes, and resume Wednesday early dismissal to provide staff collaboration time.
Building Skills that Promote Health and Wellness

The pandemic has greatly increased mental health needs among students and staff. The district uses Social Emotional Character Development Standards to align its social emotional learning and focus on student knowledge and skill development.

What is social emotional learning? The two-column table on this page illustrates some facts and myths.

Shaped by the local priorities of families, communities, and schools, social emotional learning boosts academic performance, promotes health and well-being, and helps students understand different perspectives. Social emotional learning is not therapy, a distraction from academics, or the teaching of a specific political agenda.

Dr. Cynthia Johnson, executive director of inclusion, engagement, and belonging, explains that the five competencies of social emotional learning are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Casel, 2017). Lawrence schools use Connect with Kids and Positive Action curricula during elementary morning meetings, middle school advisory periods, and high school classroom discussions to teach students character development.

The district gathers information about student needs, including student input, through screening tools, the annual Kansas Communities That Care Survey, Equal Opportunity Schools, and other surveys and student advisory groups. In Professional Learning Communities, staff provide feedback, analyze student risk screening data, and share ideas for improving social emotional instruction and delivery.

Dr. Johnson said that one of the ways to improve is to amplify student voice in this work. The district has developed a Student Mental Health Advisory Team. After a training in March, this team of students began discussing and asking peers about existing school resources, additional supports they may need at school, and the connections they have at school through their relationships with trusted adults. The advisory team agreed that it is important for students to be more involved in leading improvements in school support services.

“Students say they need breaks. They just need time to catch up. They need time to connect with that significant adult in the building or they need time to connect with their peers just to regroup,” said Jose Cornejo, district mental health facilitator, of common themes in the data gathered from high school students.

The board, district, and all schools work with a variety of advisory committees to discuss how to best support student needs. Kelly Walker, Native American Student Services (NASS) coordinator, meets monthly with the Indian Education Parent Committee. Its feedback guides and evaluates programs and services, such as the NASS school supply giveaway, cooking classes, college exploration, cultural events, and other activities and support services for Indigenous students.

Each school has a staff equity team. The superintendent meets regularly with a student advisory panel. Free State and Lawrence High have both trained groups of staff and students in Sources of Strength. The trained adult mentors support students in leading suicide prevention efforts at school and helping students focus on their strengths.

Restorative practices are another key piece of the puzzle. Jennifer Georgie, West Middle School student support facilitator, said that everyone at West is involved in implementing restorative practices, including student volunteers who co-facilitate social emotional learning through community circles with their peers during Advisory.

“Students are accountable, and they are taking accountability. Teaching 26 years, this is the first time I’ve asked myself, ‘Where has this been? Why haven’t we been doing this before?’” said Georgie of restorative practices.

Preparing to pilot new SEL curricula at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, the district will use monthly feedback sessions during the pilot to inform final recommendations for resource adoption.

After the board approved a multi-million dollar budget cut, board member Kay Emerson reflected on the district’s work around supporting students’ social-emotional needs, health, and well-being.

“Business is going to look different moving forward but we still have so many successes here in our district. Lawrence may be going through some challenges but at the end of the day, we are an amazing district!”

(Source: CASEL.com)
District Road Map to Restorative Practices

Committed to supporting caring school communities, the district has started training staff and students in restorative practices, a set of principles and practices inspired by Indigenous values. Restorative practices complement the district’s work with social emotional learning, positive behavior supports, and culturally responsive teaching. The use of restorative practices helps to build community, respond to conflict, and provide circles of support for students.

2019-2020 School Year (Pandemic School Closures - 3/2020)
• Liberty Memorial Central & Billy Mills Middle Schools' Staff Trained

2020-2021 School Year (Pandemic – Remote & Hybrid)
• Southwest & West Middle Schools’ Staff Trained
• Student Support Facilitators
• Parent Training with KIPCOR*

2021-2022 School Year
• Free State, Lawrence High, & College & Career Center Staff Trained
• Student Support Facilitators
• Parent Training with KIPCOR*

2022-2023 School Year
• Elementary Staff Trained
• Middle & High School Student Leaders Trained
• Equity Advisory Council & Parents of Color Analyze Behavior Data Monthly
• Quarter Report

Summer 2022
• District Implementation Guide Developed
• Quick Reference Cards for Administrators & Staff

2023-Forward
• Restorative Practices Journey Continues

*Kansas Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution.
Lawrence Secondary Teacher of the Year

A teacher who has grown the Lawrence High video and digital media program during the last six years earned the 2022 Lawrence Secondary Teacher of the Year Award. Zach Saltz, LHS career and technical education teacher, empowers students to learn practical and marketable skills that they can use beyond high school.

“One has only to view just a few video projects to see the evidence of his dedication, professionalism, and creativity. His students and their projects are proof of his commitment to education,” wrote Kimberly Hawks, LHS business instructor and CTE department chairperson, in a letter of nomination. “The level of this work is, in my opinion, on par with professionally produced work.”

Take a look at Lawrence High School Room 308 Productions on YouTube. They include weekly video announcements, news and sports broadcasting, music videos, documentaries, and animation. Saltz’s students recently received recognition at the eMagine Media Festival and had their work selected for screening at the International Youth Silent Film Festival.

“I’m just so lucky to do a job that I really enjoy. It’s not work when you’re working with students who are as passionate and creative as the ones I’m fortunate to have,” said Saltz, who credits his wife, Samantha Saltz, New York Elementary first grade teacher, for modeling effective teaching.

The district will nominate Saltz to KSDE’s Kansas Teacher of the Year program in the fall. LEAP partner Truity Credit Union presented him with $1,000.

Kansas Master Teacher

The Dean of Emporia State University’s Teachers College surprised Barb Tholen, Lawrence High journalism adviser, with the news of her selection as a Kansas Master Teacher! This occurred in February after the district had named Tholen its Lawrence Master Teacher in the spring of the preceding school year.

Tholen has taught at LHS for ten years. She teaches journalism and graphic design and is the adviser for The Budget newspaper and The Red and Black yearbook. These student publications have earned seven nominations for the nation’s preeminent scholastic journalism honor – the Pacemaker. The National Scholastic Press Association recognized the current journalism staff as one of eight top high school media programs in the country.

“I believe that students thrive when they have the power to make real and important decisions, and I strive to create circumstances that help students find success. I’ve found that when students are empowered to make decisions, they act quickly, decisively, and thoughtfully,” said Tholen.

Her students have called Tholen a life-changing teacher, and her classroom, a magical place.

2021 Teachers of the Year Honored Regionally

The Kansas State Department of Education recognized Jennifer Gorup, Quail Run Elementary School library media specialist, and Craig McCauley, West Middle School choral music director, during its 2022 Region 2 Kansas Teacher of the Year Celebration in March. The district previously named them 2021 Lawrence Teachers of the Year.

In her 22nd year with the district, Gorup mentors new library media specialists, sharing information and ideas to help them be successful. She also invests her time in professional learning and shares what she has learned.

“Jenny is an outstanding educator, who has successfully made our library a place where every student, staff, and parent feels welcome,” wrote colleagues Mandy Sikes and Christina Smith in their nomination.

Craig McCauley continues to build on his 24-year legacy of excellence in the district. West choirs have received multiple invitations to perform at state and regional music educator conventions.

“He continually uplifts his students and builds confidence through his curriculum, rehearsals, and performances. Craig encourages all of his students to set high standards for themselves and their peers. Accountability, acceptance, and excellence are common themes in his classroom,” wrote Melissa Smith, Free State and West assistant band and orchestra director.

School administrators recall that McCauley’s students have gone on to perform and succeed at the high school and college levels. Some entered the top fine arts programs in the country, such as The Juilliard School in New York City. Others performed on Broadway.

“It’s all about the community. We talk about this all of the time,” said McCauley to his students. “Awards are awesome. They always are but it’s really the day-to-day of seeing you guys do just cool stuff that really makes the difference. Thank you for your efforts. Thank you for believing in what we do.”
Superintendent Dr. Anthony Lewis presented two Class Act Awards, one at each high school, to classified staff members who play pivotal roles in the success of their schools. This year’s fall award recognized Travis McPherson, Lawrence High School buildings and grounds team lead. Colleagues laud McPherson’s phenomenal support of staff, strong work ethic, and can-do attitude. They note the exceptional job he does to keep LHS in its best shape, especially during a multi-year construction project and pandemic.

McPherson’s nomination read that he adapted quickly to changes in staff needs and administrative goals as well as outside forces during the construction and pandemic. A colleague described that Travis assists staff with friendly efficiency at the drop of a hat and without an ounce of judgment.

Across town, Free State High School associate principal Amy McAnarney says, “Everyone at Free State knows Justin and appreciates his positive attitude and willingness to help wherever needed.”

The superintendent surprised Justin Deaver with the district’s Class Act Award in April for his work as a special education paraeducator. Colleagues praise Deaver for his relationships with students, modifications to support their needs, and advocacy on their behalf as well as how he assists students in advocating for themselves. They say that he thinks on his feet and makes adjustments to meet the changing needs of students.

“Justin’s level of commitment and pride in Free State is unparalleled,” said McAnarney of Deaver’s support of student activities. “Justin has become our ‘go-to’ and ‘right-hand man,’ regardless of whether we are hosting an event on or off campus.”

LEAP partner Truity Credit Union presented McPherson and Deaver with $500 each.

Imagine the increased workload facing school nurses during a global pandemic. The district acknowledged this, selecting Dianne Thomas, R.N., B.S.N., as its 2021 Educator of the Year. Thomas supports Deerfield and Woodlawn schools.

“Always the first to volunteer to help out when needed, Dianne has been a mentor to numerous new school nurses. She is upbeat and has a positive outlook, even when faced with new challenges,” said Sonja Gaumer, health services facilitator. “With COVID, Dianne has volunteered to be on several committees and assisted with the implementation of new guidelines and procedures.”

LEAP partner Truity Credit Union presented Thomas with $1,000.
Another theme of the district’s strategic plan is Data-Informed Decisions. The primary objectives are to ensure that data is available, accurate, accessible, and actionable. From preschoolers to graduating seniors, data-informed decisions guide student improvement.

“We use our data to drive every decision we make in the classroom. It gives us a look at each individual student and helps us determine if their IEP (Individualized Education Plan) goals are what they should be or if we need to change them,” said Trish Wills, an early childhood special education teacher. Wills works with three and four year olds at Kennedy Early Childhood Community Center.

“Because our kids are at such a range of skills, we use data to determine how we are meeting the needs of each student, individually, and students as a group to prepare them for moving into kindergarten,” Wills said.

Schwegler Elementary teachers use their Wednesday collaboration time to discuss data and plan their instruction. First grade teacher Sherrie Murray said that she and her colleagues use pre-tests, midpoint assessments, and post-tests to determine which teaching strategies are most effective. “Common formative assessments are a powerful tool that provide immediate feedback so we can tailor our instructional practices,” said Murray.

Rosemary Blum is an academic interventionist at Southwest Middle School. Blum says that Southwest staff have been responding to student questions about why they have to take District Common Assessments. They have developed a tool to guide teachers in discussing with students their answers, the correct answers, and student reflections.

“We hope that this piece can work with teachers, students, and parents because we don’t want the DCA to be a mystery to anybody,” said Blum of the tool.

Graduation data is one of the many pieces of data that high schools examine. The district’s graduation rate improved slightly from 82.7% in 2020 to 84.2% in 2021; however, the graduation rate also was 84.2% six years ago in 2015. In comparison, Kansas graduation rates were 88.1% in 2021, dipping only .2% from the previous year.

Free State’s 2021 graduation rate of 89.8% is lower than in 2020 (90.1%) while Lawrence High’s most recent rate of 80.6% is slightly higher than last year’s 79.4%. Lawrence Virtual School improved its graduation rate significantly during the past five years. Its graduation rate increased from 52.1% in 2016 to 77.6% in 2021.

The district engages students, families, and the community in examining student data and the continuous improvement process. The following groups are among those with which the board, building and district administration, and school staff collaborate as they continue to work toward achieving the goals of the district’s strategic plan:

- Building Leadership Teams (staff)
- Building Ci3T Teams (staff)
- Building Equity Teams (staff)
- Equity Advisory Council (parents, community, staff)
- Parents of Color Advisory Team (parents, community)
- Superintendent Advisory Councils (students, parents, staff, community)
- District Site Council (staff, parents)
- District Student Equity Council
- District Student Mental Health Team
- Lawrence Special Education Advisory Committee (staff, parents)
- Budget and Planning Evaluation Committee (staff)
- Boundary Committee (staff, parents, community)
- Native American Student Services Parent Committee (parents of Indigenous students)
- Numerous community partnerships

Learn more about district assessments at www.usd497.org/Assessments.
Points of Pride: Student and Staff Success Stories

Congratulations, National Merit Finalists: Eva Ackley and Elijah Paden, Lawrence High (LHS), and Hannah DeGuzman, Isabella Evans, Chaney Finkeldei, Ari Karman, Jared Loos, Cortlyn Ruckman, Mary Kate Shultz, and Anand Singh, Free State (FSHS).

The Kansas Leadership Center selected Lawrence Public Schools among 87 organizations across Kansas as 2022 Leadership Transformation Grant partners.

What can you create with a triangle, square, and circle? Broken Arrow students let their imaginations flow, given one minute to draw a picture using a list of shapes.

The Lied Center of Kansas named Rachel Downs-Doubrava, FSHS art teacher, an IMPACT Award winner.

The NEKMEA named LHS Director of Orchestras Mariah Barnett its Outstanding High School Music Educator and FSHS Associate Director of Choral Activities Olivia Henning its 2021 Outstanding Young Choir Teacher of the Year.

Several college representatives visited LHS art classes to share information and offer 1:1 portfolio reviews for student artists.

The district launched a Student Equity Council this year made up of high school students from FSHS, LHS, and the Lawrence College and Career Academy (LCCA).

The Lawrence Education Association presented its Spring Classified Scholarship to Verline Purnell, a Billy Mills Middle School (BMMS) special education paraeducator who is earning her teaching certification. Seth Williams, Liberty Memorial Central Middle School (LMCMS) special education paraeducator, won the LEA’s fall scholarship.

Sunflower Elementary students used keyboards to practice rhythm. They could use any note on the keyboard as long as they followed the beat of the music.

Pinckney students used their creativity to build paper bridges strong enough to hold pennies. These future architects, civil engineers, and construction workers did some impressive problem solving. One bridge held 93 pennies.

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The USD 497 Farm 2 School program gives students access to healthy, local foods as well as educational opportunities such as school gardens, cooking lessons, and farm field trips. A garden area is available for each school.

The Lawrence Board of Realtors recognized Lawrence Public Schools and the LHS reconstruction project with its River City Recognition Award for architectural enhancement in the community.

Congratulations to the nearly 200 middle and high school musicians from the district selected to perform in the Kansas Music Educators Association’s Northeast District (NEKMEA) Honors Ensembles in December.

In its inaugural season, the LHS Unified Bowling Team qualified for the KSHSAA State Tournament.

Twenty-three members of the FSHS Orchestra (more than any other high school in NE Kansas) earned selection to perform in the NEKMEA Honor High School Orchestra.

KU’s Pi Beta Phi chapter hosted a book drive, collecting more than 3,800 books to donate to the Lawrence Schools Foundation for classrooms.

Midco and ENVISTA Credit Union honored among its Teachers of the Month: Ashley Weaver, LMCMS, Lauren Elkin, Lawrence Virtual School (LVS), Jenny Humburg, Deerfield; Chef Camille Eichorn, LCCA; Erin Schramm, Prairie Park; and Jenny Wilk and Abby Webb, Hillcrest. The honorees and their schools each received $100. Their classes enjoyed a Domino’s pizza party. Midco and ENVISTA’s Teacher of the Year will come from the monthly winners.

LHS senior Ashton Rapp performed with the Concert Choir as part of the 2022 High School Performance Series at Carnegie Hall in February.


In honor of Veterans Day, Kenneth St. Pierre’s classes at WMS enjoyed a visit by U.S. Navy Captain Jim Cooper. He taught students about his time as a Naval Flight Officer for the P-3 Orion.

Quail Run staff shared pictures of the veterans in their lives with fourth grade teacher Ashli Smith, who made a wonderful hallway display that students of all grades could use to learn more about Veterans Day.

LHS students Natalie Kennedy (photography portfolio) and Ashton Rapp (voice) earned YoungArts Awards, recognizing the nation’s most accomplished young artists in the visual, literary, and performing arts.

LHS student Olive Harrington won first place in the Hays 5-State Professional Photography Competition with this photo titled “Coin Flip.” Her photo also claimed second place in the 25th Annual Merriam High School Art Contest.

LHS science teacher Lisa Ball completed a communications fellowship aboard the Exploration Vessel Nautilus with the Ocean Exploration Trust. She shared her experiences with students via ship-to-shore broadcasts off the
FSHS’s Sources of Strength (SOS) student group hosted Mental Health Monday. Students grabbed their lunches and spent time with members of SOS and the FSHS mental health team learning how to manage stress and anxiety, and relax. Activities included rock art, journaling, brain games, and coloring for relaxation.

The Association of Texas Photography Instructors honored FSHS journalism students Addison Driscoll and Caroline Börk for their news videography.

Team STEAM Robotics hosted a FIRST LEGO League Tournament in December for 21 teams from around the Kansas City and Lawrence area.

Chef Camille Eichorn and the Culinary class at the Lawrence College & Career Center won first place in the Kansas Big Brothers Big Sisters Gingerbread contest.

The Lawrence Schools Foundation presented $5,000 to Erin McDaneld-Campbell, FSHS special education teacher, along with its 2021 Dedication to Education Award.

The Recyclery in Downtown Lawrence gave elementary physical education teachers a “tune up” for the biking program. Teachers learned how to change a tire, fix and tighten brakes, and overall bike maintenance.

Theater students from all four middle schools attended the musical “Wicked” at the Kansas City Music Hall in January.

FSHS Theatre students earned Superior Ratings and qualified for the International Thespian Festival at the Kansas Thespian Festival in Wichita. They also received the highest ranking of Gold Honor Troupe. Brian Percival is their director/sponsor.

FSHS and LCCA students Kyle Thalgodapitiya, Jamie King, Anand Singh, Pranav Vogeti, Minh Vu, and Kenny Warner, competing as Team Firewall, placed first within their tier for the Kansas State Round of the CyberPatriots National Youth Cyber Defense Competition. Sarah Mahoney is their coach/sponsor.

FSHS students John Marshall, Serena Rupp, Ezra Joseph, Emma Stammeyer, Gilly Falin, and Eleanor Roust finished in second place while Aaron Persinger and Sophie Racy earned third in the KSHSAA 6A State Debate Tournament.

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Lawrence Public Schools recognized outstanding students, staff, and community members with ONE DREAM Martin Luther King Jr. Awards for leading change and making a positive difference in their schools and the community. Congratulations, Landry Wilson, Deerfield student, Katie Hutchison, LHS teacher, Echo Deer, Broken Arrow student, Litzy Torres-Zepeda, LHS student, Shreya Bhakta and Anotida Chikanda, FSHS students, Steve Cadue, community advocate, Dr. Danica Moore, district equity facilitator, and Cody Charles, community advocate.

FSHS student Yejun Yun earned two Silver Key Awards in Critical Essay for “Immigrants in America” and “The Value of Competition” entries in the 2022 Scholastic Writing Awards. Caroline Börk earned a Silver Key in Humor for writing her Black Box Theatre Festival play, “The Transportation Security Administration.” Their winning pieces will appear in Missouri Youth Write, an online publication.

Southwest Middle School’s (SWMS) eighth-grade Team “Mexico City” won the Great Plains Future City Competition and advanced to the National Engineers Week Future City Competition. There, they earned the Outstanding City Essay and Best Integration of Equity in Designing the Built Environment Using Nature-Powered Solutions Awards. The team includes Aaminah Ahmed, Owen Bork, Logan Callaway, Aedan FitzGerald, Nicky Johnson, Sorcha Keating, Violet Meinershagen, Alex Oral, Liam Pleskac, Neel Sabarwal, Katherine Stancil, Eli Stone, Emi Stone, Tristan Thomas, and Jacob Wang. Dani Lotton-Barker and Angela Chowdhury coached the team and Chris Storm served as its professional engineer mentor.

LHS students performed well in the National Scholastic Art and Writing Awards. Luke Havener received three Gold Key Awards and Katherine Price earned a Gold Key Award, qualifying both for the national finals. Maddy Freed received a Gold Key, two Silver Keys, and an Honorable Mention; Rachel Schmaus earned a Silver Key Portfolio Award and a Silver Key Award; and Ella Trendal received a Silver Key Award. Todd Poteet and Angelia Perkins are their teachers. (Pictured: Havener’s oil painting, “Overseer.”)

FSHS students Elijah Ditto and Evelyn Gurske played bass at the 2022 High School Honors Performance Series at Carnegie Hall in New York City!

Kennedy Early Childhood Community Center hosted its own “Olympic Games” with preschoolers participating in simulated “ice skating, hockey, downhill skiing, and ring toss” events.

These students from Andrea Kelly’s kindergarten class at Deerfield celebrated the 100th day of school by assembling sculptures using 100 marshmallows, creating cup towers with 100 cups, and even digging in sand to find 100 pennies.

The Kansas School Counselor Association presented the 2022 Kansas School Counselor of the Year Award to Amanda Atkins, Sunset Hill school counselor.

The Lawrence Lions Noon Club honored Dee Kemp, FSHS security officer, with its Local Hero Award for the many service projects he has led and been a part of in the community.

LCCA’s chapter of Douglas County Youth Prevention received a RESIST mini-grant to help educate classmates about the link between vaping and poor mental health outcomes for teens.

The Kansas Scholastic Press Association named LHS student Cuyler Dunn the Kansas Student Journalist of the Year.

Team STEAM Robotics honored Andy Bellemere and Emma Liu, FSHS students, as 2022 FIRST Dean’s List Award Semifinalists for personal technical expertise and outstanding leadership in robotics.

FSHS musicians Amaya Gab, Lily Ye, Julie Kong, Olivia Romero, Casey Kong, Cooper Stone, Michael Bido, Levi Bates, Jackson Roberts, Jake Loos, and Nathaniel Slemmer qualified to perform at the KSHSAA State Piano Festival.

LHS students in Rosina Aguirre’s Spanish classes did an online cultural and language exchange with students in Paraguay, learning about their country and comparing daily and school life.
Sunflower art teacher Caitlin DeFilippo inspired fifth graders to channel their inner artists through these phenomenal self-portraits.

Students from both high schools participated in a three-part workshop focused on financial literacy and networking, including hearing from alumnus and local business owner Isaiah Bell and members of the KU Men’s Basketball team.

Sunset Hill physical education teacher Stephanie Dickson turned her gym into Cosmic Bowling so students could incorporate math skills along with their physical education standards to complete their bowling unit.

Twenty LHS choir students and 17 FSHS singers earned selection to All-State Choirs.

After learning about the Iditarod in the library, Langston Hughes fourth graders participated in their own i-DASH-erod with Dash coding robots. Jenny Williams is their library media specialist.

Prarie Park Student Council members, under the direction of Erin Schramm, library media specialist, came to school on a day off to help set up the spring Book Fair, earning community service hours and having fun supporting their school.

LHS and FSHS journalists led the competition in their regional contests through the Kansas Scholastic Press Association, advancing a combined 80 entries for the state journalism contest.

WMS student Joey Clossen earned Best Delegate Second Place and Best Authorship Speech while classmate Olivia Storey earned Best Delegate Third Place at Model UN in Topeka.

The FSHS debate team of seniors John Marshall and Serena Rupp won a National Tournament of Champions hosted by the University of Kentucky. This is the first national debate championship in school and district history. They also are the first Kansas team to win the Tournament of Champions.

LMCMS students Max Hollingsworth and Veta Simpson placed second and third, respectively, in regional History Day competition. Hollingsworth created a website about the Indian Removal Act of 1830. Simpson created a documentary about animals in the space race.

LHS sophomore Isabel Klish won the 2022 Teen Lawrence Public Library T-Shirt Design Contest, Oceans of Possibilities.

Team STEAM Robotics won its first blue banner, the Woodie Flowers Award, and the Innovations in Controls Award at the Heartland Regional robotics competition. Jeannie Merritt is their coach.

After learning about the Winter Olympics, Schwegler students created their own Olympic champions. They used tin foil, popsicle sticks, playdough, and recycled lids to create toboggans, skis, and curling stones.

To celebrate March Madness, Kellie Magnuson’s fourth graders at Cordley took math to the gym. They practiced fraction and decimal skills while playing basketball.

LHS freshman Arabella Gipp won the 2022 Kansas Youth of the Year title competing for the Boys and Girls Club of Lawrence. A club member since kindergarten, Gipp credits the club as one of the constants in her life. (Boys and Girls Club photo.)

FSHS junior Soledad Edison earned the $1,000 Princeton Prize in Race Relations for the Greater Kansas City area. Princeton University recognizes high school students who significantly engage and challenge their schools or communities to advance racial equity in order to promote respect and understanding among all people. Edison is a leader in the FSHS Equity Club.

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Talk about engagement! Deerfield second grade teacher Kim Neises welcomes students to her classroom by setting up stations for a soft start each day. Some stations include create your own fairy garden, balance items in different ways like “The Cat in the Hat,” and create visuals using rainbow colors.

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To celebrate March Madness, Kellie Magnuson’s fourth graders at Cordley took math to the gym. They practiced fraction and decimal skills while playing basketball.
Lawrence chess teams won at all four levels and 24 Lawrence students medaled in the Kansas Scholastic Chess Association State Chess Championships in March. LHS (K-12) and LMCMs (K-8) won first place, and Prairie Park tied for first in K-5 and placed second in K-3. Lori Greenfield, Prairie Park teacher and coach, is KSCA president.

The Lawrence Schools Foundation presented classified staff A.C.E. Awards and $500 each to Pamela Mohler, a Prairie Park special education paraeducator working in a specialized classroom for students with Autism; Laura Pope, a Kennedy Early Childhood Community Center special education paraeducator; Stacy Caldwell, a Quail Run paraeducator; Lisa Maziar, a Deerfield special education paraeducator; and Cindi McCaleb, a LHS secretary.

Kylie Cobb’s third graders at Woodlawn Elementary can tell you all about magnets. Students tested the pull of magnets with different surfaces and objects, using them to make paper clips float or move objects across their tables.

New York teacher Mandy Shockley earned CC’s Cookie Co.’s March 2022 Hometown Hero Award.

LMCMs science teacher Wendy Holman won Majic 107.7’s Crystal Apple Award for the month of January, earning prizes and $1,000 for her school.

The National Society of High School Scholars selected Judy Erpelding, FSHS director of orchestras, as a Claes Nobel Educator of Distinction.

LHS’s Interpersonal Skills (IPS) class celebrated raising $4,000 for Kansas Special Olympics. This year marks the third time LHS has been the highest contributing high school in the state. IPS beat last year’s fundraising total by $1,300. (Photo credit: Mark LaPoint.)

A wide variety of companies, colleges, and technical schools helped students experience different careers during the 2022 Skilled Trades Job Fair at the Dwayne Peaslee Technical Training Center.

LHS junior Samad Farhat earned a $40,000 Amazon Future Engineer Scholarship, including a 12-week paid programming internship to occur after his freshman year of college. Farhat is the first Kansan to receive this award.

Four Lawrence high school teams placed among the top five at the inaugural Kansas Junior Achievement Stock Market Challenge at Washburn University. A collaboration with Future Financiers, the event enabled students to compete to produce the highest return on investment (ROI) using stock market simulations. Two FSHS teams placed second and third, qualifying for the National Junior Achievement Stock Market Challenge. Congratulations Beckett Viets, Connor McClorey, Jason Meschke, Somjai Sengchan, and Malcolm Karman.

BMMS orchestra and band students visited Prairie Park fifth graders to help them test a few instruments and learn more about music classes.

Katie Henry’s WMS English students shared their Brave Bot project with Nicole Corn’s kindergartners at Sunset Hill. The older students made a Brave Bot for each of their younger peers.

During the Lawrence Middle School Solo Festival, 43 soloists from WMS, LMCMs, and SWMS performed for their families and received constructive feedback from judges on their personal performances.

LVS students worked with gifted education facilitator Nancy Jackson to submit final projects for Battle of the Brains, a competition to design a new exhibit for Science City in Kansas City. The elementary team envisioned a Ninja-Warrior-like obstacle course called “Science through Obstacles.” Participants could try it while learning about the physics and muscles involved in the activity. The secondary team proposed an exhibit called “Hive Mind” centered on bees and their hives. Participants would enter a larger-than-life-sized hive to learn about its structure and the bees that inhabit it.

Langston Hughes students crept low like a mongoose as they read “Packs: Strength in Numbers.” Library media specialists received a Lawrence Schools Foundation Innovative Teaching Grant to implement StoryWalks® and provide readers a way to experience books while out in nature being physically active.

Prairie Park Nature Center and Operation Wildlife brought animals to visit Hillcrest students. The students learned facts about the animals’ habitats, diets, and species.

Billy Mills, Oglala Lakota (Sioux), visited with students and staff at Billy Mills MS, named in his honor. The former Olympic gold medalist and KU All-American cross country runner and Big Eight track champion was in Lawrence to receive a Lifetime Achievement Award from KU Athletics.