#AllStudentsOneTeam
The return to school this fall has called on all members of our school community to deepen our social and emotional competencies and create equitable learning environments for all students and adults. To process what has happened, heal from it, and thrive; we must rebuild, rebound, and renew.

This fall finds us rebuilding relationships with students, staff, school families, and the community. We continue to work to rebound from the trauma and stress associated with the pandemic. With an eye toward renewing our schools, we will work to ensure that every student has access to opportunities, representation, and support to reach their full potential.

COVID-19 has given us an opportunity to create a new normal in schooling. I see our educators successfully modifying and structuring lessons to be more student-centered. I see our staff teaching the skills necessary for our scholars to become CEOs of their own learning. All across the district, I see incredible work by our staff to engage and support our scholars.

We have not lost learning. The pandemic interrupted our learning. Now, we must accelerate learning as we take this opportunity to rebuild, rebound, and renew.

Each of us is part of Lawrence Public Schools for a reason. There is a child depending on us. It is the highest honor knowing you have made a difference in the life of a child.

Anthony S. Lewis, Ph.D.
Superintendent
When Superintendent Dr. Anthony Lewis arrived in 2018, hundreds flocked to meet him. They shared district strengths and challenges and their creative ideas for school improvement. Dr. Lewis listened and learned. He worked with the school board, staff, and school families to develop a five-year strategic plan. This plan reflects the community's vision for the future of its public schools.

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.
Creating a Culture of Access with Data, Outreach, and Support

In addition to identifying learning standards for consistent implementation of the curriculum, Lawrence Public Schools must ensure that all students have access to the curriculum. The district has formed a collaboration with Equal Opportunity Schools (EOS) to reduce barriers to college and career readiness. The program aims to develop a culture of access by examining student and staff survey data and improving outreach and support to students. The district wants its Advanced Placement (AP) course system to fully reflect student diversity.

Amber Brown, EOS partnership director, noted a bright spot in the district’s initial survey data last school year: 89% of students responding indicated that they want to obtain a two-year, four-year, or advanced college degree. Brown said that the survey data also revealed a blind spot. A majority of high school students reported that their current classes are not challenging.

“We incorporated some of the EOS outreach into our Individual Plans of Study so as teachers were having those conversations with students about making course choices, they had some of that information to recruit and really encourage some students to participate,” said Mark Preut, Lawrence High associate principal.

Students complete growth or insight cards. On them, they share goals, career interests, and comments, and list trusted adult staff mentors.

“I don’t think we are even scratching the surface of what this (EOS) survey can do. The amount of social-emotional well-being we find out from the survey, from those growth cards, is just astonishing. It has really helped us hone in on some students that definitely need a little bit more support,” said Matthew Renk, a Free State High School assistant principal.

EOS identifies AP-capable students and provides technical assistance to help schools transition identified students to AP participation and success. The goal is to support a school culture of consistently high expectations and outcomes for all students.

Dr. Cynthia Johnson, executive director of inclusion, engagement, and belonging, said that the data identified the importance of messaging and belonging.

“We have to remember that words matter. The messages that we send to our students, verbally and nonverbally, matter. Students can pick up on what we are saying and what we are not saying,” said Johnson, adding about school connectedness. “The more a student is connected with a caring adult the greater likelihood a student is to be successful.”

Elementary Music Classes Blend Learning and Fun

By Megan Epperson,
Elementary Music Lead Teacher

A new music teacher in the Lawrence school district, Melissa Gillespie and her kindergartners and first graders at Langston Hughes Elementary made it a joy-filled and creative start to the school year. Peek into her classroom to see first graders hard at work learning melodic patterns and engaging their bodies and minds by composing parts of their own warm-up. Kindergartners practiced counting, high and low sounds, fast and slow movements, and steady beats all wrapped together in a delightful singing game about apple trees. Gillespie creates such a warm environment by modeling a growth mindset, sharing positive affirmations, class goals, and plenty of work with playful puppets to keep students engaged and coming back for more. These musical Bobcats, pictured at right, will learn so much in her music classroom this year.

Kate Stoltenberg, music educator at Sunset Hill Elementary School, collaborated with Dr. Kyakuwa Julius, KU assistant professor of music education, to bring a new bucket drumming experience to fifth grade students. In order to accommodate COVID protocols and a guest teacher, students built their ensemble skills outside. Pictured at left, they practiced drumming techniques, following conductor cues, improvising, performing and arranging syncopated patterns, exploring form and design, and even worked to compose in small groups. All of these elements woven together made for an engaging, motivating, and laughter-filled lesson from beginning to end. Bravo, Kate Stoltenberg and Dr. Julius!

At a time during which singing performances have been a logistical and safety challenge, fifth graders at Woodlawn and Broken Arrow put on a show of a different kind. Students at both schools practiced and filmed a choreography routine. Social distancing helped the camera capture everyone. We wore dark clothes to school, grabbed some glow sticks, split up into smaller groups, and tried to find the darkest places to film. Brandon Daley’s Riverhawks and Mindy Stahmer’s and Mackenzie Morgan’s Eagles learned the same routine for their videos.
Effective Instructional Practices Support Student Success

Some say in order to find high quality public schools, run, don't walk, to the nearest college town. Lawrence Public Schools benefits greatly from partnerships with the University of Kansas and Haskell Indian Nations University. The district has collaborated with Dr. Kathleen Lane, KU Roy A. Robert Distinguished Professor of Special Education, for several years to implement its comprehensive, integrated, three-tiered model of prevention or Ci3T system. Ci3T provides teachers and staff a framework for preventing the development of learning and behavior challenges and for responding to existing challenges with an emphasis on systematic screening.

USD 497’s Director of Instruction and Professional Development, Leah Wisdom, said that the Ci3T framework helps schools ensure equity and access to engage all students across a full range of academic, social-emotional, and behavioral needs. The model combines instructional practices, structures, and systems based on high quality instruction, high expectations, and positive, inclusive interventions and support.

“Without quality instruction and engagement practices for all of our students,” said Wisdom.

Strategic plan objectives tied to the Student-Centered Learning theme include:

- Meet students’ unique academic, social, emotional, and behavioral needs.
- Equip schools to effectively implement the district’s multi-tiered, student-centered support system.
- Set clear expectations for student instruction and ensure they are met through regular teacher observation and feedback.
- Decrease barriers to college and career readiness PreK-12.

The implementation of the district’s Instructional Framework provides additional guidance and support for educators to access resources, develop goals, and gain professional learning. In addition, these systems assist schools in developing their instructional goals and collectively creating support structures through professional development, resource allocation, and instructional coaching.

Wisdom described the district’s Instructional Framework as evidence-based, high-yield instructional strategies that provide educators a common vocabulary. They also inform school and district goals and professional development planning.

“We don’t just include in our framework what works, but what works best,” she said, adding that other keys to the action plan are targeted professional development, teacher feedback, and access to student data.

Each school has a Ci3T leadership team. Instructional coaches support teachers as they make decisions about meeting the individual needs of students. The district uses an app called DigiCoach as a teacher feedback tool to track key observations made during classroom walkthroughs and to monitor what instructional practices show up in classrooms and what adjustments may need to be made.

Wisdom said that a key question the district asks is, “How do we support teachers in utilizing the framework to be reflective in practice and empower students to take ownership of their learning?”
District Expands COVID-19 Prevention Measures to Keep Students Safe and in School

Lawrence Public Schools continues to explore ways to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in its school communities and keep all students and staff safe and in school. The district implemented additional contact tracing, quarantine, and COVID-19 testing procedures in partnership with the Kansas Department of Health and Environment at the end of September. These changes followed updated school guidance released by Lawrence-Douglas County Public Health.

When an individual tests positive for COVID-19, school nurses work in consultation with public health staff to conduct contract tracing. They identify those at risk of exposure to the saliva or mucus of the infected individual. With changes in contact tracing, they now consider low vs. high-risk exposure, proper and consistent mask wearing, and 3-6 ft. distancing.

The new Test to Stay, Learn, Play, and Participate program enables unvaccinated close contacts identified at high risk of exposure to the virus at school to participate in daily COVID-19 testing at school or a testing center. If individuals test negative and remain symptom-free, they may continue to attend school and participate in school activities during the 10-day quarantine period.

Always a priority, Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and support for students’ mental health and well-being has become increasingly important during the COVID-19 pandemic. Lawrence Public Schools has focused this year on ensuring that students felt physically and psychologically safe returning to school buildings. The district’s mental health facilitator, Jose Cornejo, said that mental health services and interventions make up a key aspect of the district’s multi-tiered, student-centered system of support.

Counselors and staff share the district’s SEL and character development curriculum, Connect with Kids and Positive Action, with students during elementary morning meetings and middle school Advisory classes. At the high school level, SEL curriculum is embedded into course instruction. When students exhibit additional needs, staff provide social skill groups or individual student support.

The Lawrence Schools Foundation’s ICAN Fund supported school families with grocery gift certificates, bus passes, classroom and hygiene supplies, household items, and emergency shelter last year. It also raised funds for Lawrence restaurants to provide free children’s meals in the community after the Kansas Governor closed public school buildings due to the pandemic.

Each school has a mental health team. Members joined remote classes virtually and shared digital choice boards for students to practice character development skills at home last year. Counselors also worked at each of the district’s summer learning sites.

Teams of adults and students at Free State and Lawrence High, pictured, have completed Sources of Strength training. These teams will lead suicide prevention programming, raise awareness, and share self-care strategies and community resources.

Through a collaboration between the district and Bert Nash Community Mental Health Center, a new Building Bridges community-based case management program is now in place countywide. School staff referred 55 families to Building Bridges last year.

“Although we have had some challenges, we have been triumphant in helping our students be their best and supporting our staff,” said Dr. Cynthia Johnson, the district’s executive director of inclusion, engagement, and belonging. “Social-emotional learning, like equity, is a strand interwoven into everything we do.”
Supportive Schools Enable Students to Bond and Pursue Interests

Lawrence high schools offer a wide variety of courses, extra- and co-curricular activities, and student clubs and organizations. After first signing up for Debate in eighth grade, Cella Allison participated as a novice last year on Free State High School’s Class 6A Kansas State Speech Championship team. Allison wrote about her experience in the October issue of the school’s Firebirds in Focus Newsletter and gave permission to reprint this excerpt.

WHY DEBATE (AND FORENSICS)

By Cella Allison,
Free State High sophomore

“I decided to try out for forensics and that’s where I discovered my real love. For those who don’t know, forensics is competitive speech, so there are many different events one can try out within the season. I fell in love with DI, or Dramatic Interpretation, which is basically just a ten-minute dramatic monologue, and Prose, which is basically just telling a seven-minute scripted story. Whenever I try to get my friends to join forensics, I always describe it as ‘all the best parts of the theatre, without the parts you hate,’ because for me, that’s what it is.

At my first ever in-person forensics tournament, I can remember being incredibly nervous and scared, but once I got into the squad room and saw all my other teammates, it was an experience like no other. The excitement of getting to actually bond with squad members, yell at my poor judges and see their live reactions, and just generally perform had me hooked. I went on to compete at every tournament I could, making so many new friends, improving my pieces, and working on myself along the way, too.

The LFS Speech and Debate community is just so unfathomably rad! I’m so lucky to get to be part of it, and I love each and every single one of you with my whole entire heart. This community has been there to support me through a lot, even if I am just a sophomore. Everyone here fully has your back, and you can feel that throughout tournaments and practice rounds, through late nights and cram sessions, through it all. All the truly amazing people are what caused me to fall in love with this program, and I hope it’s the same for you. Words genuinely can’t describe how much I love speech and debate, and I highly encourage you all to continue to be active members of the squad!”

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Lawrence High: A Beautiful Building and So Much More

One speaker after another who took to the podium at Lawrence High School’s Ribbon Cutting Ceremony October 9 grew emotional talking about their school experiences, whether in the mid-1960s or present day. Former Lawrence High Interim Principal Dr. Cynthia Johnson, now the district’s executive director of inclusion, engagement, and belonging, organized and served as the master of ceremonies for the event, which capped a two-year, $48 million school construction project. Dr. Johnson welcomed students, staff, families, alumni, and guests, and introduced members of the Lawrence High A Cappella Choir, Marching Lions, and Spirit Squad to perform the National Anthem, Alma Mater, and Fight Song.

Superintendent Dr. Anthony Lewis, who regretted that a calendar conflict took him out of state that day, offered video greetings. “We wanted to establish outdoor learning spaces, flexible collaboration areas, and most importantly, we wanted to ensure that the campus was safe and secure for all students and staff,” said Lewis of the school improvement project.

Funded by an $87 million school bond election approved by district voters in 2017, improvements to all middle and high schools followed site-based input into a Secondary Schools Facility Master Plan. Among its goals: create 21st-century environments to support student-centered learning, accommodate growing student populations, provide safe and secure campuses, accommodate student privacy, create equity across district facilities, and upgrade mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems to support high-performance schools.

Lawrence High’s construction project includes an innovation district that connects core classrooms to hands-on learning opportunities in career and technical education courses. A wellness/athletic district consolidates programs related to health, wellness, nutrition, fitness, and athletics. An open dining commons and media center at the heart of the school extends the flexibility and functionality of those areas.

Expanded courtyards provide outdoor learning opportunities and daylight to all core classrooms. A new wayfinding pattern unifies the various buildings that composed LHS, and strategic additions create a single campus with controlled access during school hours for improved safety and security. The plan enlarged undersized core classrooms and corridors to bring the school’s capacity to 2,000 students.

“A tremendous amount of collaboration goes into a project of this magnitude,” said Erica Hill, Lawrence Board of Education president. “We have so many people to thank … I would like to thank the community, community partners, students and their families, the district and building leadership, teachers and staff, as well as the board.”

By the Numbers
- 1954 - Lawrence High School opened
- 2017 - Lawrence USD 497 voters approved an $87 million school bond election for secondary school improvements
- $48 million – Cost of LHS facility improvements
- 2 years in 7-phases – Length of LHS construction project
- 16,000 sq. ft. – Size of LHS mural by Sike Style Industries

Mural photo courtesy of Sike Style Industries
In her fourth month as principal of LHS, Jessica Bassett said that while she missed the planning and construction, she appreciated the opportunity to help celebrate finishing the work. "After many years of this work, I am glad to be here and be a part of the new Lawrence High School, as we walk through the halls and see our students using the spaces as they were designed to be used," she said.

In addition to showing emotion for their school, each speaker referred to the proud legacy of Lawrence High. Dirk Wedd, a 1970 LHS alumnus and former LHS teacher and coach, described the school’s legacy in one word: excellence. Wedd attributed that excellence to the high quality of the teachers, and students who are motivated to learn. "There are over a thousand schools in the United States that have a mascot that is a Lion, but there is only one school that has a Chesty Lion. I love this school," Wedd said.

LHS special education teacher and coach Brad Stoll is a 1990 alumnus. His mother attended LHS. One of his sons graduated from LHS last year. Another son, Samuel, is a current sophomore. "The people make this place. Obviously, the infrastructure now is different. It’s a beautiful place. I am so proud to walk the halls and see this great building with all of these wonderful features, but I think about the people," said Stoll. "I am very proud to be the son of a Chesty Lion. I’m proud to be an alum, and I’m proud to have two sons that are Chesty Lions because this is the greatest school in the country."

Assistant Principal Dr. Quentin Rials graduated from LHS in 1995. He said LHS is a special place to his entire family. "My family came from Mississippi in the 60s, and we’ve had a Rials walking through these halls pretty much since the 70s. Now, I have a nephew, Justice Rials, who is a freshman ... This is a fantastic place," Rials said.

A part of the Lawrence community for 45 years, Leo Barbee Jr., the pastor of Victory Bible Church, is the father of six LHS alumni. He’s also the grandfather of Chesty Lion graduates and future students. Barbee said that he is thankful that the student body in 1979 crowned his daughter, Victoria L. Barbee, the first African American LHS Homecoming Queen.

“I want to challenge you to not only think in terms of the past, but to see what has happened in terms of the decorations, construction, and the people who have made a difference in this school,” said Pastor Barbee. "Now, I’m going to ask the question, ‘Where do we go from here?’ We don’t want to live in the past. We want to continue not just to exist. We want to continue to make a difference.”

Others participating in the ceremony included the Native American Student Services dancers, Dr. Sylvia Trevino-Maack, LHS psychologist and sponsor of the Latin American Student Organization; board member and LHS alumna Carole Cadue-Blackwood, and board members Shannon Kimball and GR Gordon-Ross, who served on the district’s Facilities Planning Committee. In addition, recognitions included design and construction partners Gould Evans, McCownGordon, Henderson Engineers, and BG Consultants; muralists Phil “Sike Style” Shafer and Holly Hayden of Sike Style Industries, and district administrators, past and present, who served in leadership roles during the project. They include Tony Barron, Dr. Larry Englebrick, Paula Murrish, and David Vignery. Tiffany Hall represented The Chamber.

Crowned Homecoming King the preceding night, senior Ashton Rapp spoke on behalf of the LHS student body. "So, what does Lawrence High mean to me? It means community, opportunity, and persistence. It means the world to me," said Rapp.
Lawrence Horizon Awards Honor Exemplary Novice Educators

“Relationships are the basis of everything she does, whether it is working with students, families, or her colleagues. She has a way of connecting with people that is almost magical to watch,” said New York Elementary School Principal Sunny Halsted of Sarah Edmonds, fourth grade teacher.

Superintendent Dr. Anthony Lewis surprised Edmonds September 8, with the elementary Lawrence Horizon Award. The award honors exemplary novice educators in their second year of teaching.

“Sarah has that extra special something that separates the good teachers from the great. I have no doubt in my mind that teaching is what she was put on this earth to do ... Her classroom is filled with joy, enthusiasm for learning, and relationships,” said Crystalyn Mumaw, instructional coach.

Students erupted in cheers when Dr. Lewis announced September 10 that Mary Krieger earned the Lawrence Horizon Award at the secondary school level. Krieger teaches sixth grade science at West Middle School.

Principal Kathy Branson, school counselors Carla Schmidt and Tiffany Fike, and mentor teacher Stephne Bowen nominated Krieger. They lauded her outstanding relationships with students, communication with families, and support of colleagues.

Their nomination letter read, “There are many things that Ms. Krieger does that make her the favorite teacher to so many students. She has two bearded dragons as class pets that students like to observe and hold. TikTok videos (@creatingkindnesswkrieger) help her engage students, teach science concepts, and have fun with her classes. From having LED lights strung around her entire classroom to dressing as Miss Frizzle (from The Magic School Bus franchise) the week before Halloween, Krieger takes everything she does to the next level! She recently added a disco ball in 2021-2022.”

In addition to honoring both educators locally, Lawrence Public Schools has nominated them to the Kansas State Department of Education’s Kansas Horizon Award program.

Truity Credit Union presented both teachers with $250.
Recruiting and Retaining a High-Quality and Diverse Staff

In its efforts to recruit and retain a high-quality and diverse staff, Lawrence Public Schools faces a variety of challenges. Among them, fewer of today’s college students choose education as a major. The pandemic has contributed to nationwide staffing shortages. A significant enrollment decline in the fall of 2020 negatively affected the district’s budget.

District and school administrators have had to think creatively. The district has begun working with its student transportation provider, First Student, to combine some positions to increase hours and pay for classified employees. Director of Human Resources Ron May said that special education paraeducators, for example, could also work as school bus attendants.

“It gives the student some stability with that person who knows them well, and First Student has a policy that it pays a minimum of four hours for those shifts,” said May, citing another option for bus drivers to also work in school food services between routes.

Human Resources added to its team this year a full-time recruitment and retention facilitator. Former elementary teacher Kaitlin Shulman said that she is still defining her new role, which includes recruiting a diverse staff.

“We noticed that our numbers of staff coming from Hispanic backgrounds are not matching up with our student demographics,” said Shulman. One strategy, she said, will be to partner with the University of New Mexico. She also will build a diverse team and recruit from Historically Black Colleges, such as Tennessee State University, which graduates the most students of color in the education field in the country.

Shulman uses social media to advertise job openings and wants to further develop “grow-your-own” programs, such as the Teacher Cadet and early childhood education programs offered to high school students at Lawrence College and Career Center.

“Compensation is a big deal. There is only so much creative recruitment you can do. The compensation is going to be a big thing,” said Kelly Jones, school board member.

Without funds available this year for meaningful salary increases, the board approved a staff retention incentive payment plan using funds in its application for federal Elementary and Secondary Emergency Relief (ESSER). If employees meet all of the criteria outlined in the two-year plan, they will receive a total of $3,000 in retention incentive payments by the end of the 2022-2023 school year. The plan also requires state approval. “Every single position that we have in the district is important and valued tremendously,” said Samrie Devin, executive director of human resources. “Not only does retention have an impact on student achievement, it also plays a vital role on our school climates and staff morale.”

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Aligning School, District, and State Goals

Large organizations face a common leadership challenge: making sure everyone rows in the same direction. Lawrence Public Schools continues to work to align its strategic plan goals with school building goals, and with state accountability systems.

Building leadership teams for each school gathered prior to the start of the school year to review the district’s strategic plan. Based on their own building needs assessments and data, including feedback from their school communities, each team developed four goals. Staff will use these goals to measure and challenge systems through a continuous improvement process. Building goals also will inform the development of systemic professional development programs for staff and administrators. Schools will collect evidence supported by data and review their goals regularly, making adjustments as needed as they work to achieve them. Ultimately, all goals should have a positive effect on student learning.

Among the building goals, staff continue to work to develop common formative assessments for supporting student progress in math and reading. Schools will work to improve student engagement and create new opportunities to engage parents and the community with student learning. In addition, schools want to work toward students experiencing appropriate college-preparatory activities.

Langston Hughes Elementary, for example, plans to review, select, and promote supplemental instructional resources that represent multiple perspectives, races, and underserved populations in a positive light. Billy Mills Middle School’s goals include reducing the number of major discipline referrals by teaching expectations and social-emotional skills. School improvement plans for Free State and Lawrence High both include a goal to increase the engagement and connection of all students to their school, peers, and community.

“In addition to aligning building goals with the district’s strategic plan, our goals now support required improvement systems, including Kansas Education Systems Accreditation, KansaStar Indicators of Effective Practice, and the Charlotte Danielson Teacher Evaluation framework,” said Patrick Kelly, chief academic officer. “Aligning all district improvement structures, including our Ci3T and Equity Context Analysis Process, supports student learning and development.”

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On a beautiful day in the neighborhood that just so happened to be the late Jim Henson’s birthday, the Lawrence Schools Foundation hosted its annual Community Education Breakfast featuring Free State High School Class of 2006 alumnus Spencer Lott. A puppeteer and teaching artist, Lott described his job as part actor, engineer, choreographer, and storyteller. He said that he still relies on skills he learned in Lawrence schools, including flexibility and kindness, to get him from job to job.

Flexibility, Lott said, is one of the most valuable states of mind one can practice to pursue a passion. Physical flexibility also comes in handy when he is crawling around on the floor with one arm in the air operating puppets on “Sesame Street.”

Lott said that his teachers modeled flexibility and kindness. He recalled Quail Run Elementary teacher Michelle Kirk letting him create a puppet guild and sell puppets for Quail Bucks. Lott joined Quail Run late in the year due to a family move. He thanked Mrs. Kirk, in the audience at the event, for introducing him to elementary peers still among his close friends.

While at Southwest Middle School, a teacher allowed Lott to present a “Great Expectations” puppet show instead of a book report. He said that former English teacher Diane Low gave him a hug when he wrote that he wanted to be the next Jim Henson. Lott has received multiple Jim Henson Foundation Grants for his original theatrical work. He was the first recipient of the Jim Henson Foundation Puppetry Residency at the O’Neill Theater Center.

In addition to celebrating community support for Lawrence Public Schools and shining the spotlight on an alumnus, the Foundation recognized four Student Champions for their accomplishments in the arts. Superintendent Dr. Anthony Lewis presented seniors Devon Janus and Matt Chappell, of Free State, and Rachel Schmaus and Ashton Rapp, of LHS, medals.
Kids and books: the ultimate joy! Pinckney second graders from Briena Matzke’s class love the library.

Kansas Education Commissioner Dr. Randy Watson led a Kansans Can! Success Tour that stopped in Lawrence to gather input and update community expectations of a successful high school graduate. Participants also learned about progress made since the Kansas State Board of Education announced its new vision in 2015.

The Lawrence Rotary Club donated more than 350 pairs of shoes to the Lawrence Schools Foundation. Along with a generous donation of socks from the Sertoma Club, the shoes will be distributed to students in need.

Fifth graders in Sabrina Long’s class at Schwegler shared their wellness plans with their classmates. They focused on their plans to manage stress and stay healthy as they proceed through the school year.

Students and families enjoyed the October 6 National Walk to School Day with the support of community partners, including Safe Routes to School, Lawrence Police Department, and KU Spirit Squad.

Activist, screenwriter, director, and KU Professor of Film and Media Studies Kevin Willmott, winner of an Academy Award for his work on “BlacKkKlansmen” highlighted the district’s celebration of student and staff accomplishments during Fall Convocation livestreamed from the Lied Center. With a theme of Rebuild, Rebound, and Renew, representatives of the school board, administration, teachers, classified staff, and student body provided inspiration for the start of the new school year.

In announcing the names of 16,000 Semifinalists in the 65th annual National Merit Scholarship Program, the National Merit Scholarship Corporation recognized eleven Lawrence high school students. Congratulations, Hannah De Guzman, Isabella Evans, Chaney Finkeldei, Ari Karman, Jared Loos, Cortlyn Ruckman, Blake Sanders, Mary Katherine Shultz, and Anand Singh, of FSHS; and

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and Eva Ackley and Elijah Paden, of LHS. They have an opportunity to continue in the competition for some 7,500 National Merit Scholarships worth nearly $30 million offered next spring.

Superintendent Lewis and Tim Mock of Truity Credit Union presented 2020-2021 Principal of the Year Awards to Dr. Bill DeWitt, Lawrence College & Career Center, Adult Education, and Alternative Programs; and Jayci Roberson, Woodlawn Elementary.

The Kansas Board of Regents and Kansas State Department of Education recognized Lawrence Virtual School as having the Most Improved FAFSA Completion Percentage (76%) in the Kansas FAFSA Challenge.

The College Board announced National Hispanic Recognition Program Scholar honors for Diego Klish and National African American Recognition Program Scholar honors for Sofia Thomas. Both LHS seniors, they were honored for academic achievement and outstanding performance on the PSAT and/or AP exams.

Sophomores Becca Craft and Yejun Yun, of FSHS; and Mahaya Strahle, LHS; won first, second, and third place, respectively, in the Lawrence Juneteenth “Good Trouble” Essay Contest.

Midco, McCarthy Nissan, McCarthy Subaru, and Minsky’s Pizza recognized Julie Oswald, LHS mathematics teacher, as its Educator of the Year.

The Lawrence-Douglas County Fire Medical staff visited Sunset Hill’s Marathon Club and walked or ran around the West Middle School track before school.

Lawrence-Douglas County Fire Medical staff visited Sunset Hill’s Marathon Club and walked or ran around the West Middle School track before school.

John Marshall and Serena Rupp, FSHS seniors, became the first team in district debate history to be ranked in the National Coaches’ Poll.

Remember your asthma or allergies should not interfere with work, school, activities, or sleep.
Please wear a mask and get a flu shot this fall.

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When the giant scissors cut the red ribbon, little ones streamed in to play and early childhood educators fulfilled a dream. The Lawrence Public Schools, Lawrence Schools Foundation, and The Chamber collaborated on a September 21 ribbon cutting to dedicate The William Dann Playtown at Kennedy Early Childhood Community Center at 1605 Davis Road in east Lawrence.

A combination of district funding and community grants and donations led to the purchase of new playground equipment, improved accessibility, and enhanced social play and learning for young children. The name of the safe, inclusive playground pays tribute to the late William Dann of Lawrence, a supporter of the Lawrence Schools Foundation and a generous benefactor of the early childhood program for 25 years.

“This playground is pretty special. Any preschooler can play here with their friends whether they use their legs to run, use a walker, or use a wheelchair,” said Jill Anderson, early childhood educator and project organizer.

Anderson thanked partners in the project, including Stacey Lamb of Happy Town, All Points Surveying, Lawrence Arborists, and the Lawrence Public Schools’ grounds crew. Other organizations donating to the effort: the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nations, ECKAN, Midco Foundation, and the Douglas County Community Foundation Live Well Community Grant program.

Kennedy serves more than 125 preschoolers, including children receiving special education services. Parents as Teachers and tiny-k Early Intervention also use the playground for playgroups with families of infants and toddlers.