



USD 497 News Release

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Board Discusses Remote Learning, Sports Safety Measures, & Approves Budget

School Start

Leaders of the Together Again: Fall 2020 Planning Task Force, a collaboration between the district and the Lawrence Education Association, provided to the school board Monday an update about Fall 2020 planning. The district shared remote learning guides with staff and families Friday, in addition to posting draft information about future hybrid and in-person plans on its website at www.usd497.org/TogetherAgain.

USD 497 also sent surveys to staff and families Friday. Staff will indicate whether they prefer to teach only those students learning remotely or return to in-person instruction in a future hybrid model. They will provide information about their family circumstances to help inform Douglas County's Education Unified Command (EUC) about community childcare needs. School families will enroll their children in a future hybrid model in which 50% of students would attend school in classrooms and 50% would learn remotely on alternating AB/AB days. All students would learn remotely on Wednesdays. Parents uncomfortable with the hybrid may choose to continue distance learning for their students for a trimester (early childhood/elementary) or a semester (secondary) at a time.

USD 497 teachers begin professional development for the new school year on Wednesday. Survey deadlines are Friday. The district will make decisions about staffing assignments by August 24. Virtual parent-teacher conferences are September 1-3 and six weeks of remote learning begins September 8.

A staff member and a parent shared with the board during patron commentary their concerns about unclear communication with teachers about remote learning expectations and a lack of information for families about services for students with special needs.

Board member Melissa Johnson said that the board had charged the superintendent with improving communication and supports his leadership. "We are making the best decisions we can at the time. To say that there is not transparency as far as the goals and the plan to do online learning, I feel that is unfortunate. We as a board took the whole plan they (the task force) had and turned it around. These are some things to think about before questioning the integrity of the district," said Johnson.

Safety Measures for Athletics/Activities

Secondary Schools Director Rick Henry shared with the board plans to mitigate the risk of the spread of COVID-19 as students prepare to participate in fall athletics and activities. The district will follow the guidance of KSHSAA, the Sunflower League, the EUC, which includes medical professionals from Lawrence-Douglas County Public Health, LMH Health, and KU; as well the board and administration. Health and safety measures will include screening, exposure protocols, temperature checks, illness isolation protocols, masks, static groupings, online cashless payment systems, facility and equipment management procedures, and cleaning and sanitizing measures, among others.

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"The LHS coaching staff has done an amazing job all summer long working within (health and safety) standards and protocols in place for the summer program. When we move into the season, we realize that's a whole different ballgame. They will have to raise their diligence in meeting the standards. They have shown me they are ready, and they will be prepared to follow these guidelines," said Nick Wood, LHS athletic director.

Lawrence middle schools will begin sports participation when school starts September 8, compete with in-district schools only, and follow KSHSAA, USD 497, and EUC guidance.

2020-21 Budget Hearing and Approval

After hearing no patron comments during a public budget hearing, the board approved a 2020-2021 budget of \$177,375,822, setting its maximum spending authorities, and established a proposed tax rate of 53.481 mills, an increase of .497 mill over the 2019 tax rate.

Thermal Imaging Scanners

Following a concern about tracking personal data raised by board member Carole Cadue Blackwood, the board approved the purchase of thermal imaging sensors, stand-alone technology that reads body temperatures as individuals enter schools. Board members amended the motion to stipulate that the device's facial recognition capabilities cannot be used without board approval. The \$159,100 purchase will be paid from federal CARES Act funding.

Title IX Policies

The board adopted Kansas Association of School Board's recommended policies to comply with new federal Title IX regulations to be implemented August 14. The U.S. Department of Education regulations govern reviewing, investigating, and deciding sexual harassment claims.

"We will still go back and look at it to make sure it doesn't conflict or have adverse effects on our other policies," said David Cunningham, executive director of human resources and chief legal counsel.

Board member Shannon Kimball noted that the federal regulations have been challenged in court, including in a lawsuit by 18 attorneys general.

Removal of Action Item

The board removed from its agenda an action item authorizing the superintendent to use furloughs of classified staff as necessary given differences in student learning needs under a 100% remote instructional delivery model and district budgetary considerations. The item could be brought back to the board at a later date.