



Dear Staff and Families,

I want to share with our school community that I will recommend to the Lawrence Board of Education Monday staffing reductions and changes to four of our school facilities in order to set our community on a path toward strengthening our public school system for the future. Much like we do with our own personal budgets, the school district must tighten its belt and direct our limited financial resources to protecting what we value most – high-quality teachers and staff in every classroom supporting student achievement and success.

The administrative team has developed a plan using data-driven decisions. A professional analysis shows the local outlook for potential residential development activity is 5-10 years out, with at least five years before expected regional growth from Panasonic Industries in De Soto. The current utilization of our elementary facilities is 76%, meaning we have about 1,351 available elementary seats. Middle school utilization is 72% or 843 available seats. Projections indicate our enrollment will drop by 300 students by 2027-2028. Lower enrollment means less funding. The district simply cannot afford to continue to operate this inefficiently.

We understand school closings are emotional losses for students, staff, families, and communities. We love our schools, too. Our staff has worked hard to build strong relationships across the community and provide effective schools where students feel safe and welcome and experience success. We do not have any “bad” schools in Lawrence. Monday’s recommendation recognizes the long-term benefits of consolidating facilities to combine student populations, staffing, and resources. It is a hopeful, not a heartless plan.

The recommendation builds upon the guidance of the Futures Planning Committee’s five months of study, results of the community survey in November, and the feedback you shared online and during public input sessions in January. The board and administration appreciate the district staff and community members who served on this committee and our community’s engagement around how we will educate children in the next 10, 20, 30... years.

I will recommend to the board a plan to save an estimated \$4.5 - \$4.8 million for reallocation toward our priority of providing competitive wages to recruit and retain high-quality staff to educate our scholars. These savings would come from reducing middle, high, and virtual school staff, closing three elementary facilities (Broken Arrow, Pinckney, and Woodlawn), and repurposing Liberty Memorial Central Middle School with an innovative curricular theme or themes to attract students from across and outside the district.

Pending recommendations would save an additional estimated \$3.26 million. These require discussing through negotiations eliminating the middle school second plan time and district-funded employee retirement accounts. I also recommend our community collaborate on plans to begin using renewable energy and transition to a 4-day student week/5-day staff week school calendar to support the success and well-being of staff and students.

Sincerely,
Anthony S. Lewis, Ph.D.
Superintendent

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