USD 497 NEWS

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USD 497 Postpones Start Date for High School Students

Lawrence Public Schools will postpone the start of school for students attending Free State and Lawrence High Schools and the Lawrence College and Career Center due to unforeseen delays associated with facility improvements. The postponement gives high school students an extra six days of summer break. Instead of starting school on August 14 and 15 as planned, students in grade 9 will participate in a half-day of orientation activities on August 20. The first full day of high school on August 21 will follow the regular seven-period day schedule, not a late-start schedule.

The Lawrence College and Career Center will begin its Certified Nurse Aide (CNA) and Emergency Medical Science programs on August 19. Those students will complete college applications/enrollment at the Center on August 15. The Center will send information about these courses and the application/enrollment requirements to school families via email as well as post it to www.usd497.org/discoverwhatsnext. All other College and Career Center classes begin on August 21.

The scheduled start date for high school teachers and staff will not change. This will provide extra time for staff planning, moving, and professional learning before students begin the school year. The high schools will use alternate locations for some staff activities and will share those plans directly with their employees.

“We sincerely apologize for any challenges this change may cause our high school families. We want to provide the best learning environments possible for students and staff. That means ensuring that we provide safe and welcoming spaces conducive to a successful start to the school year,” said Dr. Anthony Lewis, superintendent of schools.

As a result of the postponement and in order to meet state instructional time requirements, the district will add five minutes to each school day at the high-school level. School will start at 8:00 a.m. instead of 8:05, with a 7:00 a.m. Zero Hour. The high schools will continue to dismiss at 3:10 p.m. School hours on Wednesday late-start/early dismissal days will be 9:00 a.m.-2:30 p.m. First Student, which partners with the district to provide student transportation services, will accommodate this change with five-minute earlier morning pickup times for high school bus routes.

“We want to thank our high school communities for their patience and understanding. We know this is unexpected and challenging. We are confident that postponing the start of school for high school students will give them the best chance for a successful back-to-school experience,” Dr. Lewis said.

Funded by the community’s passage of an $87 million bond election in 2017, the high school facility improvement projects will provide 21st-century environments to support student-centered learning, accommodate growing student populations, ensure safe and secure campuses, accommodate student privacy, create equity across facilities, and upgrade mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems to support high-performance schools. While Lawrence High’s $50 million transformation is a multi-year project, Free State’s renovations will be completed in August, as will projects at Liberty Memorial Central and West Middle Schools.

Several unforeseen challenges have delayed the building improvements. Construction crews uncovered asbestos, requiring additional time to ensure its safe and effective removal according to health requirements. Severe weather, including record-breaking rainfall and a tornado, also contributed to construction delays. The EF-4 tornado that touched down in the southwest corner of Douglas County on May 28, 2019, caused extensive and long-lasting electricity challenges.

“We continue to work closely with our architect and construction team to complete these improvements quickly. Unfortunately, despite the best efforts of all of those involved, we need extra time to deliver on our plans,” said Dr. Lewis. “Once the renovations are complete, we will provide our students some of the most advanced school facilities in the state.”

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