July 22, 2019

Board Approves Publication of Budget, Issues Proclamation, Hears from LMH Health Interns, and Presents Outstanding Citizen and Service Awards

Budget Update
Kathy Johnson, the district’s executive director of finance, presented to the school board on Monday night the 2019-2020 budget maximums. She reviewed the funds that make up the district’s budget, including Operating Funds: the general fund and local option budget; Other Levied Funds: bond and interest, capital outlay, special assessments, adult basic education, and cost of living; and Special Revenue Funds: adult supplemental, bilingual education, virtual education, drivers training, food service, professional development, parent education, summer school, special education, career and postsecondary education, federal funds, gifts and grants, KPERS special liability retirement, and at-risk funds for K-12 and four-year-olds. In addition, Non-Budgeted Special Revenue Funds include the textbook/student materials revolving, special reserve (health care/workers compensation reserves), contingency reserve, and activity funds.

“We publish our budget maximums high to give us permission to spend; This does not mean that we will spend them,” said Johnson. “We can only spend what we have available in resources.”

While publishing a $6.8 million increase, Johnson explained that the district plans to spend about $4.3 million, the amount of additional state aid it will receive for the 2019-2020 school year. Based on funding decisions the board has already made about staffing ratios, support staff restructuring, renewal of employee fringe benefits, and making up for an estimated budget deficit of $1.8 million, approximately $1.4 million remain uncommitted.

Addressing the board’s deficit spending during the block-grant years when state funding remained flat, Johnson cautioned, “We have to start thinking about the next step. You are going to be stuck with nothing left in cash reserves.”

Board members indicated they understood, but expressed frustration with wanting to be able to improve teacher salaries. Jessica Beeson said that the board had missed opportunities to look for efficiencies and make budget cuts.

“We value our teachers, and we want to put money there,” agreed Superintendent Anthony Lewis. He added that he heard “loud and clear” during last year’s Listening and Learning Tour and Strategic Planning Forums that the community’s priorities were increasing teacher and paraeducator salaries and decreasing class sizes.

The board unanimously approved for publication a $177,000,680 million budget with a mill levy of 53.643 mills. The budget reflects a decrease of .784 in the local mill levy when compared to last year. This is the second consecutive reduction in the mill levy. Last year’s mill levy decreased by 1.523 mills. The board also scheduled its annual public budget hearing at 6 p.m. August 12, followed by its consideration of final budget approval.

Proclamation
The board approved a proclamation in response to recent decisions made at the federal level regarding immigration. In it, the board objects to Immigration and Customs Enforcement making any attempt to use public schools to interview students or gather information on potentially undocumented students and families. The proclamation references board policies related to law enforcement access to students and families’ educational rights to privacy.
Board Vice President Kelly Jones emphasized that the U.S. Supreme Court has upheld that all children, including those who are undocumented, have the right to attend public schools. The resolution reinforces the board’s commitment to ensuring safe and supportive learning environments for all students. It states, “The board is opposed to any action of Immigration and Customs Enforcement to interfere with the education of any student attending a public school…” and “…will take all appropriate action to protect students and their families.”

LMH Health Leadership Academy
The first student interns in a new LMH Health Student Leadership Academy shared their experiences with the board. The Academy engages high school juniors and seniors in experiences that give them a jump start on careers in health, medicine, and the biosciences. In the program, preference is given to candidates whose race/ethnicity has been historically underrepresented within the healthcare profession.

Amani Austin, a Free State High senior, and Ana Tosta and Mollie Coffey, Lawrence High seniors, spoke eloquently about what they’ve learned about leadership from their LMH Health mentors and of their career aspirations. Austin has an interest in nursing and behavioral health. Tosta eyes a career as a pediatric oncologist, and Coffey, who plans to take a CNA class during her senior year, wants to pursue orthopedic surgery.

“We got very hands-on experience,” Coffey said. “Ana and I, we have already had the privilege to watch a surgery, and that moment will be imprinted on me forever. It’ll be the moment I remember when I am in medical school, and it’s the second sleepless night or the pile of homework is continuing to grow.”

When the students complete their internships, they will receive scholarships to assist them with their college plans.

“You’ve just seen an example of what a true partnership is,” said Dr. Lewis of the Academy. To the students, he added, “While you were speaking, I was up here beaming with pride. You are trailblazers!”

2018-2019 Outstanding Citizen & Service Awards
Superintendent Lewis recognized retired Lawrence Public Schools’ special education and music teacher Lois Orth-Lopes with the district’s 2018-2019 Outstanding Citizen Award. Orth-Lopes volunteers with a variety of community organizations. She continues to support the district’s mission through her participation in teacher evaluation training, support of fine arts, and leadership of the board’s Equity Advisory Council, to name a few ways she serves our schools.

Dr. Lewis presented the district’s 2018-2019 Outstanding Service to Public Education Award to Derek Kwan, executive director of the Lied Center of Kansas. This is the 25th year of the Lied Center’s partnership with the district through the Lawrence Schools Foundation’s Lawrence Education Achievement Partners program.

The Lied Center is a Master-level Partner for donating more than $10,000 through in-kind services. It provides school-only performances to all Pre-K through grade 12 students every year, hosts an annual Third Grade Theater Arts Day and districtwide Talent Show, and offers artists-in-residence and professional development opportunities for teachers, to name a few ways the Lied Center supports our schools.

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