May 13, 2019

Board Hears Curriculum Report and Moves Forward with Budget Planning

Student Recognition
The Lawrence Board of Education on Monday recognized the Free State High School 6A KSHSAA State Speech Championship Team, and the Free State and Lawrence High Kansas Speech and Debate and History Day champions and National Speech and Debate and History Day qualifiers.

Strategic Planning
Martha Greenway of Greenway Strategy Group shared the work of the district strategy teams in developing objectives and initiatives for each of the five themes of the draft strategic plan framework. The Executive Leadership Team previously reviewed the teams’ work and identified phase one initiatives for 2019-2020, the first year of the five-year plan.

Greenway said that while the objectives outline what the community wants to see happen in its schools, the initiatives show how the district will accomplish it. Phase one initiatives involve curriculum standards, instructional resources, student supports, instructional framework, teacher observation and feedback, adult connections with students, safety, climate and culture, data use in decision making, and resource allocation.

Next, the district will form action teams for each of the nine phase-one initiatives. The teams will participate in training to analyze gaps between the current state of the district and the community’s vision for its future. The teams also will develop engagement plans, budgets, and performance indicators. The board will consider final approval of the strategic plan June 24.

Paraeducator Association of Lawrence Request
The board will allow paraeducators to use payroll deduction to pay dues to the Paraeducator Association of Lawrence (PAL). Not a recognized bargaining unit, PAL advocates for better para pay and working conditions.

Curriculum Report
Dr. Jennifer Bessolo, curriculum director, joined by teams of teachers and learning coaches shared an update about the curriculum design process that began last summer. The teams have identified priority curriculum standards and aligned them with primary resources for English language arts. Courtney Otter, Sunset Hill Elementary second grade teacher, said that through this process, they have provided teachers with a year-at-a-glance guide and implemented a feedback loop for teachers to react to the curriculum work. “The priority standards are not necessarily the most important; They are the ones that have the most impact on overall student learning,” Otter explained.

Amanda Lovett, Schwegler fourth grade teacher, shared with the board that this process represents a shift from what she called a “potpourri” approach to gathering reading resources for the classroom to a more holistic approach based on the priority curriculum standards identified by the cohort of teachers.

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Jennah Bauswell, Schwegler Elementary fourth grade teacher, added that the standards provide structure for new teachers to know what they should be measuring in terms of student progress. “Those priority standards help us, as a team, to maximize our instruction and our effectiveness,” she said.

This spring, teams began working on social studies scope and sequence with a state and national consultant, Glen Wiebe, using the Inquiry Design Model. Similar to project-based learning, this model provides more structure and allows for multiple perspectives, instructional choice, and critical thinking about historical content. “We want to teach students how to think, not what to think,” said Dr. Bessolo.

At the secondary level, teams have identified priority and supporting state standards, big ideas, essential questions, and thematic focus areas for each grade level. The middle school team built units based on learning intentions and success criteria, rather than specific novels. Now the team has started the resource review and adoption phase of the process to carefully select literature using the district’s Culturally Relevant Resource Criteria. Other teams are reviewing health, physical education, and career and technical education curriculum.

The district brought national educational expert Larry Ainsworth on-site for a two-day workshop in April. Dr. Bessolo said that teachers will use this training to design teacher-led assessments, discuss results in professional learning communities, and modify instruction and curriculum exposure to ensure student learning and growth takes place. Next year, she added, the district will conduct a K-12 math curriculum review.

**Budget Report**

In April, the board heard an update about legislative bills and financial projections for 2019-2020 school year, along with initial projections of requirements to meet current staffing ratios. Executive Director of Finance Kathy Johnson on Monday shared information about a budget-neutral proposal, reviewed by the Budget and Program Evaluation Committee (BPEC). The proposal meets immediate staffing needs based on student enrollment and addresses support staff changes due to departmental restructuring and attrition. Board members, administrators, teachers, support staff, and community members serve on the BPEC.

Johnson said that the new school funding law, Senate Bill 16, should provide the district an estimated $3,848,158 in new funding. The proposal she presented added teachers, but did not fund a teacher contingency pool; increased the curriculum director to full-time, sustained an Information Technology coordinator position to support PowerSchool implementation; and addressed deficit spending and insurance premium increases.

Board member Shannon Kimball said that she is uncomfortable without a contingency pool to manage large class sizes in August. “What else can we do in a budget-neutral fashion to deal with that?” Kimball asked.

“We are in the beginning stages of trying to have a really open dialog with our teachers through negotiations, so anything that isn’t budget neutral would set us back,” said Jessica Beeson, board president, expressing her support for the proposal. “If we could get through this year and continue doing this work, then it will allow for a lot of good things,” Beeson said of a new interest-based bargaining approach to contract negotiations. “We're skeptically hopeful,” she added.

The board agreed to move forward with the options presented, enabling Human Resources and school administrators to hire the necessary staff. Johnson will build these changes into the final 2019-2020 budget to be approved by the board in August. The board’s decision left $1,274,217 in estimated new funding unallocated, with the budget impact of employee compensation packages unknown at this time.

Review the complete school board agenda at [www.usd497.org/SchoolBoard](http://www.usd497.org/SchoolBoard).

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