Dear Colleagues,

I was pleased to be present in Topeka on Tuesday when the Kansas State Department of Education announced during the Kansas State Board of Education meeting that Lawrence Public Schools is one of 19 school districts selected to take part in the Apollo phase of the Kansans Can School Redesign Project. As you know, our certified teaching staff in all Lawrence schools voted in March whether to apply for Redesign. The vote at your four schools – Broken Arrow, Deerfield, and Hillcrest Elementary Schools and Free State High School – exceeded the 80% approval threshold required to apply.

With support from the Lawrence Board of Education and Lawrence Education Association, teams from each of your schools will spend the 2019-2020 school year planning in order to launch new school redesigns in the 2020-2021 school year. Your schools also will serve as future demonstration sites for others to study and visit.

One of the things that excited me about applying as superintendent in Lawrence was the state’s commitment to school redesign. This great news that we received from KSDE will be a defining moment for our district. Your schools will have an amazing opportunity to redesign to meet the needs of today’s scholars and to share your journey with the rest of our schools. Being a part of Apollo will give us momentum as we continue our course to become the best school district in the country.

The Kansans Can School Redesign Project supports the state’s vision for education - Kansas leads the world in the success of each student. Kansans have shared that schools need to place an equal amount of focus on helping students develop nonacademic skills, such as social-emotional growth, as they do on developing academic skills. This vision calls for a more student-focused system that provides support and resources for individual success.

Kansans have to think differently about how students are educated. The current educational system has worked well for some students, but not for all students. By personalizing education, students engage in learning that is personalized to their individual preferences and at a pace that ensures they are achieving to their fullest potential. More engagement means fewer student absences, fewer behavior referrals, and an increase in student achievement. When a student’s learning is designed around what he or she is passionate about, the likelihood of that student graduating and moving toward a successful future increases.

Apollo brings the total number of schools in the redesign process to about 150, representing 66 districts. It is the goal of the State Board and KSDE to have all 286 Kansas school districts started in the redesign process by 2026.

School redesign is a process driven by four principles:

- Student success skills: An integrated approach to developing social-emotional growth.
- Community partnerships: Partnerships are based on mutually beneficial relationships and collaboration.
- Personalized learning: Teachers support student choice when it comes to time, place, pace, and path.
- “Real-world” applications: Project-based learning, internships, and civic engagement make learning relevant.

Teachers lead redesign efforts. Your ideas will be key to your school’s success. Congratulations and thank you in advance for imagining how your school can think differently to best meet the needs of each student.

Sincerely,

Anthony Lewis, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools