



## USD 497 News Release

Julie Boyle, Executive Director of Communications  
110 McDonald Drive Lawrence, Kansas 66044  
785-330-1662 / [jboyle@usd497.org](mailto:jboyle@usd497.org)

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### **Board Approves PAL-CWA Union, Budget Maximums, & Amended Calendar**

#### **PAL-CWA**

“We're building a union so we can be better educators,” said Hannah Allison, chairperson of the Paraeducator Association of Lawrence-Communication Workers of America (PAL-CWA), prior to the Lawrence Board of Education voting 6-1 Monday, with Melissa Johnson voting no, to opt into the Public Employer-Employee Relations Act. The board directed the superintendent to file the necessary paperwork with the Public Employees Relations Board to pave the way for the board to formally recognize PAL-CWA with a final vote August 10.

Mary Lee, PAL-CWA treasurer, says the vote follows years of research and organizing in order to improve working conditions of paraeducators. “We have truly built a community of paras over the last four years,” said Lee.

In response to a request from the superintendent, PAL-CWA leaders told the board they will encourage members of other classified employee groups, such as custodial, food service, and administrative support personnel, etc. to join the union. “PAL-CWA will provide a safe environment, bringing all staff together as one team to do what is best for students,” said Melissa Clissold, a Liberty Memorial Central Middle School paraeducator.

The vote is a precursor to the board bargaining with PAL-CWA in the future.

#### **2020 Budget**

Finance Director Kathy Johnson shared with the board several concerns about the district's budget picture. They include a decline in enrollment, unpredictable categorical aid for special education, a 62% increase in the cost of property and liability insurance, and a shortfall in the Food Service budget due to paying labor and food costs without collecting revenue for meals during the pandemic. She noted that federal CARES Act funds will provide some relief and Base State Aid Per Pupil increased from \$4,426 to \$4,569.

“Sometimes it feels like we take a step forward and two steps back,” said Johnson. “We're really looking at vacancies before hiring now, and when we can, we won't commit yet.”

The board approved for publication maximum budget authorities for the 2020-2021 school year of \$177,375,822 and established a proposed tax rate of 53.481 mills (an increase of .497 of a mill over the 2019 tax rate). The board set a public budget hearing at 6 p.m. August 10 prior to final budget approval.

**MORE**

**2020 Fall Planning and School Calendar**

Leaders of the Together Again: Fall 2020 Planning Task Force, a collaboration between the district and the Lawrence Education Association, provided an update about the ongoing work of 200 teachers and staff to develop plans for reopening schools with the health and safety of students and staff at the forefront. Task force members have met for approx. 1,000 hours.

Staff is preparing detailed plans for three models of instructional delivery: in-person, a hybrid of in-person and remote learning, and 100% distance learning. The board requested the inclusion of a hybrid model. It calls for 50% of students to attend school in-person two days per week (Mon./Thurs. or Tue./Fri.) and learn remotely three days/week on alternating schedules. Wednesday remote learning days would provide extra time for cleaning and disinfecting.

“The hybrid model would allow for social distancing,” said Darcy Kraus, director of elementary schools. Staff also is working to reduce transition times during the day at the elementary level, and through block scheduling at the secondary schools.

Secondary Schools Director Rick Henry said that once the Kansas State High School Activities Association issues fall sports guidance, students in remote or 100% distance learning through their home schools will be able to participate in KSHSAA activities. KSHSAA does not allow Lawrence Virtual School students to participate in brick-and-mortar school activities.

Johnson noted that during remote or distance learning, a daily log, signed by the student and responsible adult, must be submitted verifying 360 minutes/day of learning. The Kansas State Department of Education requires the logs for accountability and equity purposes and in order for districts to count students as full-time and receive full funding. KSDE has not waived the 1,116-hour instructional requirement for the 2020-21 school year, as it did in the spring during COVID-19 building closures. The requirement applies to all three educational delivery models.

The Calendar Committee presented an amended calendar to start the school year for students after Labor Day, per the Kansas Governor’s recommendation, and provide more staff professional development and preparation time in August. The board approved the revised calendar to start school September 8 and end May 27. (High school concurrent credit courses will begin according to post-secondary partner schedules.) Virtual parent/teacher conferences will occur prior to the start of school, August 31-September 3.

“COVID is going to be here. It’s not like the flu, so when that comes around, we will have COVID and the flu at the same time,” said Paula Smith, board member, indicating her preference for starting school with 100% distancing learning. A majority of the board shared that perspective, voting to start the school year with six weeks of 100% distance learning and review that delivery model and public health data during its September 28 board meeting.