



USD 497 News Release

Julie Boyle, Executive Director of Communications
110 McDonald Drive Lawrence, Kansas 66044
785-330-1662 / jboyle@usd497.org

July 26, 2021

School Board Ratifies Master Agreement and Hears Equal Opportunity Schools Report

RECOGNITION

The school board on Monday recognized nine LMH Health Leadership Academy Fellows who participated in the third year of the summer paid mentorship program. Paired with senior executives in health care, the rising seniors explored health care careers and leadership skills. Congratulations to Jesse Self, Evan Darrow, LaDerrick Reeves, Chais Chickaway, Unique Hall, Ahnie Scott, Ta'Mya Douglas, Gabi Carttar, and Zoe Symons (not present). The students are completing capstone projects about topics of interest to them, including representation in health care, the effects of socio-economic disparities on the quality of health care, Black maternal health care disparities, and minority behavioral health, among other topics.

RATIFICATION OF MASTER AGREEMENT

The school board ratified the Master Agreement with the Lawrence Education Association (LEA). The negotiations team agreed to horizontal movement on the salary scale, which corresponds to education credits, and a reopener clause to reassess finances this fall for potential salary increases and vertical movement for years of service. This follows a significant enrollment drop last fall that led to a budget deficit in the district.

Megan Epperson, LEA negotiations team co-chair, shared with the board that LEA received the highest number of 'no' votes in recent years during ratification. "We've definitely agreed that coming this fall, we need to start with the salary conversations. We need to start with a proactive plan so we can work backwards in terms of budgeting any potential cuts and look at a long-term lens, recognizing we can't fix what we can't fix . . .," she said.

"We are not satisfied with the outcome either and we have committed to, and continue to commit to, working to find a path to increasing or improving our salary package for the next year. We are ready to start that work immediately," said Kelly Jones, a board negotiations team member.

Eligible certified staff will see increases of up to \$500 in federal COVID-relief payments through ESSER II funds and a \$366.37 fringe benefits savings rebate. Staff signing up for spouse and/or family medical insurance will see decreased yearly premiums of \$100-\$300. The board will continue to pay for single employee medical, dental, and vision coverage.

"I really appreciate the negotiations team and all that you have done to work through what has admittedly been a really difficult negotiations year because of the financial situation that we are in," said Shannon Kimball, board vice president. "The state of Kansas, specifically, our state legislature, has illegally underfunded our schools for the better part of the last decade . . . It is not a lack of desire or will on the part of board to do better. There is just no easy answer."

MORE

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY SCHOOLS

The board also heard a report about Equal Opportunity Schools (EOS). The EOS program targets an objective of the district's strategic plan to reduce barriers to college and career readiness. Free State and Lawrence High School administrators shared action steps to ensure students of color and low-income students have equal access to advanced coursework.

Amber Brown, EOS partnership director, said that the program's mission to create a culture of access by examining student and staff surveys and improving outreach and support to students. She noted a bright spot in the data: 89% of students responding to the survey said they want to obtain a two-year, four-year, or advanced college degree. Brown added that a blind spot for the high schools is that a majority of students report that their current classes are not challenging.

Free State High Assistant Principal Matthew Renk said that due to the pandemic and remote learning, EOS data collection started late last year. "I don't think we are even scratching the surface of what this (EOS) survey can do. The amount of social-emotional well-being we find out from the survey, from those growth cards (student insight cards), is just astonishing. It has really helped us hone in on some students that definitely need a little bit more support," said Renk. The insight cards include student goals, career interests, comments, and trusted adult staff mentors.

Mark Preut, Lawrence High associate principal, said, "We incorporated some of the EOS outreach into our Individual Plans of Study so as teachers were having those conversations with students about making course choices, they had some of that information to recruit and really encourage some students to participate."

Dr. Cynthia Johnson, executive director of inclusion, engagement, and belonging, shared that the goal this fall is to have all remaining students surveyed by mid-September. She added that two things that jumped out of the baseline data were messaging and belonging.

"We have to remember that words matter. The messages that we send to our students, verbally and nonverbally, matter. Students can pick up on what we are saying and what we are not saying," said Dr. Johnson. She added about school connectedness, "The more a student is connected with a caring adult the greater likelihood a student is to be successful."

###