



USD 497 News Release

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Board Hears Progress Report from Redesign Schools

Recognition

The Lawrence Board of Education on Monday, May 9, recognized Lawrence High National Merit Finalists Eva Ackley and Elijah Paden and Kansas Governor's Scholars Ackley, Samuel Lopez, Kenna McNally, and Aidan Zimney. The board also honored four West Middle School Kansas History Day winners. Caitlyn Barry created a website on the fall of the Soviet Union and placed fourth. Kyla Mickle, Zacha Zavarse, and Stella Dorssom made a [documentary film](#), "Children in the Shadows," about forced assimilation in Indigenous schools. Their film won first place, qualifying them to compete in National History Day in June.

Public Comment

During Public Comment, the board heard from eight individuals - students, alumni, parents, and community members - who want the high schools to continue to offer Latin. The board recently approved more than \$6.4 million in budget reductions, including 10.0 full-time teacher positions across the two high schools. As they identify and implement these cuts, district and building administrators look at staff retirements and resignations, vacant positions, and teacher certifications and licensure, as well as student enrollment numbers and class sections needed. Student course requests determine sections in the high school master schedules.

Increased Medical Benefits Premium

As part of its Consent Agenda, the board approved an increased premium with Blue Cross Blue Shield of Kansas for the core employee-only medical plan for the 2022-2023 school year. The monthly premium will increase from \$533.36 to \$548.57, for an estimated total increase to the district of \$218,654.

School Redesign Progress Report

In 2017, the Kansas State Department of Education asked communities to think differently about how they design public schools to meet student needs. The board heard a progress report Monday from Broken Arrow, Deerfield, and Hillcrest Elementary Schools and Free State High School about the history, goals, actions, results, and next steps of their redesign projects. These four schools applied and were approved to be a part of the Apollo Kansans Can School Redesign Project sponsored by the Kansas State Department of Education. In the future, KSDE will incorporate redesign into Kansas Education Systems Accreditation (KESA) for all public schools.

Redesign provides flexibility for school communities to plan together creative ways to modify school schedules, structures, procedures, and practices to improve student success skills, expand family, business, and community partnerships; and personalize student learning. This includes by providing students relevant, project-based learning, internships, and civic engagement opportunities.

Meeting students' unique academic, social-emotional, and behavioral needs is an objective of the Lawrence Public Schools' strategic plan focus on Student-Centered Schools.

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All four schools began their redesign thinking with students, staff, and parent “blitz” events or brainstorming sessions. They also received Think Wrong training to steer them toward innovation. The schools built their redesign teams, set goals, and began their research and exploration of new ideas to meet the objectives of redesign.

The pandemic delayed the launch of the school’s plans, but gave them more time to plan, try some changes, collect data, and evaluate and adjust initial ideas.

Broken Arrow

Broken Arrow will present its plan to KSDE next Monday for approval to launch. Its plan includes five goals:

1. Primary Supports: Provide more developmentally appropriate learning opportunities for primary students, such as enabling more movement and play-based options for students.
2. Flexible Learning: Provide personalized, multigrade learning opportunities in order to increase achievement, engagement, and participation.
3. Social Emotional Supports: Provide multiple opportunities for students to engage in learning that will encourage self-regulation, awareness, and social/emotional growth and development connected with a buildingwide approach to enhance the positive climate of the building. For example, each school day begins with a “soft start” with students having their choice of activities for the first 15 minutes of the day.
4. Learner Focused Scheduling: Create a balanced calendar to increase overall student engagement and achievement, including building purposeful, learning-focused breaks into the school calendar.
5. Student Behavior Supports: Enhance behavior supports that unite the building and allow students to learn about tools and strategies that they can use to empower themselves to be ready to learn.

“I think that the biggest thing that has come out of redesign for Broken Arrow is that we have had a very focused effort on increasing our purposeful data collection and analysis of that to make data-informed decisions. I think that our staff feels really empowered by this process. When we started this it really created a way for us to think differently and also work together to really come forward with some new ideas for our students,” said Amanda Green, Broken Arrow learning coach.

Deerfield

Deerfield Principal Joni Appleman said that the school began its brainstorming by asking the question, “If there were no boundaries, what would our school look like and what skills would our students be leaving Deerfield with?”

“We had some lofty goals and some very excited staff members,” said learning coach Caitlin Feighny.

Deerfield’s redesign plans stem from four goals:

1. Increasing academic achievement, including personalized learning, ability grouping, and response to intervention.
2. Increasing social-emotional health, including play-based learning in kindergarten, a focus on movement and mindfulness starting with morning meetings and wellness breaks, and helping students develop social skills.
3. Increasing staff morale, including by increasing plan time and common plan time, investigating smaller class sizes, and improving the work environment.
4. Sustainability and outdoor education, including enhancing outdoor educational spaces.

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Hillcrest

Principal Sarah Kruse said that when she came to Hillcrest and learned of the redesign that she thought it was exactly how schools should be putting decisions in teachers’ and parents’ hands to decide how their school should best serve student needs. This is Kruse’s second year at the school.

Hillcrest launched its redesign plan in March. Its goals fall in four areas: structures and systems, purposeful play, community hub, and social emotional learning. “Everything we are doing, we want to provide all students access to opportunities to excel,” said Kruse.

As an example, some of Hillcrest’s ideas around making the school a community hub include providing a place for families to use Wi-Fi, do laundry, utilize the food pantry and other resources, have parent meetings, and other outreach efforts.

To improve social emotional learning, a team of Hillcrest teachers looked at student data and developed a social emotional learning curriculum tied to district equity goals. Their curriculum is used during morning meetings.

“Knowing that essentially you are one of the first elementary schools that went through redesign, it is really exciting to see where some of our other elementary schools are headed. Thank you for laying that groundwork,” said Kay Emerson, board member, of Hillcrest.

Free State High

One of Free State High’s redesign co-pilots is Aimee Landwehr, who teaches social studies. She said that during the school’s brainstorming sessions, some of the things they heard over and over again from students and staff was that in the current model, there was no time in the day for students to get assistance from teachers, for enrichment or cross-curricular work, or for students to develop the “soft skills” they need for post-secondary success.

Free State’s redesign plan has three key focus areas:

1. Balance in the everyday workload through changes to the schedule, adding more flexibility, and enhancing the school’s focus on wellness and mental health.
2. Relevance by providing personal, individualized learning that is applicable to students and their futures and that involves connections with community partners.
3. Habits of Success, described as creative know-how and way-finding abilities. These are the “soft skills” that prepare students for successful futures by supporting them in building character, understanding the importance of wellness, and giving them relevant, project-based learning experiences.

Free State High has been working to redesign the way education looks, including how it facilitates connections for students that prepare them for success in the next stage of their lives. The most sweeping change at Free State this year has been the school’s implementation of the flexible modular or Flex Mod schedule that includes longer class periods for hands-on lab classes and student independent learning time.

“This was a full implementation year in Flex Mod, and if you have talked to anyone who has lived through it, it has been quite a steep learning curve,” said Landwehr.

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In evaluating concerns with the Flex-Mod schedule, such as classes overlapping, students not being able to get assistance from teachers who were not available during their ILT, and student attendance issues during ILT, Free State has looked at adjusting the Flex Mod schedule. The school has looked at two options called Rolling 7 and Flex Mod 2.0.

Free State surveyed staff and students, whose opinions were split on which schedules they prefer. The majority of staff preferred Rolling 7 while the majority of students preferred Flex-Mod 2.0. Both options include some flexible learning time during the day. The Rolling 7 schedule has a common ILT for all students to help ensure students can meet with any teacher during that time. Both schedules eliminate class overlaps and bring back Wednesday early dismissal, which provides staff collaboration time.

Free State also looked at its data. For example, the school saw a decrease in classroom discipline office referrals from 2018-2019 (266) to 2021-2022 (125) but did not see an improvement in the number of students with one or more failing grades from 2018-2019 (503) to 2021-2022 (552).

Considering school community feedback and its data, Free State will transition to the Rolling 7 schedule next year.

“I appreciate your transparency in sharing what has worked, what is not working, and how you plan to adjust to meet the children’s needs,” said Board President Erica Hill.