



USD 497 News Release

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Board Hears Certified Salary Matrix Update and Report about Early Childhood Educational Services

Board Recognition

Free State High School Principal Amy McAnarney recognized the Free State Dance Team for placing third in division 6A of the Kansas State High School Athletic Association's Game Day Spirit Showcase. Dena Johnston and Claire Johnston coach the team.

Certified Negotiations Subcommittee Update

The Lawrence Board of Education discussed on Monday one of its top financial priorities: providing competitive staff wages. Lawrence Public Schools' teacher salaries lag those of many comparable and peer districts. The district's current Futures Planning Community Engagement Process seeks to identify budget reductions for reallocation to salary improvements, among other areas.

In August, members of the Lawrence Education Association, which represents teachers, shared comparisons among Kansas school districts' teacher salary schedules. On Monday, members of the certified negotiations salary matrix subcommittee presented an update about this work. The salary schedule enables teachers to advance in pay as they move across steps horizontally for years of experience and down columns vertically for additional education.

Dr. Tom Barker, Billy Mills Middle School social studies teacher, said that the goals of the study are to look at the purpose and functionality of the matrix, find a solution for staff with significant years of service who are at the current salary schedule's maximum Step 13, and to make sure no teachers regress in salary because of any changes.

"What do we want our matrix to do for our teachers professionally?" Barker asked, citing retention, recruitment, and advanced education goals.

Matt Ellis, Lawrence High math teacher, shared with the board various models he developed after looking at the matrices of more than a dozen peer and neighboring school districts. He said that moving toward a more equalized table (i.e., a schedule with equal increments for each step across and down), would enable movement on the salary schedule in a predictable fashion, so teachers would know what to expect and would be able to plan. He said that the current salary schedule is seemingly randomized and unpredictable.

"From a negotiations perspective, and I would say also from the worker's perspective, it's more predictable where the money is going for the individual, and then we also can see more predictably...what kind of impact are we having on those early careers and... on those middle careers, where we are seeing some exits," said Kelly Jones, board and negotiations team member.

The negotiations team will review the subcommittee's work, and possibly a proposal, in January. Implementation of a new teacher salary schedule could occur in phases, considering the district's limited financial resources.

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In addition, the board heard a report about district early childhood services. Lawrence Public Schools serves approximately 500 Douglas County families of children from birth to age five, supporting successful child development and kindergarten readiness. Staff anticipate serving 550+ families by the end of the school year.

Monday's update included information about Parents as Teachers, tiny-k Early Intervention Services, the Pre-K readiness program, early childhood special education and peer model program, community-based services, and the district's new classified staff early childhood benefit classroom. All funded by state and local grants and donations, with the exception of the classified staff benefit program. The district used federal Elementary and Secondary Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds to support this benefit through spring 2024.

The district also provides early intervention multidisciplinary screenings and evaluations in the community and monthly hearing and vision screenings at Kennedy Early Childhood Center. These services are free to families.

Early childhood learning coach Jill Anderson said that with the use of ESSER funds, the district purchased new literacy and math early childhood curriculum this year. The readiness program has identified priority standards for curriculum, a pacing guide, and data collection tools to monitor student progress. Kennedy also has started providing its families a satisfaction survey to gather feedback in the fall and spring.

The district's early childhood programs foster several community partnerships, including a Head Start classroom and a Community Children's Center early childhood clothing closet and parent-child classes at Kennedy. Partners with Sunflower Bank and River City Church support and celebrate Kennedy staff. In the summer of 2022, the Community Children's Center collaborated with district staff to provide a Kindergarten Camp at Kennedy with 68 children participating from 13 receiving elementary schools.

"Early childhood education is just a gem. It is so foundational," said Kay Emerson, board member, "Thank you is what I want to say."

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