



## USD 497 News Release

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### Board Receives Enrollment Projections and Futures Planning Committee Update

#### Board Recognition

The Lawrence Board of Education on Monday invited Free State High School Principal Amy McAnarney to recognize Judy Erpelding, director of orchestras, for her election as president-elect of the Northeast Kansas Music Educators Association and Matt Renk, assistant principal, for his recognition as this year's NE KMEA Honor Administrator. Free State's Joshua East, NE KMEA Choir Teacher of the Year, and West Middle School's Heather Madgwick, NE KMEA Outstanding Educator for Middle-Level Orchestra, were unable to attend the meeting.

#### Consent Agenda

Among items the board approved as part of its Consent Agenda were:

- Acceptance of the annual audit from BT&CO certified public accountants for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2022. The annual audit is favorable with no significant findings of weaknesses.
- Approval of an administrative request to sell surplus property, 8.78 acres at 2600 W. 25th Street, adjacent to Holcom Park. Built in 1978, the building was used for the former Lawrence Alternative High School from 1982-2004, and later the Community Transition Program (C-Tran) Community Connections Center and the high school culinary program. Used for storage, the building has not housed an academic program for seven years. The appraised value of the property is \$1.35 million. Should the district sell the property, Kansas law directs the district to return proceeds to the Capital Outlay Fund.
- Renewal of two software systems: PowerSchool, its Student Information Management system, at a cost of \$190,140.17, and Odysseyware online curriculum at a cost of \$72,000. The Lawrence Diploma Completion Program uses the latter, as do both high schools and the Juvenile Detention Center for credit recovery and summer school.
- Encumbrance of an additional \$60,000, for a total of \$120,000, to pay increased costs of student device repairs.
- Approval of a \$49,592.50 service agreement with Tech Electronics for semi-annual and annual testing and inspections of district fire alarm systems.

#### RSP & Associates Enrollment Projections/Futures Planning Update

Consultant Rob Schwarz, CEO of RSP and Associates, presented an enrollment projection analysis. He previously shared this report with the Futures Planning Committee in November. Among key takeaways, RSP forecasts districtwide enrollment will decrease by an estimated 300 students during the next five years for a total enrollment of fewer than 10,000 students (an estimated 9,500) by 2027-2028. Schwarz predicted larger enrollment drops at the high school and middle school levels.

He told the board that there is the potential for increased residential development and economic growth in the area in 6-10 years. He cited potential growth long-term from the Panasonic plant under construction in DeSoto, as well as other new manufacturers it will bring to the area. Schwarz also shared that district buildings were underutilized.

Board President Shannon Kimball said that she appreciated the thoroughness and the quality of the RSP report. "This is incredibly helpful, especially in the context of living up to our stated belief that we have to make data-driven decisions," said Kimball, referring to the district's strategic plan.

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Kimball said her key takeaway from the report is that the district is projected to be a declining enrollment district over the next five years. “I don’t think as a community that people really understand what that is going to look like for our district. It is not a good place to be in in terms of the financial situation for us going forward, so I think it reinforces for me that we cannot not deal with that reality out of this process. We have to have a plan,” she said.

Board member Kelly Jones agreed that the report was sobering. She also acknowledged that the board is taking this opportunity to operate in a way that best suits the district. “There can be some positive things for students in this,” Jones said. “I hope that when you come back to the board (with a recommendation), that it doesn’t feel quite as heavy and sobering, but there are some spaces that we can see where there might be some highlights. There might be increases in wages. It might also be that we find that when we combine certain types of programs or spaces that there are benefits to those particular communities.”

“Yes, there is going to be some impacts for current students,” echoed Superintendent Anthony Lewis, “but there is also the opportunity to really set this district up for success...for 10-20 years from now.”

The board contracted with RSP and Associates in August to provide school boundaries, community development, and housing analyses, as well as facility utilization and enrollment projections. RSP also facilitates the work of the Facilities Planning Committee. This group has met since September to review data and develop a recommendation for the board to achieve its top financial priorities. These include providing staff competitive wages, balancing the budget by planning for increases in operational costs, and rebuilding a fiscally healthy contingency reserve fund.

The community engagement process included a public survey in November. **Next week the district will host two public input sessions from 6-7:30 p.m. January 17 and 18 at Free State and Lawrence High Schools, respectively.** Input gathered during these events will further inform the committee’s work toward making a recommendation to the board in February.

The committee meets again Wednesday, January 11. Follow its work at [www.usd497.org/FuturesPlanning](http://www.usd497.org/FuturesPlanning).

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