



## USD 497 News Release

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**August 28, 2023**

### **Board Discusses Needs Assessment and Attendance Advocacy**

The Lawrence Board of Education recognized LMH Health's Junior Volunteers. They donated 1,627 hours of service to the hospital during the summer. LMH Volunteer Services Supervisor Shane Heiman introduced the student volunteers present, noting that some plan to continue their service during the school year.

### **Consent Agenda**

As part of its consent agenda, the board accepted a settlement from Altria of \$85,573, less legal fees, from additional JUUL Labs litigation. The national litigation concerned the impacts on schools of managing addiction to vaping fueled by JUUL marketing to youth.

The board also approved on consent the purchase of a digital crisis monitoring solution software called Gaggle at a three-year cost of \$162,285.75. The software notifies administration of safety risks, such as references to self-harm, depression, drug use, and violence on district devices. The purchase costs will be paid from capital outlay and matched by Kansas Safe and Secure Grant funds.

### **Needs Assessment and State Assessment Review**

State law requires that prior to budget approval, the board review a district needs assessment that includes input from each of the schools. The board has scheduled public budget hearings and approval of the 2023-2024 budget September 11.

As part of the Needs Assessment, the board reviewed 2022-2023 Kansas Assessment Program results for the district, which it had received in June. District and building goals established as part of this year's school improvement plans also were included in the assessment, noting barriers that prevent student proficiency in reading, math, and science.

"Our buildings have identified a number of areas where they are lacking in resources in order to meet the expectations the Legislature apparently has for us. As I read through this (Needs Assessment), time after time after time, the lack of resources is related to resources the state has given us," said Past President Shannon Kimball, noting that where resource challenges exist, the state is responsible.

President Kelly Jones, referencing the length of the Needs Assessment, 119 pages, said that the information, especially from the schools, is truly helpful from a governance perspective.

### **Attendance, Chronic Absenteeism, and Truancy Report**

"District goals will not be a reality unless our students attend school, are actively engaged in the teaching and learning process, and build those relationships and that culture of learning here in our classroom environments," said Dr. Cynthia Johnson, executive director of inclusion, engagement, and belonging.

Dr. Johnson introduced the theme "Every Day Matters" for the district's advocacy for regular and timely student attendance to access learning and build social-emotional skills and relationships with adults and peers. While Average Daily Attendance was slightly higher last year than the year prior at 90.68% in 2022-2023 and 90.20% in 2021-2022, the district's goal this year is 95%.

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Another critical attendance issue affecting Lawrence Public Schools, as well as school districts across the country, is chronic absenteeism. It is defined as students missing 10% or more of school days due to absence for any reason (excused and unexcused). The district's rate of chronic absenteeism last year was 29.7%, an improvement from 34.11% in 2021-2022.

Dr. Johnson noted that research shows that chronic absenteeism affects students of color, students with disabilities, limited English proficiency, and students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds at higher rates than other students. The district's chronic absenteeism data for students in identified racial/ethnic subgroups mirrors the research. "Attendance is an essential ingredient for educational equity," she said.

Jennifer Georgie, the district's lead student and parent support facilitator, asked, "So how do we improve attendance?" She cited Attendance Works research of proven strategies for improving attendance. These include engaging students and families, recognizing good and improved attendance, providing personalized early outreach, monitoring attendance data and practice, and developing a programmatic response to barriers to attendance. Georgie said that the district will be using these strategies, as well as highlighting the importance of school attendance, including during the month of September, which is Attendance Awareness Month.

The report included health guidance for when students should stay home from school for legitimate health reasons, such as testing positive for COVID-19 or being diagnosed with the flu.

### **Truancy**

A student is truant if they are absent without excuse for a significant part of the school day for three consecutive days, five days in a semester, or seven days in a school year. The district is required to report truancy to the Douglas County District Attorney's Office.

Mark Preut, Lawrence High associate principal, described how the school's student services team looks for warning signs of attendance issues and works on preventing truancy. "We document all of the steps that are taken before we get to the point of filing truancy for a student," said Preut, noting the assistance available to families from community partners that focus on truancy prevention.

Pam Weigand, director of criminal justice services for Douglas County, highlighted two such partners. SupportEd truancy prevention services are provided for students K-8 by the Center for Supportive Communities and Criminal Justice Services. The O'Connell Children's Shelter Truancy Prevention Program serves high school students. The district, the Kansas Department for Children and Families, Douglas County District Attorney's Office, Douglas County Criminal Justice Services – Youth Programs, Center for Supportive Communities, and the O'Connell Children's Shelter are finalizing a Memorandum of Understanding. The MOU serves as a formal expression of cooperation among these community partners focusing on prevention and support for students and families prior to truancy reporting.

"This is a robust and collaborative way of working with our kiddos to keep them in school and out of our truancy program... and to keep them successful," said District Attorney Suzanne Valdez.

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