



USD 497 News Release

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Middle School Redesign Report

“You guys are cooking something really good, and I am very excited to see it,” said Bryndal Hoover, a Lawrence High junior and student representative to the school board, after hearing the Middle School Redesign Committee’s report Monday night.

Committee members told the board that their review of student data and staff and community input guided them to explore a Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math, or STEAM, curricular focus for Liberty Memorial Central Middle School (LMCMS). This follows the board’s charge to district administration last spring to create a committee to develop a plan for repurposing LMCMS with a curricular focus and to bring a recommendation to the board in December.

Chief Academic Officer Patrick Kelly said that when the committee began meeting in April, it developed this statement to focus its work: “Design an innovative learning center at LMCMS that meets the board directive, attracts families and students, and has community engagement so that all students are ready for high school, college, and careers.”

In addition to making sure students in the LMCMS community may continue to choose to attend their home school, the committee’s focus statement bears in mind a new state law (House Bill 2567) that takes effect in 2024. It will enable nonresident students to attend any school with available capacity.

Laura Leonard, LMCMS English language arts teacher and a member of the Redesign Committee, explained that the group read every open response on the 728 staff and parent surveys received. “Not every respondent felt like we need to have a redesigned middle school,” said Leonard, who is in her 18th year of teaching at LMCMS.

“When we look at our test scores, when we look at our behavioral referrals, when we look at our Panorama (school climate) data, we are not meeting the needs of our students,” she said. “We can do better because what we’re doing right now isn’t working for them. I am super excited to offer them something different, to redesign our school, looking at what our students, families, and staff are telling us.”

The next steps for the committee include collecting and evaluating more data from student and community focus groups, visiting and learning from schools that have a STEAM focus, and attending professional development learning opportunities.

The board’s Boundary Advisory Committee will reconvene in November to review all middle school boundaries. A teacher negotiations committee already is meeting to examine middle school teacher plan time.

“Thank you. This is really what I was hoping for,” said Board President Kelly Jones, who lives in the LMCMS neighborhood. “I clearly heard a desire to serve the current community, so what you are doing is welcoming people in and welcoming people who are here... The direction from the board is to serve the community and welcome others who might also want to be a part of what I think is going to be really amazing.”

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Capital Improvement Plan

As part of the district's Capital Improvement Plan, the board approved a list of more than \$17 million in capital projects in the 2023-2024 school year. Its Facilities and Planning Committee will review the projects as the district receives bids for the work. Board Policy also requires all expenses of \$20,000 or more to come back before the board for individual approval.

Property and real estate taxes as well as proceeds from any sale of district land, a building, or equipment make up the Capital Outlay Fund. The board annually assesses the state-maximum eight mills for capital outlay.

Most of the projects in the Capital Improvement Plan involve facilities improvements, such as roofs and heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems, or campus site improvements like asphalt, concrete, and playgrounds. Capital funds also cover equipment purchases, such as the band uniform and football helmet replacement cycles, library-media center furniture, and custodial, maintenance, and food service equipment. Other capital projects are technology purchases or leases for student and staff devices, copy machines, and technology infrastructure.

School and district vehicle purchases are a capital expense. Chief Operations Officer Dr. Larry Englebrick explained that the district has not been able to order government-purchase vehicles for four years due to industry supply issues. "Some of the vehicles in the fleet are showing signs of age," he said, sharing that the district evaluates vehicles for safety issues to determine replacement needs.

The district also allocates capital funds to each school based on the number of students served. Building administrators have the discretion to spend those funds, per capital expenditure parameters, or carry over balances to save for larger project purchases.

Staff playground inspections led to a list of priority replacement plans for equipment at Woodlawn, Sunflower, Langston Hughes, and Prairie Park. Working with the schools, the district provides a basic playground with climbing, crawling, and swinging components based on school enrollment and the number of children expected to use the playground at any given time. Schools may augment their playgrounds with building discretionary capital funds or through fundraising by parent organizations. Board members plan to revisit their Fundraising Policy to ensure equity across schools regardless of their student enrollment or capacity to raise funds.

Legislative Priorities

The board approved its 2024 Legislative Priorities early, thanks to the legwork of its Policy Committee. This list creates the basis for the board's advocacy efforts and informs local legislators and the community of the greatest needs of the district. Organized by the district's five strategic plan goal areas, the legislative priorities include funding, and what the board referred to as good governance, policies, and practices.

The board incorporated input from its Equity Advisory Council and the Superintendent's Advisory Councils into the legislative priorities. "The feedback was so good from the students, staff, and advisory council that when we present this to legislators during The Chamber's annual legislative breakfast, I think including some of the quotes from them would be powerful," said Jones.

She was referring to an annual Chamber event that includes presentations of legislative priorities from city, county, school district, KU, and Chamber leaders to Douglas County's legislative delegation.

Special Recognition

Lawrence Public Schools started a new effort Monday to showcase school celebrations during recognition time on the board's agenda. LMCMS students invited the board and community to attend their fall musical, "Annie Jr." November 8-10, by singing "You're Never Fully Dressed Without a Smile." Billy Mills Middle School Principal Dr. Andy Taylor celebrated the work of the school's mental health team to support students and make their school a better place.