



## USD 497 News Release

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**October 9, 2023**

### **Special Recognition**

The Lawrence Board of Education on Monday recognized the district's high school security officers for their important role in ensuring safe and supportive schools. Security officers are Jeffrey Colter, Derrick Johnson, and Spencer Bonner at Lawrence High, and Dee Kemp, Chris Goulter, and Ethan Hamel at Free State.

The board also acknowledged recent national and state honors received by the Lawrence Kansas Police Department's school resource officer program. The city of Lawrence and LKPD provide SROs at each of the district's middle and high schools. The department's SRO program earned the National School Resource Officers Association Model Agency Award. In addition, the Kansas Juvenile Officers Association recognized Corporal Kacey Wiltz as the Kansas SRO of the Year. The SRO Team includes Lt. Myrone Grady, Corporals Amaury Collado (LHS, 2022-23), Dean Kemppainen, LHS; and Wiltz, FSHS; and Officers Lindsay Bishop, WMS, James Browning, BMMS, Bailey Salisbury, SWMS, and Danny Affalter, LMCMS.

### **Contract with RSP & Associates**

Before approving a contract with RSP & Associates, the board moved the item, originally on the Consent Agenda, to New Business for public discussion. The Consent Agenda is made up of business items considered routine and approved in one motion. RSP & Associates has worked with the district since 2005-2006, providing enrollment projections and analysis. Last year RSP facilitated the district's Futures Planning Community Engagement Process and supported the Boundary Advisory Committee's work.

"What we are looking at this year is a continuation of what was done last year," said Dr. Larry Englebrick, chief operations officer. "A big change this year in the work is the focus on middle schools, and the boundary adjustments that may need to be considered to support the redesign of Liberty Memorial Central Middle school." A Middle School Redesign Committee has announced that it is looking at a Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math curricular focus for LMCMS, based on student data and staff and parent input.

Under the new contract, RSP will look at this year's student enrollment and how it aligns with last year's projections. Englebrick thinks the board's desire last year to provide families choice through the district transfer policy will impact school-by-school enrollment. RSP will also provide an enrollment analysis and support the Boundary Advisory Committee with its study of middle school boundaries. In addition, it will assist the district with determining building and classroom capacities. This work is in preparation for a new state law taking effect in 2024. HB 2567 allows nonresident students to attend any school where space is available.

### **Special Education Services Report**

The board heard a report Monday from the district's Special Education administrative team. "This team has worked together for 10-15 years, which is rare," said Kevin Harrell, executive director of student services and special education. "I do have to give credit to them for the work that they do and all the things they have done over the years to make our team and special education in the Lawrence Public Schools strong...I have been here a while, and we do some great things."

The district's current special education staff includes 211 certified staff, 220 paraeducators, and five administrators. The district contracts with 11 teachers and 13 classified staff, which are positions included in the 24 current certified openings. The staff serves 1,795 students with disabilities and 333 students receiving gifted services, providing special education services PreK-age 21.

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Special education consists of specially designed instruction, related services required to assist the child to benefit from special education, supplementary aids and services, such as accommodations and modifications; and supports for school personnel. “All students are general education students first, so these are services that help them access the general education curriculum,” said Shelia Smith, assistant director of special education.

Monday’s report included prevalence data, showing the percentage of students with disabilities and students receiving gifted services in the district as compared to the state. From 2015 to 2021, the district served a lower percentage of students with disabilities than the state, and a higher percentage of gifted students than the state.

The team said that the district continues to struggle to fill some special education positions, leading the district to contract for harder-to-fill positions. These include speech language pathologists, occupational and physical therapists, and registered behavior therapists. The district estimates that it spends an additional \$1 million to hire contracted staff, rather than direct hires, a challenge not unique to Lawrence schools.

State special education funding, by law (K.S.A. 72-3422), is to supplement 92% of the excess cost incurred by school districts for the provision of special education and related services to eligible students. Executive Director of Finance Cynde Frick said that the Kansas State Department of Education estimates that the Lawrence school district would receive an additional \$3.5-\$4M if the state were following the law. The district transferred approx. \$9M from its General Fund to support special education services in 2022-2023.

Regardless of state aid, maintenance of effort (MOE) must be met with local special education funding. MOE requires the district spend as much on special education as it did the previous year. If the district does not make MOE, it must pay the state the amount that it underspent on special education.

Several board members expressed frustration with the Kansas Legislature not meeting its financial obligations to fully fund special education. “Why don’t districts sue the state when it does not meet its financial responsibilities?” asked Board President Kelly Jones. She added that she understands the costs of litigation are often prohibitive, referring to the successful Gannon school finance lawsuit. The board told Frick that it wants a closer look at the costs of special education and the difference full funding from the state would make.

The Special Education Team celebrated parent and community partnerships. A small group of parents lead the Lawrence Special Education Advisory Committee, which comes together monthly to connect parents with one another. This group developed a parent handbook and hosts family activities. Other partnerships highlighted included relationships with KU, LMH Health, Joblink, ECKAN Head Start, Early Childhood Local Interagency Coordinating Council, and postsecondary partners.

The team said that it wants to celebrate the district’s special education staff, collaborative negotiations with teachers and staff, Community Connections at Pinckney, a service to young adults ages 18-21. This program moved this year from East Heights to Pinckney. Another celebration: a board-approved hiring stipend for recruiting certified special education staff.

Besides hiring staff, special education administrators also mentioned ongoing challenges with meeting the varied needs of staff with professional development opportunities, and limited available resources.

“I appreciate all that your team does for students,” said board member Erica Hill.