



## USD 497 News Release

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**December 11, 2023**

### **Special Recognition**

During a District Showcase on Monday, the Lawrence Board of Education recognized celebrations from West Middle School and the Lawrence College and Career Center and Academy. West Interim Principal Therese Edgecomb honored the school's wrestling team, coached by Chad Aberle and Kenny St. Pierre, for its middle school championship. The West Chorale, directed by Garrett Viets, performed.

LCCC and Academy Principal Dr. Bill DeWitt and Dr. Kelly Welch, Family and Consumer Science Education teacher, recognized high school students earning national Child Development Certification. Dr. Welch said that these students will now work to complete 480 hours of service with community partner Princeton Children's Center, and then will graduate career-ready and able to work as lead teachers in licensed early childhood centers.

Several of the students shared that the program changed their mindset toward their educations and their futures. "This class was absolutely amazing, and I loved every minute of it," said senior Caden Pennel, who entered the class feeling out of place.

Sophomore Soleil Cummins-Grinnell shared, "A year ago, I couldn't imagine a future for myself. I felt like an empty shell of a person who was burned out and exhausted." The class turned things around. "I felt an instant connection. It felt like I had something to hold onto to keep me afloat... This class saved my life," said Cummins-Grinnell.

"Dropping out sounded really nice. I didn't like kids, but I thought I would try (the class) anyway," said Ryan Carlson, before sharing of the class, future plans, and Dr. Welch, "I love it. I want to be a teacher when I'm older. I want to say, 'thank you' to the best teacher I have ever had in my entire life."

Senior Jana Lindsey also wants to teach. "I had dropped out of school last year... Now, if you ask me, I am going to be a teacher. I am going to have my own daycare and a preschool."

Board member Erica Hill said, "To see this next generation investing in the next generation is invaluable. Thank you so much for stepping up and doing that."

Superintendent Dr. Anthony Lewis agreed, saying that he could not be prouder of the students, their teacher, and their principal. "This is what it's all about, creating programs that benefit all students," he said, wiping his eyes. "You really messed me up tonight."

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### **Recognition of Outgoing Board Members**

Dr. Lewis recognized outgoing board members Hill and Paula Vann, who were elected in 2019 and joined the board in January of 2020, just a few months before schools shut down due to COVID-19. He recounted some of the challenges faced and accomplishments made during their tenure.

“You have been champions for the district’s equity work, raising the achievement of all students, closing opportunity gaps, and holding the district accountable by asking the tough and necessary questions,” Dr. Lewis said.

Both served as board officers. Hill as vice president in 2020-21, president in 2021-22, and past-president last year. Vann was vice president last year.

“You both represent the type of board member I try to be,” said President Kelly Jones. “I am so grateful to both of you for everything you have done.”

### **Middle School Redesign**

The board unanimously approved a recommendation from the Middle School Redesign Committee to implement a Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math, or STEAM, curricular focus for Liberty Memorial Central Middle School (LMCMS), beginning next fall.

“I am super excited about the work that you’ve done. It is the kind of flexibility and different thinking about teaching and learning that really has the potential to transform education for our students,” said Past-President Shannon Kimball.

The board last spring directed the administration to create the committee to develop a plan for repurposing LMCMS to grow enrollment. The committee began meeting in April and 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.”

“Our why is: how can we best meet all of our students needs based on what they are telling us and what our data suggests?” said Laura Leonard, an 18-year veteran teacher at LMCMS.

In addition to making sure students in the LMCMS community and other middle schoolers in the district can attend the school, the committee kept in mind a new state law (House Bill 2567) that takes effect in 2024. It will enable nonresident students to attend any school with space available.

Committee members shared possible curriculum adjustments, course offerings, and examples of community partnerships to support student STEAM learning, described as grounded in hands-on, project-based, interdisciplinary instruction, during which students solving authentic problems. They shared a mock schedule combining English, math, social studies, and science standards during a core time and an inquiry time for teacher-facilitated and student-driven authentic problem-based tasks.

“In the current model, subjects get siloed, and kids do not see connections,” said Josh Spradlin, who has taught at LMCMS for 14 years. “The idea with having a chunk of time that is flexible and integrated would allow us the freedom to choose a topic and cover it fully.”

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Teachers shared that a current middle school class, Project Lead the Way, would serve as the foundation for STEAM challenges and as a connector between education and industry. Offerings might include courses, such as Design and Modeling (3D designs), Automation and Robotics (coding), App Creators (create and design apps), Computer Science for Innovators and Makers, Energy and the Environment, Flight and Space, Science of Technology, Magic of Electrons, Green Architecture, and Medical Detectives.

“Every bit of redesign is talking about things that you are not sure yet how they are going to work. The committee has given a lot of time and a lot of effort, and we still have a lot of work to do. I am appreciative of them and their work,” said Chief Academic Officer Patrick Kelly, “The best thing is to get started and let people see it.”

The committee plans to schedule student and parent nights, so the community can experience what inquiry-based project learning looks like. “Some of this instruction might be the very thing that motivates students,” added Jones.

The STEAM plan also includes an annual fine arts requirement, starting with sixth graders completing a two-week exploration of band, choir, orchestra, art, and theater, before selecting a focus area.

### Consent Agenda

As part of its consent agenda, the board approved:

- A service agreement with Tech Electronics of Kansas for testing, monitoring, and inspections of fire alarm systems for \$50,512.50 from the Facilities and Operations general fund.
- A three-year agreement with the Southeast Kansas Education Service Center – Greenbush to continue to lease space at Wakarusa Valley at a cost of \$5,874.53/month.
- A three-year agreement with Johnson Controls, Inc. to provide preventative maintenance to district building systems for \$58,959/year from the Facilities and Operations general fund.
- Support for the building of a shade structure over the picnic area on the playground at Hillcrest for up to \$15,000 from the Capital Outlay Fund and \$25,000 from Grants and Gifts.
- Use of additional funds for the continued costs of AWS - Disaster Recovery purchased through ConvergeOne at \$16,000, for a total of \$35,000 to be paid from the Technology general fund.
- Agreements with ABCreative for purchase/installation of playground equipment for Langston Hughes, Prairie Park, Sunflower, and Woodlawn for \$365,270 from the Facilities and Operations Capital Outlay fund and a Langston Hughes PTO donation.
- Acceptance of the Fiscal Year 2023 Audit, which is favorable and shows no significant weaknesses.
- Purchase of 15 licenses from the Art of Education Flex Curriculum for K-8 Visual Arts for five years for \$59,334. This follows a recommendation from a curriculum leadership team of K-12 art teachers and their 10-month curriculum review.
- Amendments to the Board Governance and Operations Manual.
- Revisions to Board Policy JBC - Enrollment to remove language regarding nonresident students due to changes in state law.
- A Certified Memorandum of Understanding for horizontal movement for 2023-2024 that adds a February deadline for processing mid-year horizontal movement to allow employees who complete credits mid-year or miss the August 20 deadline to receive a salary increase for the second half of the contract year.