



USD 497 News Release

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Board Approves 2024-2025 School Calendar; Hears Staffing Update

Special Recognition

The Lawrence Board of Education on Monday recognized two school showcases. Sunflower Principal Amanda Green shared information about cross-grade level weekly meetings to build relationships and engage all students. Members of the Garden Club, who call themselves the Gnomies, also meet weekly, but before school. They shared that they liked working in the school gardens and have been surprised by growing “humungous sweet potatoes,” “weird” ground cherries, and “tomatoes shaped like pears” that “grow over everything.” Special education teacher Danita Long sponsors the Garden Club.

Billy Mills Middle School Principal Dr. Andrew Taylor recognized the school’s Autism teacher, Rhea Palkhiwala, for making a positive difference in the daily lives of her scholars and their families, and school colleagues.

Effective Employees Update

Members of the district’s Human Resources Team shared an update about staffing. They noted the following celebrations and areas for continued improvement:

- The district has hired 95 certified staff, as of Jan. 1. This compares to 130 certified hires during the 2022-23 school year and 164 during 2020-2021.
- Classified hiring numbers have increased, including for food service and custodial positions that have been challenging to fill since the pandemic began.
- There are currently 30 certified openings, compared to 33 in September; and 43 classified openings, compared to 52 in September and 114 in September of 2022.
- The substitute fill rate for January was 94.5%, an improvement from 87.5% in the fall.
- There are 1,623 district employees, compared to 1,692 in the fall of 2022.
- There have been 19 certified midyear exits this year, compared to 29 last year.
- End-of-year certified exits dropped by 31 last year, from 184 exits in 2022-2023 to 153 in 2022-2023.
- The district has an 82% certified and an 80% classified retention rate.
- A March 2023 survey completed by 320 classified staff shows 62% of those employees as “disengaged.” This is based on how respondents rated job satisfaction, such as level of pride, accomplishment, motivation, expectations, professional growth, voice and opinion, commitment of colleagues, and feedback from administration.
- The classified survey showed areas of high satisfaction in relationships with coworkers and supervisors and areas of low satisfaction in the responsiveness of the district office, ongoing training received, opportunities to receive feedback, and pay. (Classified staff completed the survey last spring, prior to the board’s approval of significant salary increases.)
- Human Resources staff have expanded recruitment, including efforts to hire more staff of color, to Tennessee State and the University of Texas at El Paso.
- A new Kansas program will provide tuition assistance to aspiring teachers earning a bachelor’s degree while working alongside teachers as paid apprentices.

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2024-2025 School Calendar

The board approved the 2024-2025 school calendar as recommended by the district's Calendar Committee. School begins in the fall with a half-day of transition for Grades K, 6, and 9 on August 13 and the K-12 Regular Schedule on August 14. Early childhood programs open August 20.

The last day of school for seniors and Kennedy early childhood preschoolers is May 16. The school year ends with a half-day for all other students on May 22. Lawrence Virtual School Graduation is scheduled May 17, followed by Lawrence High on May 21, and Free State's Graduation on May 22.

Next year's school calendar includes a week of fall break, November 25-29. Winter break is scheduled from December 20-January 3, and spring break aligns with KU's on March 17-21.

Like this year's school calendar, next year's also includes one inclement weather make-up day in April. If the make-up day is used, the state "forgives" another inclement weather day, so the district would not make up lost instructional time on a second "snow day."

The calendar includes 170 elementary, 173 middle school, and 174 high school student contact days and 186 teacher contract days.

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