



USD 497 News Release

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Board Reviews Planning Process, Makes Recommendations for Future Changes

During a special meeting of the Lawrence Board of Education Friday, March 8, the Certified Negotiations Team presented a revised plan for making up instructional time. The district shared the revised plan with staff and families Friday night. It can also be found at www.usd497.org/News.

Instructional Time

The board-approved 2023-2024 school calendar met the state minimum requirements of 1,116 hours. A make-up plan is necessary because the district used four inclement weather days in January. In addition, a state auditor determined that 1.5 days of parent-teacher conferences held prior to the start of school in August could not count toward state requirements. This is the third year the district offered conferences before school. The state audits districts' school year schedules the following year.

Planning Timeline

Executive Director of Human Resources Kristen Ryan reviewed the timeline of developing the original make-up plan announced to the school community March 8 and replaced by the revised plan March 9.

March 1: The certified negotiations team, made up of representatives of the board, administration, and Lawrence Education Association (LEA) members, met to discuss options for making up time. The team agreed to add five minutes to the beginning of each day for the rest of the school year and four hours of staff professional development. Later, district administration learned from the state auditor about the additional 1.5 days to be made up due to August conferences. Staff worked Friday night and through the weekend on options.

March 4: District administration met to discuss information learned from the auditor, calculate instructional hours, notify the LEA leadership of the auditor's concerns and the new calculations, and inform the board.

March 5: District administration met with secondary school administrators to review calculations and the original make-up plan. Middle schools were short 17 hours, 32 minutes; Free State High, 21 hours, 3 minutes; and Lawrence High, 13 hours, 20 minutes. Principals created new daily bell schedules. District leaders examined the bell schedules to ensure they complied with state requirements and the auditor's guidance, confirmed them with principals, and sent them to the auditor.

March 6: District administration received the auditor's approval late afternoon, notified principals, and met with the LEA president and negotiations co-chairs. The original make-up plan was written and a link to the following day's staff online newsletter that included the plan was sent to the board and staff at 10 p.m.

March 7: The district sent the original make-up plan to school families at 10 a.m. The LEA president informed administration of staff concerns that the changes violated the Master Agreement and needed to be discussed through the interest-based bargaining process. A negotiations meeting was scheduled for the next morning. The board and administration received concerns about the plan from students and families.

March 8: The Certified Negotiations Team met in person from 10:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. with more than 175 staff participating online, despite it being their day off. Ideas were shared and checked using the state's "instructional minutes calculator." The team reached consensus around a revised make-up plan. Board President Jones called a special meeting of the board at 4:15 p.m. to discuss the revisions.

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Jones, who serves on the negotiations team, also met Friday afternoon with leaders of PAL-CWA, the classified support staff union. Under the revised plan, some nine-month classified staff will work two more days during the last week of school. The General Fund will cover additional transportation and staff work day costs.

“Righting the Ship” Comments

Board President Kelly Jones – “I want to acknowledge that the way that this occurred was not in keeping with the IBB process, and as a district that practices restorative justice, I don’t think it’s too much of a leap to say it was our intention to repair the harm. I certainly want to apologize for any confusion we might be causing families and staff with sending out a new schedule now and any harm it might have done to trust and our relationship.”

LEA Co-Chair Josh Spradlin – “We have had a good relationship... You want everything to work out perfect. This was not that situation, but that’s how you learn. We can look back on this and figure out...let’s not repeat some of those mistakes.”

Free State senior Becca Craft, a student board member – “I think on the student side of things, everything has been really confusing. I am grateful for everyone who really stepped up and listened to the student voice...I’d prefer that there was some sort of student involvement prior to these decisions being made in the future.”

Board Past President Shannon Kimball – “I think that we have to acknowledge that the way this (original make-up plan) was communicated out to families certainly didn’t meet my expectations, and I don’t think it met our families’ expectations. With a decision this impactful to families, when it went out to staff, it needed to go out to families as well.”

Superintendent Dr. Anthony Lewis – “We always look back and reflect on what could we have done better? One of the things I want to work on is a plan for the beginning of the year that maps out if we have three snow days or if we have eight, this is what the schedule will look like, so families and staff will know what to expect.”

Executive Director of Human Resources Kristen Ryan – “The district is looking at building in additional school hours to have a cushion and to avoid having to worry about another shortage.” The board, administration, and Calendar Committee will revisit the 2024-2025 school calendar, approved by the board in February, for potential changes.

President Kelly Jones – “I observed all the work that all of you did and how much all of you care about students. How we tried to honor the educators, and how we were very sure to really change this as quickly as we could when we found out we did something wrong. I am grateful for all the work that all of you put in.

“I am really proud of you. This is a really amazing school district, and you do good work. It is an honor to have sent my children through here, and it’s an honor to be able to be part of this and watch other children go through. Thank you for everything you do.”

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