



USD 497 News Release

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May 28, 2024

Board Approves Core Elementary Math Resource & 2024-2025 Capital Outlay Plan

2024-2025 School Calendar Changes

As part of its consent agenda, the school board approved two changes to the 2024-2025 school calendar. The first moves Kindergarten Orientation from April 2 to April 16, 2025. The second, aligns high school graduation dates with our district's current practice for Tuesday/Wednesday evening ceremonies, moving Lawrence High Graduation from May 21 to May 20, 2025, and Free State High Graduation from May 22 to May 21, 2025.

Purchase of Core Elementary Math Resource

The board unanimously approved spending \$228,464 from the 2023-2024 instructional resource fund and \$495,385 from the same fund in 2024-2025 for a total of \$723,849 for the purchase of the math primary resource "Open Up Math" from Open up Resources. This fund is supported, in part, by student fees, and earmarked over multiple years when our district plans major resource adoptions like this one.

In 2010, our district conducted an elementary math curriculum review, adopted Math Expressions in 2012, re-adopted Math Expressions in 2019, and extended that subscription in 2023. Staff began this curriculum review process last fall, researching evidence-based resources and selecting two resources to pilot.

The Elementary Math Curriculum Pilot Committee of educators and building administrators from Deerfield, Hillcrest, Prairie Park, Schwegler, Sunset Hill, Quail Run, and Woodlawn shared feedback to inform the recommendation. More than 70 educators in five schools participated in the pilot with goals to select a resource to transform teaching and learning, promote student discourse, build conceptual understanding through problem solving, and provide high-quality, ongoing professional development for educators.

Cynthia Emery, Quail Run's academic interventionist, said of the pilot, "I watched my students transform from reluctant to racing me down the hall to the classroom and calling themselves 'math nerds'... I need to give as many opportunities for my students to be doing the math as possible, and this resource does that."

In addition, the team kept district K-5 math goals at the forefront. They are: 1) By the end of the 2025-26 school year, 80% of students in grades K-2 will score as low-risk or on-track on the Spring FastBridge aMath or earlyMath assessment, and 2) By the end of the 2025-26 school year, the number of students in grades 3-5 scoring at level 3 and 4 on KAP Math Assessment will increase by 10% each school year.

Staff shared additional feedback with the board about Open Up Math:

- It puts student thinking front and center.
- Students engage in problem solving using their own ideas and strategies throughout the entire lesson.
- Students view themselves as capable learners of mathematics.
- It is a standards-aligned resource.
- It includes ongoing, robust job-embedded professional development.
- It is designed to focus heavily on mathematics content and effective teaching practices rather than just helping teachers understand the resource.
- It aligns with our district's strategic plan in the areas of cohesive curriculum and effective employees.
- It balances all three components of rigor (conceptual understanding, procedural fluency, and student application).
- There is a K-12 connection with the middle schools' selection of Desmos.

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“We realize that this is about more than putting a resource in front of students..., this is an opportunity for us to value our staff, to develop them, and to build their understanding and knowledge,” said Sunset Hill Elementary Principal Jeremy Philipp.

“I have to thank the teachers and principals for spending hundreds of hours on this recommendation and on the pilot. It is an open-access curriculum, so teachers and parents can get into it on their own. It has been since 2010, so we are ready for a new curriculum resource,” said Denise Johnson, elementary curriculum director.

Capital Outlay Plan

The board unanimously approved the 2024-2025 projects outlined in the Capital Improvement Plan. This annual planning document identifies the scope of school facility maintenance and renovation projects and equipment and furniture purchases for next year, as well as compares them to the current year’s spending and includes estimated budgets for three additional school years. Planned improvements, which are subject to change, are based on considerations such as safety and security, educational effectiveness, operational efficiency, equity, cost-effectiveness, and the availability of resources. Projects that cost \$20,000 or more require a bidding process and return to the board for final approval.

The board levies the state-maximum 8 mills in local property taxes for the Capital Outlay Fund, raising approximately \$12 million. Capital expenditures are restricted by state law for the acquisition of land, the construction, reconstruction, repair, and remodeling of facilities; and the purchase of furnishings and equipment (K.S.A. 72-8804). When our district plans large capital projects, funds are earmarked over multiple years. Moody’s Investor Service, which provides credit ratings for governmental entities, recommends USD 497 maintain an unencumbered cash balance of at least \$8 million in its Capital Outlay Fund.

For 2024-2025, \$17 million is budgeted in the Capital Outlay Fund. The breakdown of these funds is 51.4% for facilities – boilers, fire/safety systems, flooring, HVAC, roofs, building exteriors, and site improvements, including asphalt/concrete, athletic fields, and playgrounds, etc.; 26.7% for technology – cyber security software, classroom technology, security, devices, and technology leases, etc.; 9.3% for equipment and furnishings – food service, custodial/maintenance, building casework, furniture, vehicles, and copier leases, etc.; 5.1% trades wages (electricians, HVAC technicians, locksmith, construction workers, etc.); 4.4% for school allocations; 2.2% for instruction – non-consumable curriculum, and fine arts, career and technology education, and physical education equipment, etc.; and .9% activities and athletics.

“It is important that we are keeping up with building repairs so we can extend the useful life of our public facilities,” said Cynde Frick, executive director of finance.

Among specific projects planned next year are HVAC/boiler replacements at Kennedy, Langston Hughes, and Cordley; roof replacements at Langston Hughes, Sunflower, and Cordley; asphalt and concrete work at Deerfield, Schwegler, Billy Mills Middle School, and both high schools; technology improvements extending wi-fi to the high school outdoor athletic facilities and working toward extending the district’s private fiber Wide Area Network to students’ homes; equipment purchases, including new risers and two additional student vans for each of the high schools; and improvements to the Cordley and New York playgrounds, Liberty Memorial Central Middle School’s auditorium, and both high schools’ tennis courts.

“As we replace chillers, the new equipment is more efficient and produces energy savings. The other thing we need to get into is our building automation systems and how we can program them to help us save energy and utility costs,” said Dr. Larry Englebrick, chief operations officer.

Executive Session

The board also met in executive session to discuss contract negotiations.