

Universal public education is the bedrock of our democracy and is a fundamental right that does and should provide for each child the opportunity to reach that child's potential. Lawrence USD 497 is committed to continuous academic growth and high achievement for students of all races, backgrounds, and abilities so that students graduate on time prepared for success in college and careers.

2021 Special Priority Issues

Kansas public schools continue to need additional support for safe and successful operations during the continuing COVID-19 pandemic

Lawrence USD 497:

- Advocates for allocation of additional operational funds to PK-12 schools to cover the extra costs of extraordinary alterations to school operations during the COVID-19 pandemic, including health and safety supplies such as masks and other personal protective equipment for students and staff, supplies for extra cleaning and sanitizing, and access to capital funds for ventilation and air quality improvements in school buildings.
- Urges the legislature to consider hold harmless provisions to support school districts through significant and likely temporary financial losses they are experiencing in enrollment, weightings, transportation costs, staffing, and remote learning needs due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Support for High-Quality Learning Opportunities

Lawrence USD 497:

- Advocates for continued expansion of support for universal access to high quality broadband services to support the learning needs of students and families during and after the pandemic.
- Urges the legislature to provide flexibility to districts in areas such as instructional hours so that remote learning options can be structured to support good instructional pedagogy in remote learning environments.

Support for Additional Student and Staff Social-Emotional Needs

Lawrence USD 497:

- Advocates for increased support and community partnerships to meet the mental health needs of students and staff.

Continuing Priority Issues

The Kansas Constitution and our state's election laws must support effective school operations

Lawrence USD 497:

- Opposes amending Article 6 of the Kansas Constitution to alter or lessen the legislature's constitutional duty to provide suitable funding to public schools.

USD 497 Lawrence Public Schools 2021 Legislative Priorities

- Supports having school board members elected in non-partisan elections held in the spring.
- Supports the role of an independent judiciary in enforcing constitutional provisions and opposes either changing the selection process for judges or limiting the ability of the courts to enforce these provisions, which would weaken the separation of powers in Kansas.

Kansas tax policy and the school finance formula must work together to fully support an equitable and adequate system of financial support for public education

Lawrence USD 497:

- Advocates for stable, reliable, adequate, and equitable funding of the current school finance formula, as approved by the Gannon court, and encourages the legislature to adopt tax policy that will generate revenue sufficient to fully fund the school finance formula for current and future generations of Kansas students.
- Requests that special education services be fully funded at the required 92% of excess cost.
- Supports increased funding for school- and community-based mental health services, including funding for additional school counselors, social workers, and psychologists to address the social and emotional needs of the entire student population.
- Supports expanding funding for universal preschool and before- and after-school programs.

The legislature should protect and maintain the spheres of authority designated to the State Board of Education and locally elected school boards as set forth in the Kansas Constitution

Lawrence USD 497:

- Believes that a district's curriculum should be established by the local board of education, not by state statute.
- Supports the continued implementation of the State Board of Education's Kansans Can vision, the KESA process, and the Kansas College and Career Ready Standards.
- Supports maximizing local flexibility in using funds, including repeal or modification of the "65 percent for instruction" statutory goal that excludes services and activities that support student learning from inclusion as instructional expenses.

The legislature should support recruitment and retention of highly qualified teachers, administrators, and support staff

Lawrence USD 497:

- Supports a long-term, sustained commitment to state funding for KPERS, including changes to make KPERS a more attractive retirement program to support recruitment and retention of highly qualified teachers, administrators, and support staff.
- Supports reinstating the previous working after retirement laws to allow KPERS retired staff to continue working without penalty.

The legislature should prioritize policies that support student wellness and safety

USD 497 Lawrence Public Schools 2021 Legislative Priorities

Lawrence USD 497 supports the following policies to improve student wellness and safety and to support the school district's work in these areas so that students are ready and able to access teaching and learning:

- State funding for vision, dental, and other school-based health screenings for students pre-K through 12.
- Anti-vaping initiatives and raising the age for purchase and possession of tobacco and nicotine products to 21 (Tobacco 21 proposals).
- Returning the Communities that Care survey to opt-out rather than opt-in so that the district can have more complete and accurate data to direct health, wellness, and student safety initiatives.
- Red Flag laws and firearm safety proposals such as closing the background check loophole. Schools cannot carry the burden of student safety on their own; community policies must address the presence of and access to deadly weapons within the community.