

Lawrence Public Schools Fall 2024 Engagement: A Community Conversation

Report of Key Themes, Patterns,
and Next Steps



LAWRENCE
Public Schools

Board of Education
& the Lawrence Public Schools Community

Dr. Jeanice Kerr Swift, Interim Superintendent

January 27, 2025

Lawrence Public Schools 2024 Fall Engagement



“Everything good in life - a cool business, a great romance, a powerful social movement - begins with a conversation. Talking with each other, one to one, is human beings’ most powerful form of attunement. Conversations help us understand and connect with others in ways no other species can.”
- Daniel Pink, To Sell Is Human

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Part 1: Introduction

Letter from Superintendent



Monday, January 27, 2025

Hello, Lawrence Public Schools Students, Staff and Community,

It's an important time in the Lawrence Public Schools as we come together to share the report of the thoughts, perceptions, and ideas received during an expansive community engagement endeavor: Lawrence Public Schools Fall 2024 Engagement: A Community Conversation.

Our deepest gratitude to everyone - students, parents, and families; teachers and staff, school and district leaders; team members from across the organization. Key to this endeavor are also the many individuals from nonprofit, business, higher education, and community leaders who participated in a wide array of community group conversations. Widely varied perspectives and experiences of individuals are reflected in this effort: from fifty-plus-year Lawrence residents, alumni, and staff from a continuum of decades, alongside recent newcomers to our community, parents, and families of our youngest students.

The investment of so many to take time to share their thoughts about our schools is a strong indicator of community care and vibrancy. Principals and team leaders across the organization also organized and convened conversations, and data from those responses added meaningful depth and weight to this work. Thank you to all who committed time and energy to convening a group for conversation and/or to sharing your experiences and insights regarding Lawrence Public Schools.

A strength of this report lies in the vast amount of data, representing the perceptions and experiences of thousands of individuals sharing tens of thousands of thoughts and ideas.

Additionally, the import of this information is also reflected in the clarity of key themes and patterns the data yields. The data reveal a clarity, even a poetry of sorts, with fundamental themes reflected from across many conversations and groups and from within the multitude of thoughts shared.

The timing of this report is also critical; hearing comprehensively from the community now, following the many challenges the district has weathered over recent years, is beneficial to support an openly stated, collective desire to move forward together.

The overall themes reported are those informed by the perceptions and experiences of the many respondents. The key patterns shared are those that resonated widely, and recommended next steps emerge directly from knowledgeable participants. The data speaks powerfully to the collective experience of those who attend, live, work, and give their energy in support of the Lawrence Public Schools.

During the coming weeks of 2025, we will take steps to act in response to the focus areas illuminated from this engagement report; our work over the coming year will be focused to move forward in the directions this report illuminates. Collaboration, innovation, diligence and a disciplined focus will be required to meet the challenges we face as an organization, to turn the page together, and to achieve the priorities articulated here. Over the coming months, we will check in for ongoing conversation with stakeholders across the community to continue to hear input and feedback on our progress together.

Robust, successful communities are known for their care for the children and young people served in their high quality public schools. This report is proof that in Lawrence, we are most fortunate to live in such an engaged, vibrant community, one with care for students as our shared and abiding north star, both our direction and our hope.

Thank you for all you continue to do to support the educational experiences of our more than 10,500 students and the remarkable teachers, staff, and leaders who serve them each day.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jeanice Kerr Swift".

Jeanice Kerr Swift
Interim Superintendent of Schools
Lawrence Public Schools

Overview of the Engagement Endeavor

During the fall months of 2024 in the Lawrence Public Schools, we engaged with students, staff, families, and community members in an ongoing conversation to better understand the collective experiences and perspectives, the thoughts and ideas, and the best hopes and dreams for the future of our children and our district.

The premise for the engagement effort is that no one knows better the strengths and celebrations, the challenges, and the areas for improvement than the students, school families, and staff who make up our school community and the Lawrence partners and citizens who support and enhance the work to serve the children and young people of Lawrence, Kansas.

We asked open-ended questions in three critical areas of inquiry:

- *In what areas are we doing well, and should continue to strengthen?*
- *In what areas do we have opportunities for improvement?*
- *What do you see as the top priorities as we move forward together this year?*

This report includes the outcome of the thoughts shared in response to these essential questions, including a summary of the input provided by students, parents, staff, and community members through:

- written responses to the online survey,
- information shared in face-to-face team, school-based, and department meetings across the organization,
- thoughts and ideas shared at in-person district-convened community conversations, and
- in community groups.

In working with the data collected to understand key themes and patterns, we were fortunate to have the expertise and support of an outside analysis completed by a research team at the University of Kansas. We are most grateful for their support.

As we begin 2025, we look forward to sharing this information and convening continuing conversations to clarify and gain input on priority next steps as we move forward in the Lawrence Public Schools.

Executive Summary

During the fall months of 2024, Lawrence Public Schools engaged in conversations with students, staff, families, and community members to gather insights into the district's strengths, challenges, and future priorities.

The goal was to tap into the lived experiences and perspectives of those who make up the school community, recognizing that the best ideas for improvement come from the people directly involved in the organization.

Three critical questions were posed:

1. ***What areas are we doing well and should continue to strengthen?***
2. ***Where do we have opportunities for improvement?***
3. ***What should be our top priorities for the upcoming year?***

Feedback was gathered through surveys, face-to-face meetings, and community conversations, with the assistance of a research team from the University of Kansas to analyze the data.

Areas of Strength in this Reporting:

- Represents a **vast amount of data**, reflecting the perceptions and experiences of thousands of individuals sharing tens of thousands of thoughts and ideas.
- The **clarity of key themes and patterns** the data yields. Fundamental themes are reflected from within and across many conversations and groups.
- The **timing of this report proves critical**; hearing from the community now, a key moment to pivot & move forward together.

Areas of Awareness about this Reporting:

- Perception versus fact - always the interplay exists when collecting experience data - within some of the resonant patterns, details may lack full factual substance or perhaps be outdated to the current time.
- It is critical to recognize that **all organizations rise and fall along the fault lines of the perceptions of its constituents**.
- The goal of this engagement endeavor and report is to collect and share key patterns reflected in the thoughts and ideas of participants in order to better understand the experience of our community.
- We receive the perceptions that have been shared, as they are shared, and this fall engagement was integral to receiving and acknowledging perspectives as both are critical to successfully navigating the way forward.
- Following the many challenges and difficulties of recent years, as we move forward, we will take steps to build in frequent reporting with transparency, consistent internal and external communication, featuring 2-way interactions and use of other tools to clarify when needed; these steps will prove critical to rebuilding trust and collaboration.

- When appropriate, the use of outside confirmation sources (such as the KU research team to analyze the community engagement response data featured in this report) to balance and document facts around issues of concern will prove key and critical.

Key themes emerged in the responses.

Strengths Identified:

- **Dedicated Teachers and Staff:** Educators were recognized for their hard work and commitment to student success despite challenges such as overcrowding and limited resources.
- **Inclusivity Efforts:** Programs to promote inclusion, particularly of LGBTQ+ and neurodiverse students, were praised, though some felt these efforts should be more consistently applied across schools.
- **Community Connection:** There is a strong sense of unity and pride in the district, supported by programs like AVID, environmental science, arts, and extracurricular activities.

Areas for Improvement:

- **Safety and Discipline:** Many respondents voiced concerns about safety, including bullying, violence, and inadequate discipline enforcement. There were calls for better security measures, such as metal detectors, and more consistent enforcement of discipline policies.
- **Resource Allocation:** Overcrowded classrooms and insufficient funding for special education were significant concerns. Many suggested reallocating resources from administrative roles to classroom support.
- **Communication:** Frustration was expressed over the district's lack of timely and clear communication regarding policies, safety incidents, and curriculum changes.
- **Academic Rigor:** A recurring theme was a desire for a stronger academic focus, particularly in foundational skills like reading, writing, and math. Some respondents also expressed concerns about grade inflation.

Priorities:

- **Teacher Retention and Compensation:** Increasing teacher salaries, improving working conditions, and reducing turnover were identified as crucial for maintaining a high-quality education.
- **Safety and Discipline:** Ensuring safer school environments by improving discipline practices and security measures, including enhanced presence of School Resource Officers (SROs).
- **Resource Allocation:** Reducing class sizes and better distributing resources to ensure more equitable support for students and teachers.
- **Academic Excellence:** Focusing on academic rigor, particularly in core subjects, and ensuring consistent curricula and interventions for struggling students.
- **Transparency and Communication:** Improving communication between the district and the community, ensuring timely and clear updates on district policies and initiatives.

Themes Across Groups:

- **Community and Student-Centered Strengths:** The district has a strong sense of community and values its educators and student achievements.
- **Need for Improved Communication:** Respondents called for more transparent and consistent communication across the district, from policy updates to everyday interactions.
- **Resource Challenges:** Both staff and students noted resource gaps, particularly in special education and support services, which need to be addressed to create more equitable learning environments.
- **Focus on Teacher Support and Retention:** There was broad agreement that teacher retention is a key priority, with calls for competitive salaries and improved support systems to reduce burnout.
- **Behavior and Safety Concerns:** Addressing safety issues, particularly bullying and disruptive behavior, was a consistent priority for all groups.

Moving Forward:

The district plans to use this feedback to guide future strategic decisions, with a focus on:

- Investing in teachers through better compensation and support.
- Ensuring consistent safety measures across schools.
- Improving academic programs and outcomes, particularly by offering a menu of rigorous, robust programs and enrichment opportunities.
- Enhancing communication and transparency to build trust with families and the community.
- Promoting inclusivity and equity, particularly for marginalized students.

The community's feedback underscores a desire for meaningful, actionable change in key areas like safety, academic rigor, teacher support, and resource allocation.

The next steps include articulating action steps, implementing changes that reflect the priorities and concerns of the community, and continuing engagement and conversations to receive ongoing feedback from the Lawrence Public Schools community.

Part 2: Participation

During the Fall of 2024, Interim Superintendent Swift and school and district leaders engaged the community in a series of conversations to hear directly from students, teachers and staff, parents/caregivers, and community members.

The conversations were organized to include diverse voices, with meetings held at centralized locations, such as middle school campuses and the public library, as well as conversations with community groups, such as the Chamber of Commerce Governmental Affairs Committee and the Lawrence Interfaith Alliance (a more complete list of groups may be reviewed in Addenda B).

Staff, students, and parents/caregivers at each of our individual school sites participated in conversations. Additionally, in-person meetings were conducted with teams and department staff across the organization. In all, more than 55 in-person team/group conversations were convened, and approximately 1,193 individual responses were recorded in the online written survey.

Participants were asked to respond to three questions:

1. In what areas are we doing well, and should continue to strengthen?
2. In what areas do we have opportunities for improvement?
3. What do you see as the top priorities as we move forward together this year?

Small groups wrote notes on chart paper to capture conversation highlights and shared those responses with the whole group at the end of each meeting.

This report includes a summary of the responses collected during in-person meetings.

Each group's feedback provided unique perspectives based on their experiences and priorities. The following sections of this report categorize feedback across these key groups—parents/caregivers, staff, students, and districtwide community members—to analyze themes and priorities from these varied interactions. This ensures that all voices are represented in this current report and in future strategic planning efforts.

Additionally, the district provided a community survey to gain additional input.

Overall, 1,193 people responded to at least 1 question in the survey.

Of these respondents, 781 identified themselves as parents or guardians of a student in the district, 129 as staff members and parents or guardians of a student in the district, 115 as staff members, 113 as students, 41 as community members, and 14 chose not to respond to this question.

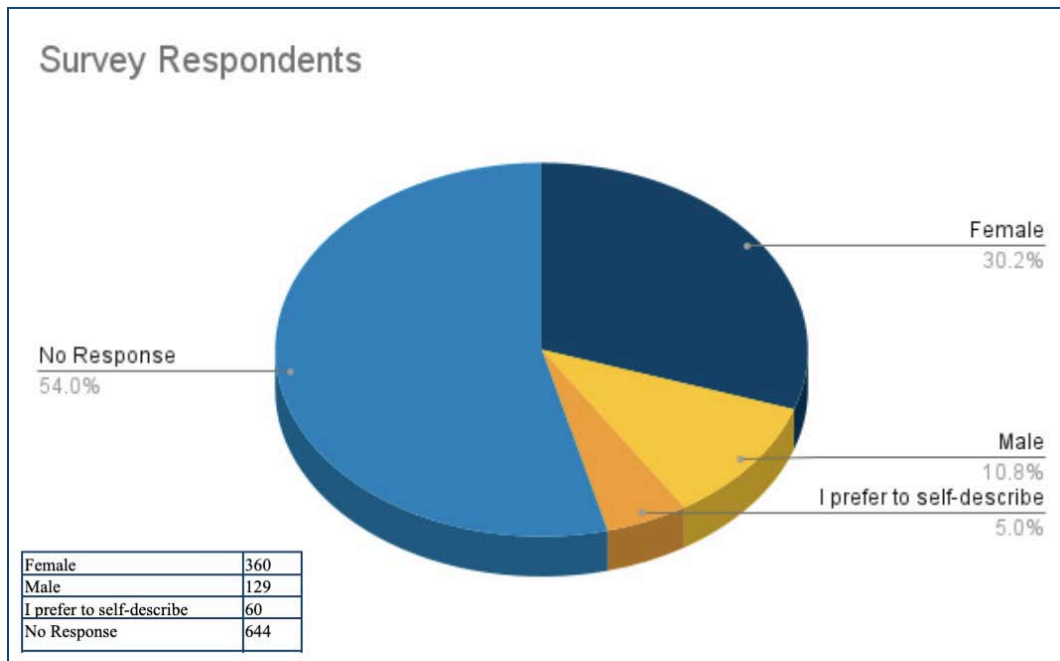
Figure 2.1

Written Survey Participation

Respondent Role	Number of Respondents
Staff Members	115
Parents/Guardians	781
Staff Members & Parents	129
Students	113
Community Members	41
No Response	14
Total All Respondents	1,193

Figure 2.2

Written Survey Identity of Respondents



Part 3: What We Heard: Key Themes and Patterns

Written Survey Reporting and Analysis of Data - University of Kansas Research Team

We value the work of a partner research team at the University of Kansas that worked to analyze the massive data set from the online/written survey. Its analysis follows.

The district asked survey participants to respond to three questions:

1. *In what areas are we doing well? What are our strengths?*
2. *In what areas are we not doing well? How can we improve?*
3. *What should be our top priorities in the coming year?*

Size of the Data Set is a Strength of this Survey Endeavor

All survey responses included about 15,000 sentences and 110,000 words.

The district survey highlights community perspectives on district strengths, areas for improvement, and future priorities. Key strengths cited include teacher dedication and inclusivity efforts, while concerns focus on safety, discipline, resource allocation, and academic rigor. Stakeholders emphasized the need for smaller class sizes, improved teacher retention, and transparent communication. This report summarizes the feedback for each question.

Question 1: In What Areas Are We Doing Well? What Are Our Strengths?

Respondents identified several areas of strength in the district:

- The community shared that the district's greatest strength lies in its dedicated teachers and staff, who were repeatedly praised for their hard work, creativity, and commitment to student success despite significant challenges, such as overcrowding and resource limitations.
- Specific programs, such as AVID and environmental science, were highlighted as successful initiatives that positively impacted students.
- Respondents also commended the district's efforts to foster inclusivity, particularly for LGBTQ+ and neurodiverse students.
- These programs and policies were recognized as valuable steps toward creating a welcoming and equitable environment for all learners.
- However, some noted that these inclusivity efforts could benefit from more consistent implementation across all schools.
- Participants acknowledged the district's sense of community, fostered by the hard work of staff and through various valued programs, as a key strength.

Question 2: In What Areas Are We Not Doing Well? How Can We Improve?

Respondents identified several areas requiring significant improvement:

- Safety and discipline issues, including concerns about violence, bullying, and inadequate consequences for disruptive behavior, were prevalent.
- Stronger enforcement of discipline policies and better safety measures, such as metal detectors and additional SROs, were frequently requested.
- Many criticized administrative practices, citing inefficiencies, poor transparency, nepotism, and a lack of accountability.
- High administrative salaries and perceived mismanagement of resources were recurring themes, with calls for reallocating funds from district offices to classrooms.
- Resource allocation and class sizes emerged as major concerns, with overcrowded classrooms and insufficient funding for supplies and special education highlighted as critical issues.
- Respondents also expressed frustration with communication from district leadership, citing untimely or unclear updates on policies and safety incidents.
- Additionally, widespread dissatisfaction with academic rigor was present, along with concerns about grade inflation and insufficient focus on fundamental skills like reading, writing, and math.

Question 3: What Should Be Our Top Priorities in the Coming Year?

- Key priorities for the district include teacher retention and compensation, with respondents emphasizing the importance of increasing salaries and improving working conditions to address high turnover and ensure quality education.
- Safety and discipline are also top concerns, with calls for enhanced security measures, consistent enforcement of policies, and proactive approaches to preventing violence and bullying.
- Class size reduction and better resource allocation are seen as essential to improving student outcomes, alongside renewed investments in teacher support.
- Respondents highlighted the need to focus on academic excellence, particularly by strengthening foundational skills and providing consistent curricula.
- Efforts to promote equity and inclusivity—especially in resource distribution and special education support—were also prioritized.
- Transparent and timely communication with families and staff is viewed as critical to rebuilding trust and fostering collaboration.

Analysis of Responses - Themes and Patterns

Question 1. In what areas are we doing well? What are our strengths?

1. Strength: Teaching and Staff Dedication

Teachers and staff were praised for their creativity, hard work, and dedication to student success. Specific strengths like AVID and environmental science were highlighted positively. Teachers and staff are seen as the strongest asset, working hard to provide quality education despite challenges like overcrowding and resource limitations.

2. Strength: Community and Inclusivity

Inclusivity efforts, particularly for LGBTQ+ and neurodiverse students, were recognized as strengths. Families appreciated programs promoting diversity and

equity. Efforts toward inclusivity are appreciated but need to be more consistently implemented across all schools.

3. Strength: Programming Opportunities

Programs such as arts, music, extracurricular activities, and career readiness initiatives were frequently praised. Many respondents highlighted these as successful and impactful elements of the district's offerings.

Question 2. *In what areas are we not doing well? How can we improve?*

1. Area for Improvement: Concerns About Administrative Practices

Administrative inefficiencies, lack of accountability, and worries with resource mismanagement at the district level are significant concerns. Many feel resources are overly concentrated centrally (at ESC) rather than focused on supporting classrooms. Resource allocation and administrative salaries were common concerns.

2. Area for Improvement: Safety and Discipline Issues

Safety concerns were pervasive, with references to violence, bullying, and insufficient consequences for disruptive behavior. Safety is inadequate because of inconsistent discipline enforcement and a lack of preventative measures. Respondents called for stronger enforcement of discipline policies and better safety measures, including consistent SRO presence and secure school facilities.

3. Area for Improvement: Cell Phone Policies and Screen Time

Mixed reactions emerged on cell phone policies. Some supported stricter measures to reduce distractions, while others questioned the practicality of enforcement and the overall impact of technology use on learning and behavior. Opinions are divided, but there is general agreement that excessive screen time (including from district-provided devices) is a problem that needs attention. Enforcement of cell phone policies should not fall solely on teachers.

4. Area for Improvement: Resource Allocation and Class Size

Overcrowded classrooms and inadequate funding for teachers, supplies, and special education were major issues. Respondents frequently mentioned the need to lower class sizes and better compensate teachers to improve recruitment and retention.

5. Area for Improvement: Communication and Transparency

Communication from district administration was viewed as insufficient, with families expressing frustration about late or unclear updates regarding policies, safety incidents, and curriculum changes.

6. Area for Improvement: Focus on Core Academics and Rigor

Parents expressed dissatisfaction with and a desire for more academic rigor, citing grade inflation and lack of focus on fundamental skills like reading, writing, and math. Respondents called for a renewed focus on fundamental academics and higher standards for learning.

Question 3. *What should be our top priorities in the coming year?*

1. Teacher and Staff Retention and Compensation

- a. Concerns: High turnover, uncompetitive pay, and insufficient resources.

- b. Suggestions: Increased salaries, reduced administrative overhead, better working conditions, and more funding for classrooms. Addressing teacher dissatisfaction and burnout is essential for stability and success.

2. Safety and Discipline

- a. Concerns: Gun threats, drugs, violence, vaping, and a lack of enforcement of safety policies.
- b. Suggestions: Metal detectors, pat-downs, clear backpacks, stricter discipline, SRO presence, and improved threat response protocols.

3. Cell Phone Policies

- a. Concerns: Over-reliance on devices, distractions, and enforcement challenges.
- b. Suggestions: The majority of respondents suggest implementing stricter cell phone policies to reduce distractions and improve focus on learning. While there is general agreement that excessive screen time is a problem, opinions are divided on the specifics of enforcement. Many emphasize that enforcement should not fall solely on teachers, and some express concerns about practicality and the impact of technology restrictions on communication during emergencies. Overall, the sentiment leans toward reducing non-educational cell phone use in schools.

4. Class Sizes and Resource Allocation

- a. Concerns: Overcrowded classrooms and concerns with allocation of funding.
- b. Suggestions: Reduce class sizes and redirect funds from administrative roles to classroom support. Prioritizing direct student and teacher support over administrative expenses is necessary for impactful change.

5. Academic Excellence and Core Skills

- a. Concerns: Declining academic rigor, inconsistent curricula, and lack of foundational skills.
- b. Suggestions: Focus on reading, writing, math, and science; provide interventions for struggling students.
- c. A strong emphasis on academic rigor and foundational skills is necessary to address achievement disparities.

6. Administrative Practices and Accountability

- a. Concerns: Inefficiency, nepotism, and expenditures on non-student-facing roles.
- b. Suggestions: Conduct audits, reduce overhead, and reallocate more funds for classrooms.
- c. Greater accountability is necessary to rebuild trust.

In-Person School, Team, and Department-Based Conversations

Principals, team, and department leads worked to facilitate engagement conversations during the fall, both at schools with staff and parent groups, such as site councils and with members of the USD 497 team. Thoughts, ideas, and the data collected from these conversations were compiled and analyzed. Key themes and patterns are summarized below.

	Strengths	Opportunities	Priorities
Parents/ Caregivers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Strong communication at the school level (newsletters, curriculum nights, weekly updates). ● Positive school culture and staff relationships. ● Diverse extracurricular offerings (art, music, PE, STEAM). ● Active PTA and family events fostering engagement. ● Focus on safety and inclusivity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Consistent updates on academic progress and fine arts offerings. ● More robust bullying prevention and behavioral management. ● Equity in resources and smaller class sizes. ● Increased transparency in decision-making (board actions, transitions). ● Expanded social-emotional and mental health supports. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Advocacy for teacher/staff retention through competitive pay. ● Alignment of district goals with clear implementation. ● Increased funding and resource allocation for classrooms and programs. ● Strengthening communication and parent involvement in governance.
Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Commitment to equity, inclusion, and diversity. ● Collaborative, student-centered environments with strong administrative support. ● Positive school climates and restorative practices are gaining momentum. ● Increased focus on professional development (LETRS, Ci3T). ● Improved resources for SEL and behavioral interventions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Clear and consistent districtwide communication of expectations. ● Professional growth and collaboration opportunities for classified and certified staff. ● Systematic implementation of equity-based curriculum and behavioral supports. ● Smaller class sizes and more staff to meet growing needs. ● Addressing teacher workloads and better-utilizing district resources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Recruitment and retention of high-quality staff across all levels. ● Better integration of restorative practices and SEL programming. ● Transparent decision-making processes with long-term vision. ● Reducing overhead in favor of classroom-level resources.

	Strengths	Opportunities	Priorities
Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities for extracurricular involvement (clubs, arts, athletics). • Teachers and staff who foster community and inclusion. • Availability of mental health supports (e.g., WRAP). • Flexible learning options, including dual enrollment and independent study. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvements in campus facilities (bathrooms, clean environments). • Enhanced diversity and inclusion in curriculum and activities. • Increased access to laptops for non-iPad-compatible assignments. • Better integration of mental health and behavioral supports. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistent enforcement of policies (cell phones, behavioral standards). • Reducing screen time and incorporating more interactive learning. • Support for specialized programs and advanced learning opportunities.

Analysis of Responses - Themes and Patterns

Based on the thematic analysis of schools, teams, and department-based feedback, the following overarching insights emerge:

➤ **Teacher and Staff Retention**

Retaining high-quality staff remains a significant concern, with calls for competitive pay, robust professional support systems, and fostering positive workplace environments.

➤ **Behavior and Safety**

Consistency in addressing behavioral issues was highlighted as a priority. Improved transparency in handling bullying and implementing restorative practices were frequently mentioned as critical areas for improvement.

➤ **Class Size and Equity**

Parents and staff emphasized the need for smaller class sizes and equitable distribution of resources among schools to ensure all students receive quality education.

➤ **Communication**

Strengthening transparency and consistency in communication at all levels—district, school, and community—was identified as a critical priority to build trust and collaboration.

➤ **Social-Emotional Learning**

Continued support for SEL initiatives and expanded mental health resources for both students and staff were widely emphasized.

➤ **Technology and Curriculum Alignment**

Stakeholders expressed a need for improved access to technology that aligns with curriculum goals and equips students with the skills needed for future opportunities.

In-Person District / Community Conversations

We value the experience of sitting together in person to explore how to improve the educational experience for our students.

Analyzing feedback from recent community engagement events highlights recurring themes across three key categories: Strengths, Opportunities, and Priorities. This synthesis provides actionable insights for consideration.

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Student achievements: Recognition of students' success and growth.● Community connection: A strong sense of unity and support within the district.● Staff and teacher excellence: High appreciation for the dedication and quality of educators.● Support for programs: Acknowledgment of valuable initiatives, particularly in the arts and other specialized programs.● Opportunities provided: Positive reflections on the district's capacity to create meaningful opportunities.
Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Operational enhancements: Addressing inefficiencies in school operations and support systems.● Resource allocation: Increasing access to resources for both students and staff.● Community engagement: Strengthening relationships and communication with the broader community.● Teacher challenges: Addressing concerns related to staffing and equitable resource distribution.● Policy transparency: Improving clarity and communication regarding district policies and practices.
Priorities
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Student-centered focus: Prioritizing student needs, with an emphasis on well-being and academic support.● Support for staff: Emphasizing recruitment, retention, and providing a balanced workload for educators.● Policy improvement: Developing clear, parent-inclusive policies that reflect community values.● Community collaboration: Building stronger partnerships with families and stakeholders.● Alignment and clarity: Ensuring district initiatives are cohesive and well-communicated.

In-Person District Community Conversations continued

Analysis of Responses - Themes and Patterns

Based on the thematic analysis of community conversation feedback, the following overarching insights emerge:

- **Community and Student-Centered Strengths:**
There exists a strong sense of community across the district. An abiding recognition of student achievements and the dedication of staff are significant assets that should continue to be nurtured and celebrated.
- **Need for Enhanced Communication and Transparency:**
Consistent concerns about policy clarity, districtwide alignment, and community engagement highlight a need for improved communication, engagement, and transparent decision-making processes.
- **Resource and Support Challenges:**
Gaps in resources for students and staff, alongside operational inefficiencies, suggest an opportunity to reassess priorities, streamline systems, and ensure equitable distribution of support.
- **Focus on Collaboration and Inclusivity:**
Building stronger connections with families, involving parents in policy development, and fostering districtwide collaboration can strengthen participation and trust across the community.
- **Actionable Priorities for District / Organizational Improvement and Growth:**
Addressing student well-being, supporting staff through recruitment and retention efforts, and reinforcing cohesive policies and programs are critical for driving meaningful progress and maintaining trust.

These takeaways provide a foundation for strategic action, ensuring the strengths of the district are leveraged while effectively addressing areas for improvement. This feedback underscores the importance of maintaining an open dialogue with stakeholders while focusing on actions that support staff, enhance student outcomes, and promote trust within the community.

Part 4: Overall Key Themes and Patterns

The overarching message from the community conversations is clear: The Lawrence Public Schools are deeply valued for dedicated educators, commitment to inclusivity, and a wide variety of programs that foster student success.

It is also clear that there is a call for action to make significant progress in addressing some areas of concern: safety, academic rigor, and opportunities, ensuring resource allocation to classrooms, and prioritizing teacher and staff retention.

These conversations provided a resounding affirmation that members of the community are eager to partner with the district to ensure every student thrives in an equitable, supportive, and challenging educational environment.

Key Themes

High-Quality Teachers and Staff

Appreciation and Value for Teachers and Staff; Importance of Teacher & Staff Retention, Resources & Support

- The community continues to recognize and commend the tireless efforts of teachers and staff who go above and beyond for students despite the challenges they face, such as large class sizes and resource limitations.
- Addressing teacher and staff retention, increasing salaries, and ensuring a strong system of support is in place were identified as critical to maintaining a high standard of education.
- Class sizes and equitable resource allocation are necessary to support both teachers and students.

Commitment to Academic Excellence;

Value for Programs and Desire for Enhanced Program Offerings

- Ensure access and opportunities for advanced learning; offer an enhanced menu of rigorous, rich academic program opportunities at all levels.
- Programs such as AVID, arts, music, and environmental science were frequently mentioned as standout examples of impactful initiatives.
- A renewed focus on academic rigor is essential, including a priority for foundational reading, writing, and math skills, as well as opportunities for advanced learning.

Prioritize Safety and Discipline

- Safety concerns, including concerns with bullying, violent behavior, and perceived insufficient consequences for disruptive behavior, were consistently voiced.
- Stakeholders emphasized the need for consistent enforcement of discipline policies and proactive measures to ensure a secure environment for all.

Value for Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging

- Efforts to promote inclusivity for all students, specifically for LGBTQ+ students, neurodiverse learners, and other marginalized students, were praised,
- More consistent equity and inclusivity implementation across all schools is needed.

Imperative of Transparency, Communication, and Engagement

- The district must improve its communication processes, consistency, clarity, and timeliness across all levels to rebuild trust and foster collaboration.
- Timely updates and clear policy explanations are needed.
- Consistent engagement, including 2-way communication, with families is vital.

Part 5 - Next Steps: Moving Forward

As we move forward, the district's focus will remain steadfast on the following priorities:

- **Invest in teachers and staff** through competitive compensation, professional development, active recruitment, equitable resource distribution, and enhancing systems of support.
- **Ensure safety and inclusivity** by implementing consistent, proactive safety measures and strengthening inclusivity initiatives to support all students, particularly those from marginalized groups.
- **Strengthen academic programs and enhance academic program offerings** to engage students, ensure excellence, and close achievement disparities.
- **Improve transparency and collaboration** with the community to align our policies and practices with shared values, addressing resource disparities and evaluating fund allocation
- **Develop a plan for long-term sustainability** by updating a strategic plan with short- and long-term goals aligned to these community priorities, with regular reviews to adjust initiatives to ensure continued relevance and effectiveness.



Given the enduring themes echoed within and across groups from this community engagement endeavor, these resonant areas of focus and organizational disciplines will inform updates to the strategic plan.

The district's path forward is one of opportunity, partnership,, and accountability; these conversations during Fall 2024 have laid the groundwork for meaningful, actionable steps and turning the page to move forward in 2025.

Addenda A - Questions and Answers

1. What was the intended outcome of conducting Fall 2024 community conversations?

The desired outcome of Fall 2024 community engagement was to better understand the perceptions and experiences of students and staff, parents, and community members regarding the strengths, challenges, and priorities for moving forward in the Lawrence Public Schools.

2. How were participants selected for the community conversations?

Participants were invited through a combination of open calls, targeted outreach, and community networks to ensure a diverse range of voices and perspectives were represented.

3. How were insights from the community conversations compiled?

The district collaborated with a research team at Kansas University to analyze the responses, identifying key themes and priorities based on the feedback. This process ensures that every voice is heard while maintaining the privacy of individual participants.

4. What happens next with the information gathered?

The Board of Education and district leadership, alongside teachers, staff, and school leaders, will use the insights from these conversations to guide strategic planning and decision-making. Updates on progress and next steps will be shared regularly with the community.

5. Were there costs incurred to the district in completing this community engagement endeavor?

Conversations were conducted by members of the Lawrence Public Schools teams, including principals, team leaders, Superintendent, and members of the leadership team. Data was analyzed by a research team at Kansas University at no cost to the district. So additional costs were not incurred in the collection, analysis, and presentation of this data.

6. As members of the community, how will we ensure that these priorities are acted upon?

The feedback gathered will be directly incorporated into the strategic planning process moving forward, and together we will continue to align and report on progress to achieve the priorities outlined in the plan; regular monitoring, reporting, and updates will prove key to ensuring collective accountability.

7. How do the outcomes from the Fall Community Engagement Conversation inform next steps in updating the strategic plan?

This is a great question. The key themes gleaned from the community engagement conversation will inform the focus areas of an updated strategic plan. We look forward to gaining community input and feedback on draft updates to the strategic plan this spring.

8. What if my feedback or concerns weren't specifically mentioned in the report?

All feedback was carefully reviewed and analyzed for major, common themes. If you feel your concern requires immediate attention, please contact the district office to ensure it is addressed.

9. How will the district continue to engage the community moving forward?

The district plans to hold regular community forums, send surveys, and provide opportunities for ongoing feedback to keep the community involved and informed.

10. What changes can we expect in the short term versus the long term?

Some priorities, such as improving communication and addressing safety concerns, will see immediate action. Others, like reducing class sizes and enhancing teacher retention, will require long-term planning and resource allocation.

11. How can I provide further feedback or get involved to support our schools?

You can attend board meetings, participate in upcoming forums, or contact district leadership directly. Information on opportunities to engage will be shared via the district's website and newsletters.

12. How does the district plan to measure success in addressing these concerns?

Success will be measured through regular progress reports, measurable outcomes like improved student achievement and teacher retention rates, and continued community satisfaction surveys.

13. What if I have specific concerns or questions about the process?

If you have additional questions, please reach out to the district office. We are happy to provide clarification and ensure transparency about how the feedback is being used to shape our next steps.

14. How can the community get involved?

The district welcomes and encourages community involvement through:

- Staying informed and engaged through regular updates from the district.
- Participating in meetings, forums, and feedback sessions.
- Joining committees or volunteer programs to support classrooms, schools, and district initiatives.

15. Will the raw data set / individual responses be shared?

The full raw data set will not be shared publicly, as the district committed to protecting the anonymity of everyone who participated in the survey and community conversations. Many individuals graciously shared personal stories and experiences under the assurance that their identities would remain confidential. Sharing raw data could inadvertently reveal identifiable information, and we are honoring our promise to safeguard that trust.

16. What steps were taken to ensure anonymity during the process?

All responses were collected without requiring any personally identifiable information. This process was designed to focus on themes and trends while preserving the confidentiality of participants.

17. How will progress on these priorities be tracked and communicated?

The district will:

- Share regular updates on progress through newsletters, the district website, and community meetings.
- Provide measurable outcomes and benchmarks to track success.
- Maintain open channels of communication for community feedback and collaboration.

Addenda B - Highlights of Community Meetings

- *All Lawrence Public Schools*
- *Lawrence Public Schools Teachers, Principals and Staff*
- *Lawrence Schools Foundation 2024 Kids Expo*
- *Lawrence Community Safety Fair*
- *Lawrence Special Education Advisory Council (L-SEAC)*
- *Lawrence Education Association Trivia Night*
- *Rainbow Kids & Families Board of Directors*
- *Lawrence Schools Foundation Board of Trustees*
- *Lawrence Schools Foundation Meet & Greet with Jaunelle White*
- *Lawrence Schools Foundation Community Education Breakfast*
- *LHS vs FSHS Soccer*
- *USD 497, LEA, PAL, Lawrence Schools Foundation, & Truity All-Staff Mixer*
- *Chamber Taste of Lawrence Mixer*
- *Haskell Indian Art Show*
- *Lawrence Art in the Park*
- *The Chamber Board of Directors*
- *USD 497 District Administrators and School Principals*
- *East Lawrence Neighborhood Association Block Party*
- *Haskell Welcome Powwow*
- *FSHS and LHS Homecoming Parades*
- *Candidate Meet and Greet Events*
- *October 8 Community Conversation co-hosted by Billy Mills Middle School and Lawrence Special Education Advisory Committee*
- *Lawrence High School Orchestras Concert*
- *October 29 Community Conversation hosted by Liberty Memorial Central Middle School*
- *Leadership Lawrence Education Day*
- *Blue Ribbon Advisory Committee*
- *November 8 Community Conversation at Lawrence Public Library*
- *November 12 Community Conversation at Southwest Middle School*
- *Lawrence Interfaith Alliance*
- *The Chamber Governmental and External Affairs Committee*
- *Community Conversation hosted by Southwest Middle School*
- *Conversation with Lawrence High Students*
- *Community Conversation hosted by West Middle School*
- *Conversation with Lawrence Virtual School Students*
- *Conversation with Free State High School Students*
- *Community Conversation with KU School of Education Faculty*

Addenda C - Artifact - Community Engagement Invitation



Fall Community Engagement

What are our best hopes and dreams for the future of our children?

What do we need and want most for our students as we move forward in Lawrence Public Schools?

No one knows better the strengths and celebrations, the challenges, and areas for improvement for the future of Lawrence Public Schools than the students, school families, and staff who make up our school community and the Lawrence partners who support our work.

*As we move forward in planning for the future,
we want to hear from you!*

We invite you

to participate in a variety of opportunities for community conversation this fall and share additional thoughts via an online survey.

From your personal/family experience with Lawrence Public Schools,

- In what areas are we doing well and should continue to strengthen?*
- In what areas do we have opportunities for improvement?*
- What do you see as the top priorities as we move forward together this year?*

We will use what we learn to inform and align our work with the voices, needs, and direction of our community. High-quality public schools are an outcome of engaged, caring communities.

Thank you. We hope to spend time in conversation with you this fall!

Jeanice Kerr Swift
Jeanice Kerr Swift
Interim Superintendent
Lawrence Public Schools



Check our schedule for continuing updates on fall community conversations, sign up to invite us to one of your own groups, and complete our survey at:

www.usd497.org/superintendent

