"Little River-Windom USD 444: Building Brighter Futures – Board & District Updates"

Little River-Windom USD 444

Mission

USD 444 is committed to preparing ALL students to make a positive impact in their lives and communities after high school.

Vision

Every Student. Every Opportunity.

Focus	Goals	Objectives
Recruitment and Retention of Quality Staff	Develop a culture of recruitment and retention of high-quality staff that drives student success.	• Develop a competitive compensation package • Increase housing options • Create a culture of choice with a sense of belonging • Provide professional growth opportunities for all staff • Increase marketing for the school district and educators
Community Engagement and Partnerships	Develop and maintain partnerships with community stakeholders to provide meaningful learning.	• Enhance and grow school-community partnerships • Actively pursuing/receiving grants and outside funding • Develop student-run enterprises • Increase methods for all stakeholders
Student Success	Develop a culture of learning that challenges each student through meaningful opportunities and experiences	• Develop personalized learning with appropriate staff resources/time • Create meaningful learning opportunities • Ensure college and career readiness • Identify ways to best measure student success
World Class Facilities	Maintain and enhance facilities and resources that align with the district's vision.	• Update and maintain facilities • Develop a culture of ownership and pride • Maintain technology innovation

Focus Area #1

Recruitment and Retention of Quality Staff

Goal

Develop a culture of recruitment and retention of high-quality staff that drives student success.

Objectives & Outcomes

1.1 Develop competitive compensation package

1.1.1 Increase base teacher salary to be equal to or greater than all adjacent school districts and increase median teacher salary by 3+% annually to be competitive with surrounding districts.
1.1.2 Evaluate and expand employee benefits annually, ensuring our offerings remain competitive, responsive to staff needs, and aligned with organizational goals.

1.2 Increase housing options

1.2.1 Form a collaborative community housing committee, including school, city, local developers, and others, to develop and implement a strategic housing plan.
1.2.2 Develop and expand a building trades program for student training, career opportunities, and future housing expansion.

1.3 Create a culture of choice with a sense of belonging

1.3.1 Construct one or more representative advisory teams that routinely meet with district and/or BOE leadership.
1.3.2 Construct and use an employee and student survey to assess their sense of belonging and identify areas for improvement each year.

1.4 Provide professional growth opportunities for all staff

1.4.1 Provide annual professional development opportunities for all staff by offering relevant workshops or training sessions and establishing partnerships with peer schools or districts to collaborate and share professional learning resources.
1.4.2 Conduct surveys or evaluations annually to assess the effectiveness of professional development programs and adapt them based on staff feedback.

1.5 Increase marketing for school district and educators

1.5.1 Increase staffing or reassign job duties to prioritize district communication and marketing.
1.5.2 Highlight and celebrate district successes by consistently sharing compelling stories that result in at least one positive feature or mention in regional or state-wide media each month of the school year.

Focus Area #2

Community Engagement and Partnerships

Goal

Develop and maintain partnerships with community stakeholders to provide meaningful learning.

Objectives & Outcomes

2.1 Enhance and grow school-community partnerships.

2.1.1 Establish a School-Community Partnership Committee to collaboratively design and implement a joint educational program that strengthens connections between schools and community stakeholders.

2.2 Actively pursue/receive grants and outside funding.

2.2.1 Establish a system to prioritize, assign, and promote awareness of grant opportunities by developing and maintaining a centralized repository of grants and other funding sources available for school and community use.

2.2.2 Increase external funding by annually submitting 3–5 grant proposals and securing a minimum of $10,000 to support district initiatives and strategic priorities.

2.3 Develop student-run enterprises.

2.3.1 Prioritize work-based learning through the School-Community Partnership Committee by creating a dedicated sub-committee to lead the initiative and launching at least two student-run enterprises by 2030 to provide authentic, career-connected learning experiences.

2.3.2 Track the financial sustainability and profitability of student-run enterprises, demonstrating their viability each year.

2.4 Increase methods of communication for all stakeholders.

2.4.1 Strengthen district communication by improving or implementing at least one new stakeholder communication channel annually through 2027, and improving school communication open rates each school year.

2.4.2 Conduct surveys or focus groups to annually assess stakeholder satisfaction with communication methods and identify areas for improvement within.

Focus Area #3

Student Success

Goal

Develop a culture of learning that challenges each student through meaningful opportunities and experiences

Objectives & Outcomes

3.1 Develop personalized learning with appropriate staff resources/time.

3.1.1 Enhance personalized learning by establishing a baseline from fall 2025 student survey data, developing clear targets and metrics, and increasing the percentage of students who feel their learning is tailored to their needs and interests by 10% annually through ongoing data collection, analysis, and strategic adjustments.

3.1.2 Increase work-based learning opportunities annually.

3.2 Create meaningful learning opportunities.

3.2.1 Increase student engagement and motivation by 10% annually through the implementation of high-impact, standards-aligned teaching strategies supported by biannual professional learning opportunities.

3.2.2 Enhance personalized learning across all classrooms by expanding the effective use of technology to create more dynamic, student-centered learning experiences.

3.3 Ensure college and career readiness.

3.3.1 Raise student MAP scores by 5% from Fall to Spring and reduce the percentage of students in the bottom 40%
annually.

3.3.2 Cohort ACT scores will exceed the Kansas state average ACT scores in all categories.

3.3.3 Regularly track and report the participation rate in college and career exploration activities.

3.4 Identify ways to best measure student success.

3.4.1 Engage key stakeholders through surveys and focus groups to gather diverse perspectives on success measurement, while tracking the variety and frequency of assessment methods used to measure student progress across the academic year.

3.4.2 Monitor and enhance the use of data analysis tools to evaluate student success beyond standardized tests, and track the frequency and effectiveness of data-driven decision-making in curriculum development, instructional strategies, and student support services.

Focus Area #4

World Class Facilities

Goal

Maintain and enhance facilities and resources that align with the district's vision.

Objectives & Outcomes

4.1 Update and maintain facilities.

4.1.1 Complete all planned maintenance projects on existing facilities, each as outlined in the Five-Year Capital Outlay Plan. 4.1.2 Conduct satisfaction surveys with students, staff, and parents to assess the overall condition and functionality of school facilities annually.

4.2 Develop a culture of ownership and pride.

4.2.1 Foster a stronger sense of ownership and pride in the school community by conducting surveys or focus groups with students, staff, and parents annually, and using the insights to guide engagement efforts.

4.2.2 Strengthen school spirit and community involvement by increasing staff and student participation in beautification or volunteer projects annually and launching two new student-led initiatives that promote engagement by 2030.

4.3 Maintain technology innovation.

4.3.1 Upgrade 20% of classroom technology equipment with newer models each year to ensure adequate functionality and support for learning activities.

4.3.2 Implement at least one new teacher-led technology initiative or program that enhances teaching and learning each year.

4.3.3 Train all teachers on effectively integrating technology into their lesson plans and instructional practices annually.

February Board Briefs

Written reports were presented by Mr. Crump, Technology Director, as well as Mr. Paden and Mr. Hendrickson. Mr. Paden and Mr. Hendrickson highlighted the exciting happenings going on in both buildings. Principals will be preparing for state testing and will begin work on next year's scheduling and planning over the next couple of months.

Mrs. Williams was present at the meeting to share information about her classes and the FFA program. Board members toured the ag shop and classroom. An update on FFA activities, the work auction, and information regarding courses offered at Little River Jr./Sr. High School were discussed. We have a wonderful facility that is being used by our students in many beneficial ways for their future development.

Negotiation representatives were chosen after discussion on the role of board members in the process. Mark Frick and Andy Wills were selected by board members to serve in that capacity for 2026.

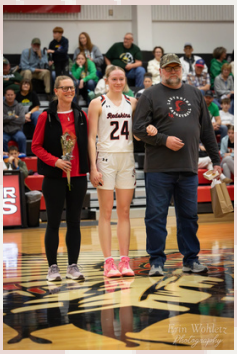
The 2026–2027 school calendar was adopted and formally approved by the board. The calendar is very similar to this year's calendar.

Driver Education fees were discussed. After discussion, a small increase of $25 was added to both the in-district and out-of-district fees. Fees are now $175 for in-district students and $225 for out-of-district students. Mr. Renken reported that he hopes to have around 18 students enroll in the summer course. The program costs the district approximately $6,000 per year. The fees help offset the cost of the program, as we do not receive that much in reimbursement from the state.

Legislative concerns were discussed at the meeting. If you are interested in reaching out to your legislators, please feel free to contact me, and I will let you know how you can assist. The major challenge continues to be the lack of Special Education funding. Without any additional funding for Special Education, USD 444 is expected to lose another $50,000–$75,000 to offset the increased cost. Last fiscal year, USD 444 paid an additional $331,000 out of the General Fund budget. This is money that could be used for staff raises, student programs, curriculum, and other needs of the district. Currently, some discussion has indicated that the state may fund up to an additional $10 million. This would result in very little additional money for USD 444. The current school finance bill calls for a small cost-of-living allowance of nearly 3%.

Senior Night

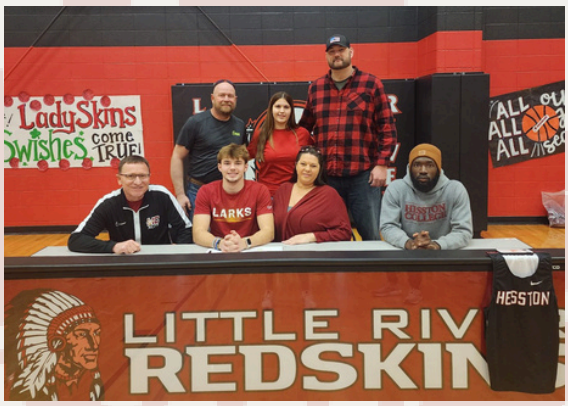







Congratulations Tristan!



Congratulations to Tristan Bristow, on signing his NLI to continue his education and track career at Hesston College!

Vetran Night

A huge thank you to all the veterans in the stands! We are so grateful for your service and for the sacrifices you and your families have made for our country. It was an honor to have you at the game.




Little River Cheer Clinic

The Little River Cheer Clinic was a huge success! The energy they all brought to the game was amazing—definitely a highlight of the night!









Sandstone Heights

A big thank you to the residents of Sandstone Heights for coming out to cheer us on! We love having you in the stands and truly appreciate the support you show our team.






JH WSL Results

Our Junior Skins wrapped up their Hoop Season. With a 2nd Place finish for the girls and a WSL Championship for the Boys. Proud of our Redskin players and Coaches!





FFA Students Earn Top Honors Through Hands-On Agricultural Projects

FFA Students Earn District Recognition

Several of our FFA members recently earned top honors at the district level for their Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) programs. SAE projects give students hands-on opportunities to apply what they learn in the classroom through real agricultural work, entrepreneurship, and job placements.

Arika Feldman, Cole Dieball, and CJ Herzog were named State FFA Degree candidates, one of the highest honors awarded to FFA members.

Arika also earned the District Proficiency Award in Grain Production – Placement for her work with SAF Ag, LLC.

Cole Dieball received the District Proficiency Award in Beef Production – Entrepreneurship and was named the District Star Farmer, recognizing him as the district's top agricultural entrepreneur.

Kelltyn Grasser placed third in Diversified Agricultural Production – Placement for his work with Kratzer Farms.

Kade Feldman was named a District STAR Greenhand candidate for his work at the Lyons Golf Course.

These recognitions highlight the dedication, hard work, and real-world skills our students develop through their agricultural projects. Arika and Cole will now advance to state-level evaluation at the Kansas FFA Convention in May.
Congratulations to these students on their outstanding accomplishments!







Basketball Buddies





Our 5th graders got to watch their basketball buddies play against Wakefield. Such a treat for them to see their role models in action. Keep it up Redskins! We're always cheering for you!

8th Grade Career Exploration







Our 8th Grade Career Exploration students spent a day at Hutch Community College getting a real look at life after high school! 🎓

Students were able to explore different career pathways, take part in hands-on activities, and learn what college opportunities are available right here close to home. From technical programs to academic majors, they discovered there are MANY paths to a successful future!

A big thank you to the staff and professors for welcoming our students to campus and helping them start thinking about their next steps!

JH Quiz Bowl







Our Junior Wiz'Skins opened up their season at Elyria Christian. 8th grade battled well and had fun and our 7th grade came back with a 2nd place finish! Great job Skins!!

HS Scholars Bowl



The Wiz'Skinz come away from Regionals with a 5th place finish. Congratulations on a great season!

Spelling Bee

Tiger Pride!
Twenty-one WES students participated in the spelling bee. We are very proud of participants! Great job!
Results:
Champion - Jonathan Sigsbee
Runner-up - Clay Rolf's
3rd - Jaylin Nelson
4th - Hadley Porter
5th - Evan Lindsay





Rice County Spelling Bee



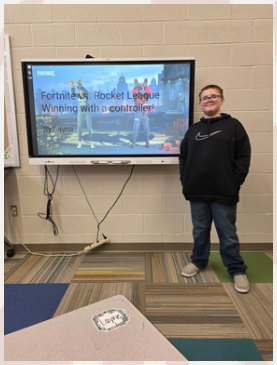


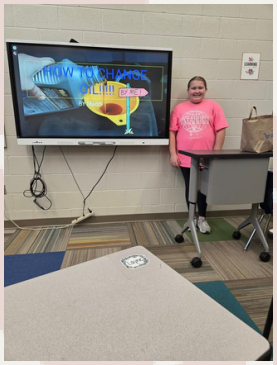
Little River Junior High School and Windom Elementary School were well represented in Sterling for the Rice County Spelling Bee.
25 spellers from the county competed.
The top 11 saw all three LRJH students and 3 WES students still competing.
We are proud of all of you. Great job!

Results:
Jonathan Sigsbee - Rice County Champion
Clay Rolfs - 3rd place

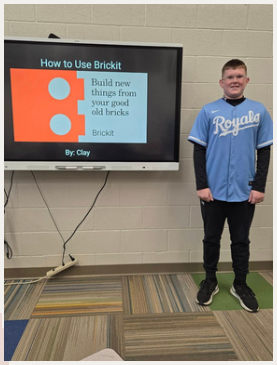
Winning words:
mortician
ibuprofen

Teach Me Tuesday





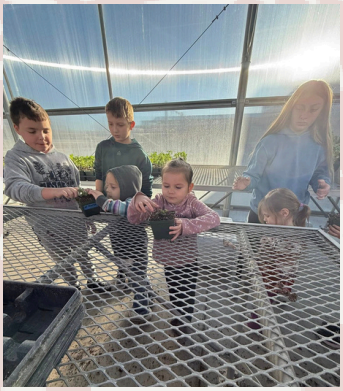








Tiger Pride


The preschoolers are in the greenhouse planting with help from fifth graders! The plant name was too big for the principal to remember or spell. And big for the preschoolers, as well, I should add!
Great teamwork.



Fourth graders planting licorice and marigold plugs!

Artwork by Mrs. Sutters students!







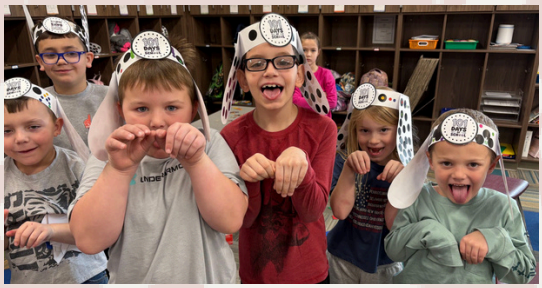


Great job! These projects really make our school look great!

100th Day of School!

Friday, January 30th, was the 100th day of school, and pre-k, kindergarten, first, and second grade celebrated together all morning! Students got to work in groups to stack 100 cups, create 100-piece mosaics, create a dalmation headband with 100 dots, make a snack out of 100 pieces, build with 100 items, and find 100 pictures of Mr. Paden around the school!







Kansas Day Celebration's at WES!



