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00:18	Hi, and welcome back to Season 5 of the Lansing USD 469 Lion Pridecast. I'm Sharon Burns, Director of Communications and Marketing, and I'm joined by my co-host, Miles Azzeh, our Director of Teaching and Learning. Yep, and we're excited to be back for another season.
00:30	We'll be sharing stories from across the district, highlighting the great things happening in our classrooms, and introducing you to some of the people who make Lansing such a special place. Yes, we are looking forward to giving you a little behind-the-scenes look at Lansing USD 469. And because we're going to be talking behind the scenes, I think, you know, elephant in the room, we're a little late getting started this year, but there's a pretty good reason for that. We've spent quite a bit of time, Sharon, haven't we, on our Kansas Heartland Virtual Academy, and we've seen incredible growth this year. Yes, we have.
00:58	So those who aren't familiar, Kansas Heartland Virtual Academy, or KHVA is what we call it, is our district's tuition-free virtual school for Kansas students in kindergarten through 12th grade, and you have taken the lead on that. So you can talk us a little bit more about that. Yeah, absolutely. We've been really excited. Like I said earlier, the growth has been incredible. We started three years ago. This is our third year having this virtual option. We've even changed the name over the couple of years. It was the Lansing Virtual Academy to begin with.
01:26	And just as an option, you know, it kind of ties into our strategic plan, that personalized education that we kind of talk about wanting to have for students. So this is a great opportunity for local homeschool families, nearby districts, to be a part of the Lansing community and the Lansing school district, just in that virtual way. But it really has, you know, kind of opened up even more than we thought, hence the growth. Yeah, 365 % since the first year. Oh, man. Yeah, yeah, we're at about 270 students now, which is very impressive.
01:57	Yeah, our first year we had, I want to say it was 59. I always get the number wrong, or not wrong, 57, 59, somewhere in that range. And really, we had just started with wanting to get our Greenbush students. So we had partnered with Greenbush, and any students that were part of our district that wanted to be virtual, we actually outsourced them, you could say, to Greenbush, and they would get all the state aid for those students. And now we keep it in - house, which means that we have our staff and our teachers in charge of it, which I think has just been great. Yeah, exactly. And there is a lot of work that goes into it, as we've definitely seen, especially as we've grown.
02:29	But we have an incredible team working with KHVA. We are a skeleton crew, and I think this is a great time for you to give them a shout - out, because our KHVA team is outstanding. They absolutely deserve it. So I'll start off with somebody who's been with us from the get-go. She is Martina Crisp. She's our Registrar for the middle

school. However, she's also the Registrar for the virtual school, for the KHVA, and for the last two years, she has been the only Registrar. But this year, we're lucky that we have Monique Cribbs, another Registrar from the high school, who's come over and joined us, and she's taken a lot of the load off of Martina's plate.

03:04 She handles 9 through 12 students, so grades 9 through 12, and Martina focuses on K through 8, and this has been excellent. We also have Dr. Christina Hoverson taking a full - time role this year as the Director of Secondary Alternative Programming. Mainly, her job is to focus on students grades 7 through 12, specifically 9 through 12, when it comes to things like grad checks, making sure that their transcripts are in order, evaluating transcripts, getting them in the right classes. There's a lot of work that happens behind the scene, and she is incredible.

03:34 The next two people that I want to highlight are two amazing academic learning coaches. We have Ellie Schwinn, who is in charge of kids, students K through 6. She's also our SPED case manager. This is her second year in the program with us. And then a newbie who is incredible, Eric Mitchell, who is our academic learning coaches for students 7 through 12, but he's also one of our assistant football coaches for the high school. And so we're really happy to have him, and he's wonderful. Then there's you that I have to give a shout - out to, because you've helped us with our systems, engaging the community, keeping track of everything, some things that we'll talk about in a little bit.

04:07 You've been instrumental. Thank you so much. And then there's me. I continue to oversee the program, I'm the Director of the whole thing, and I focus on things like student enrollment, state requirements, reaccreditation, and then I do focus on K through 6 students to lighten the load for Dr. Hoverson. So yeah, it takes a team, and we definitely have a great team. Yeah, we do. And we also have a couple of people working behind the scenes at the high school that aren't actually part of the team, but just help kind of in support roles. You want to talk about those? Yes, we're very lucky to have these two. Kristy Wessel is a high school interventionist.

04:38 She helps us with everything when it comes to making sure that students are in the appropriate classes, in Skyward and Q, to also helping Dr. Hoverson left and right when it comes to transcript work. And then we also have a math teacher at the high school, Tracy Chmidling, who is another great resource. She's not only mentoring Eric and helping him with so many things, because she was an academic learning coach previously, but she also is that second level of help, another layer of help for Dr. Hoverson when it comes to communication to families about all the myriad of things that happen at the high school level.

05:08 Because it's amazing the emails that have been coming through to me that now we can see that we have people to help Dr. Hoverson and myself. It's wonderful. Right, right. And I think what makes this group so special is how positive everyone is. Everyone knows their role, everyone supports themselves, and it is just, it's truly one of the best teams I've ever been a part of. Yeah, I can honestly say, I love all the groups that I work with, but they're my favorite group in terms of the positivity. They always want to help each other, you know, whether, you know, I talked a little bit earlier that some of us are split up, you know, Ellie's K - 6 and Eric maybe 7 - 12, and Dr.

05:42 Hoverson handles high school more than elementary. But none of that matters. You can definitely see whether it be in our text message or our email threads, we're all jumping in and helping people, helping each other. And I think that's what makes it

such a great team, and they're problem solvers, and they really mean, they've really committed to students and families' success. Yeah. And I mentioned this earlier, this is a tuition-free virtual program. Can you talk a little bit about how we get our funding for that and those state requirements?

06:10 Yeah, the state funding comes in the same way that it does for a regular student in the sense, when I say a regular student, I mean a brick - and-mortar student, an in-person student, in the sense that there's these things called count days, and in schools, that's when the student physically is there. And for us, the auditor looks for students being online in our academic program, our academic resource, which we use Acellus, Acellus Gold. They have to have six hours of work in a 24 - hour period, twice. So there's count day windows, and they need to hit it by that certain day.

06:41 So within these certain times, the auditor needs to see that students were interacting with the work for six hours. Now, that doesn't mean that they have to work six hours consecutively. It also doesn't mean that a student can only do one six - hour day and never work again. There's other things like attendance and achievement, you know, course completion and things like that. So that's our one major way of making sure that students are being counted in our enrollment are those two count days, and everybody on that team was instrumental in making sure that those kids got those count days.

07:12 Right, we had a meeting about this, and it was going through each student, and we're talking 270 students, making sure they hit the six - hour window, and then if they hadn't on Acellus, then you have offline forms that we have to make sure that those parents fill out. So again, there's a lot of work that goes into that when you're talking about that many students with two academic learning coaches and two directors. And that's why I like to think that Dr. Hoverson and I step in, you know, I have parents that are sending me pictures of their offline form, coming up here to district office to fill their offline form. Dr.

07:41 Hoverson has actually made house visits to get the offline form. Those are those things that we're not going to just drop it. And you know, we've been doing that, I've been doing that myself for the last three years, is realizing, because it does take a village, you know, and it's all of us, because if the offline form, if the student doesn't hit their six hours, whatever it may be, we don't get the funding as a district. And it's not that we do this for the money, but it does cost money to be able to have this program. So I'm really proud of our group that we work so, so hard, and once again, thank you to you, because you kept us on track with our master list, and that helped us, you know, guide us on what we needed to get finished.

08:16 Yeah. Well, in addition to the count days, we also have to verify Kansas residency for all of our students and make sure they're enrolled in the correct courses with students coming from us from all over the state. That can be quite daunting. Yeah. Can you talk a little bit about why those requirements are so important and what goes into making sure we're meeting them? Yeah, and I think people that are listening right now that are either working maybe at the high school level, have students at the high school level, anything of that nature, will understand transcripts are really, really important at that level, because we have to make sure that students don't miss a course that we sign them up for, you know, when we enroll them, that, oh, no, you didn't take this, and we didn't put you in, or putting them in an incorrect course.

08:54 So we've got a couple of people that, Dr. Hoverson, Christy Wessel, Eric, of course, everybody at the high school looks at those transcripts, but I have to give a great

shout - out to Monique and Martina for requesting those transcripts, because sometimes they're calling school districts in parts of the state I never even heard of, and finding out, like, hey, we need the transcript for this student that's with us now, so can you please send it over. And then, of course, they have to look at it, make sure that they're in the correct classes, make sure they've passed the classes for grad requirements, and then even at my level, to make sure that students are progressing appropriately before I enroll them in fifth grade math or seventh grade science, I have to make sure that they took the previous requirements.

09:32 So it's a lot of work when we get so many students all at once, and that's really what happened this summer. Right, right. We did it. We did do it, yes. We did it. Starting this, you know, I know, I knew very little about virtual programs. I'm guessing you did as well, and we've definitely been a learning experience throughout the whole process, and very, very rewarding, building systems from scratch, and again, with such a great team, it's been very fun, and I've enjoyed it. And I think that's a good transition to another area we've been spending a lot of time on this fall, which is recruiting and retention.

10:04 Yeah. We just hosted our first prospective teacher tour this year, this week, and we had a University of Kansas student visit who's graduating in May with a degree in early childhood unified education. So we took her to the elementary school. Yes, I love the visits, because we talk, you know, I know I've said this before, but you know, everybody at these career fairs are talking about how great their districts are, and how amazing they are, you know, to try to woo people to come over. But what I love about it is that we can, you know, put our money where our mouth is.

10:35 You know what I mean? So we said that we're amazing. Hey, we said that the superintendent will make time for you. The first thing we do every time they get here, after we give them a little goodie bag and stuff, is go show, you know, walk them down to Marty's office, and Marty's always kind and always, you know, able to give some time to talk to these people, and I just love it. And then we get to go to the buildings, and they get to see prospective administrators and teachers that they teach with, and the students, which is the best part. So I absolutely love doing it. I do too, and I woke up this morning from, with an email from Jan. Yes.

11:05 Zellner, and we have another student that we interviewed there, Bella, who wants to student teach. Yes. Here in the spring, based on our first interview and everything else, and she's exceptional. Yeah. So we're super excited for bringing her back, getting the ball rolling with getting her in the district. I try not to do this too often, of like, and this isn't really, it's you two, it's both of us, but, and especially with Bella, but I try not to brag too much, and I'm not trying to brag when I say this, but we are good at the recruitment to the point that this person who we didn't know that morning met us for maybe, what, 15, 20 minutes when it was all said and done, and then asked to be placed in our district for student teaching.

11:43 And I think that that's the kind of thing that we need to do with what we hear about the teacher shortage and just everything going on, and just the way education has changed, is we do need to show people that we have a very welcoming environment, and I think we've done a great job of that, because we've had so many new people that come in, and they're staying, and that's what we want. So I'm really excited about Bella coming in student teaching. Yeah, it's an easy district to sell, because we both love it. So our next career fair is coming up next week, which is Emporia State University Career Fair, and it's one of our favorites.

12:12 It's a really great teaching college. Over the years, we've attended quite a few in the area, and we've now narrowed it down, just because we aren't getting hit with a teacher shortage, like, you know, a lot of districts around us. So we've narrowed it down to a few. We have Emporia, and then after that, Fort Hays in the fall. Yeah. And then we'll go into the spring season and hit about three to four then.

12:34 Yeah, we really have been fortunate, because when we talk to other districts, even just the conversations when I'm there, you know, to hear how many, you know, vacancies they have, yeah, it breaks my heart, because that hurts students at the end of the day, and we don't have those, and I'm really happy. I think it also helps that the reason that we have that is things like supportive building administrators that are making sure at all times they are focusing on what they're doing in terms of helping teachers that need that help, those newbies.

13:04 Right. You know, we have our late start Thursdays, which is a great chance to collaborate with PLC partners, or even if you just have one, you know, other teacher that's near you, even if you're on an island, somebody that you can go sit with and ask those questions, the mentoring for the new teachers, the mentoring that we give with our new teacher cadre every month of the first year of the professions, professional development, instructional resources, I think we do an excellent job of making sure we have those PD days, but also getting resources to students, or teachers to help students, and then, of course, the relationships that you see.

13:35 I mean, I like to think, and I know we've seen it firsthand with the people we give tours with, is that when you come to this district, people are going to be friendly and kind with you, and then they're going to continue. And that makes me really happy when I see that. Yeah, and you did it briefly, but I do want to give a shout - out to our administrators. They play such a crucial role in this and supporting our staff. They already have so much on their plate between students, you know, parents, and then staff, and they really do focus on building those relationships with their teachers and classified staff.

14:07 So shout - out to them. Yeah. And then we also have a district climate survey coming up. We haven't done one of those in a few years, so I'm excited to do that. It gives our employees an opportunity to share their experiences and provide feedback. And one thing about our district is we do take that feedback, and we change and get better because of it. As with any survey, we expect to hear a variety of perspectives. You always want that. That's important, but we want to know what's going well and where we can continue to improve. Yeah, I think it would be worrisome if we didn't want to hear that, you know, if we didn't want the feedback.

14:36 You know, I always like to say is that, like, the minute you think that you've, I say this about teachers and myself, like any educator, the minute that you think that you've, like, learned all you can, it's pretty much time to retire. Like, you know, you'll never arrive. There's always something. And that's why I'm so lucky that I have all these people in other districts around me, my counterparts, that I can really reach out to and like, hey, listen, I'm stuck on this, or I really want to help my staff with this, and I get such great advice. I couldn't even imagine if I wasn't the kind of person to do that.

15:05 So I know we as a district, especially as leaders here, when I think of district office, and I think of our administrators, we're going to take that, be introspective and reflective, and take the feedback and use it to even be better. I agree. And speaking of continuous improvement, it's a great transition again. That brings us to our final topic, which is our recent KESA check - in, and you have been heavily involved in that. So go

for it. Talk about it. I feel like I'm the one doing all the talking. So KESA is our accreditation.

15:33 You know, if you're not familiar with it, it stands for Kansas Education System Accreditation. It's something that we have to do every single year. It used to be that you were on a five - year cycle. I much prefer this one, where every year you have a six - month check - in. So you come up with your action plan, you come up with your goals. We have those lists on the site. Thank you very much for making those very, like, community and, you know, front-facing, friendly. I don't know if any of those words are right. I'm not the marketing person. Yeah. But, so we've got our goals. Everything's online. You can go and see it. But we do a six - month check - in.

16:03 Jean Rush comes and sees us. She's fantastic. She's been our person from KSDE, pushes us, gives us some advice, asks us where we are with our six - month goal, and then at one year, we go and we meet with our peer districts, which are peer districts that we have, are Piper and Lewisburg. And so we get to work with them, and my favorite part of it is not only showing off the great things that we're doing and talking about our goals, but learning about what they're doing, because some of their goals are different, some of them are a little bit aligned, but ultimately, they're all things that can help students.

16:32 So it's really great, because we can sit there, listen, I don't want to say pick apart, we don't really do that, but we definitely ask difficult questions to each other, which only makes us better. We're all there as a district leadership team. Marty comes, all of our principals are there, and it's just really, really good. So our KESA check-in went really well last week. I'm very happy. And so thank you, Jean Rush, for pushing us, and thank you for saying that we're well, more than well prepared for our April one, which is six months away. So I'm really proud of our district leadership team, and of course, our staff.

17:03 Yeah. Now, can you talk about how that work translates into what our teachers are doing in the classrooms? Yeah, yeah. So I'll talk about our two goals, if that's okay, just really quick, our main fundamentals that we're focusing on. So at the K - 5 level, we're focusing on structured literacy. You've heard me talk about that a lot. You hear a lot of people say things about, like, the science of reading or letters training. All of that is specifically what we're talking about.

17:28 Last year, our goal, or our fundamental, our focus, was structured literacy around professional learning, and that was to get everybody trained up with letters to get their seal of literacy. Not only because we needed to get the seal of literacy, because it's a state mandate by 2028, but ultimately to learn those aspects of teaching reading, so to help our students. This year, we still kept with structured literacy, but what we did was we shifted from professional learning to professional collaboration.

17:55 And what we mean by that is now working together to, we've learned the knowledge, now let's implement that knowledge in our classrooms. And we've already seen our reading scores get better, but we're specifically seeing our fluency scores getting better. Students, when they get to third, fourth, fifth, sixth grade, are not needing phonics intervention anymore. They've got that part down. So what we are intervening with now is helping them with those reading strategies for comprehension to make them even better. So it's working, and I'm glad that we kept that as our major focus.

18:27 Six through twelve, so it's secondary, and we didn't need to do this. We didn't need to have a second one, but they wanted to have it, and once again, proud of our team.

They have standards alignment, and their standard alignment is specifically focused around these things called PLDs, another acronym, which are performance level descriptors that the state has released and given to districts with our, the core subjects. And shout - out to Dee Wiley, because she did a great job of compressing these, because what do you know, the state gave like 100 documents, 100 PLDs.

18:57 We compressed them into the ones that were the, I don't want to use the word priority, but the essential ones that students really needed to focus on, and for staff to look at these PLDs, because a performance level descriptor is saying what a student should be able to do when they sit down for their state assessment, or any assessment. So now we're using that to build and to improve our GVCs, our Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum, and we're using PLCs as the process. We've talked about PLCs before. All of it connects with each other.

19:25 You know, sometimes you hear all these acronyms, and you think you're doing different things. We have, since I got here, not done anything different. When I got here, one of our focuses was, let's have a Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum. We've got it. It hasn't died. It's not put up on a shelf. It's a living, breathing document. Now we're making it better by saying, is it specifically hitting what students need to do to get a three or a four in the state assessment, or to do well in school? And so, yeah, six through twelve is doing a great job.

19:52 They explained it very well, the Jean Rush last week, and she was excited, and I'm excited in six months to see if we hit our goals. Great work. Sorry, I talked too much. No, that was excellent. That was excellent. This is definitely your realm. Yeah. And what's nice is the staff know those things. Yeah. You know, if you go to an elementary teacher, they know that structured literacy is something we work on. Dee and myself, Dee led it, but I was there at both meetings. We've talked PLDs with the middle and the high school staff. So PLDs aren't like, what's that?

20:19 We went and talked about it, and now we're giving time during PLCs for these teachers to look at this information and to mellow it with what they're already doing to make sure our kids are well prepared. Yeah. I like it. And I think that's a pretty good look at all the things that have been keeping us really busy this fall. Yes. Yeah, now we're back up and running again, which is exciting. I like our podcast. I am excited to be back. It's been a hectic year. I've talked to a few people about it. You know, the state has given a few major requirements that we have to do as a staff, more than just the KESA stuff.

20:51 So with that, and the virtual school and all the stuff that we both do, I am happy to be back. And I'm sorry about the hiatus, but we'll be here now. All right, so for more updates and stories on Lansing USD 469, you can visit us at www.usd469. net. Yes, and if you don't already have it, download the free Lansing USD 469 mobile app on Apple and Android. That app allows you to be the first to know all the fantastic things happening in the district. And if you like our content and want to stay up to date on the latest episodes, please follow us wherever you are listening, and leave a review to help others find us and learn more about our great district.

21:24 We did it. Yep. Wrap on episode one of season five. Oh, I said woo. You're supposed to say woo. Woo. Thanks for listening. Thanks for listening. Bye.