

2025-2026

USD Budget Profile



Unified School District No. 480,
Seward County, Kansas

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2025-2026 Budget – General Information USD #480

Introduction

Liberal USD 480, located in Seward County, Kansas, is a vibrant, diverse school district serving the community of Liberal and surrounding rural areas. With its mission to provide a safe, quality, and caring learning experience for every learner every day, USD 480 operates five elementary, two middle, one high school and a Pre-K center. As an educational and economic anchor of the region, the district's annual budget is both a comprehensive plan for student success and a reflection of the broader financial, demographic, and policy landscape affecting public education in southwest Kansas.

District Characteristics and Geographic Profile

Liberal USD 480 encompasses the City of Liberal and surrounding neighborhoods, serving a significant portion of Seward County. The district headquarters is at 7 Parkway Blvd, Liberal, KS 67901. It includes ten educational institutions:

- Liberal High School
- Eisenhower Middle School
- Seymour Rogers Middle School
- Bright Start Pre-K Center
- Cottonwood, MacArthur, Meadowlark, Prairie View, and Sunflower Elementary Schools.

USD 480 is recognized for its culturally diverse student population, strong dual language programs, partnerships with Seward County Community College, modern school facilities supported by a landmark bond, and emphasis on both academic and extracurricular enrichment.

USD 480 serves over 4,500 students from pre-K through 12th grade, making it one of the largest districts in southwestern Kansas. The district population is characterized by a high percentage of English Language Learners, as well as a significant number of students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunches, reflecting broader community economic diversity.

Mill Levy and Assessed Valuation

The property tax base is central to USD 480's local funding, influencing both local option budget (LOB) capacity and bond/capital outlay levies.

2025-2026 Valuation and Mill Levies:

- **Assessed Valuation (General Fund):** \$167,452,593
- **Assessed Valuation (All Funds, incl. Capital Outlay):** \$213,390,464
- **General Fund Mill Rate:** 20.000 (state-mandated)
- **Supplemental General (LOB):** 14.135

- **Capital Outlay:** 8.000
- **Bond & Interest:** 3.866
- **Total USD Mill Rate:** ~46.001

The proposed mill levy figure means the district is not increasing the tax rate on property, but, due to higher assessed valuation, it is in a position to collect more aggregate property tax revenue, even though the rate (mills) is down. The Board of Education’s prudent approach to setting mill levies reflects efforts to maintain affordability for local taxpayers while collecting sufficient revenue to meet mandatory and strategic needs.

Main Priorities for the 25-26 Year

USD 480’s top priority continues to be human capital – the educators and staff who shape student success every day. The district is proud to deepen its investment in professional growth, retention and recruitment through a multi-pronged strategy that reflects both innovation and care. At the heart of this effort is the “Learn Here, Grow Here, Lead Here” initiative, which empowers non-certified staff to pursue certification and enter the classroom. Through in-house support programs, flexible pathways, and targeted educational assistance, USD 480 is cultivating future educators from within its own community.

The district is also committed to honoring and retaining its legacy staff, whose experience and dedication anchor the district. This includes expanded professional development, recognition efforts, and strategic compensation planning to ensure that long-serving employees feel valued. On the recruitment front, the district is broadening its outreach to attract high-quality candidates who align with USD 480’s culture and goals. Finally, the district is making significant investments in curriculum alignment and instructional coherence. This includes adopting new curriculum materials and pairing them with robust professional development to ensure educators are equipped to deliver consistent, high-impact instruction across grade levels and content areas.

Board Members

The Liberal USD 480 Board of Education is composed of a dedicated group of community leaders who bring diverse perspectives and a shared commitment to student success. Together, they champion transparency, fiscal responsibility and strategic innovation – guiding the district through complex challenges while remaining deeply attuned to the needs of families, educators, and the broader Liberal community.

President:	Brad Carr
Vice President:	Sarah Thompson
Member:	Alan Brown
Member:	Mike Brack
Member:	Nick Hatcher
Member:	Kaylee Lopez
Member:	Jesus Baeza

Key Staff

Position	Name
Superintendent:	Dane Richardson
Assistant Superintendent:	Jarod Bellar
Assistant Superintendent:	Maria Gomez- Rocque
Director of Business Services:	Nila Newton
Director of Special Education:	Dane Parcel
Director of Technology and Board Clerk:	Rusty Tuman
Director of Operations:	Chad Mease
Director of Federal Programs:	Kendra Haskell
Director of Recruiting and Education:	Ashley Kappelman
Director of Human Resources:	Mary Foster
Board Attorney:	Lane Frymire

The District’s Accomplishments and Challenges

Liberal USD 480 enters the 2025–26 fiscal year with a foundation of stable, yet complex, budget management. The district continues to rely heavily on state aid and federal support for at-risk students to sustain instructional programming and operational viability. As ESSER relief funding phases out, the district faces the critical task of realigning its budget to preserve essential academic and support personnel, meet the evolving needs of a highly diverse and transient student population, and maintain modern facilities—all while minimizing additional tax burdens on the local community.

Despite these pressures, USD 480 has made notable strides. The district has restructured its administrative framework to better support strategic goals, including the addition of a Director of Recruitment and Education. Innovative workforce development initiatives—such as expanded teacher certification pathways and the launch of an Apprentice Teacher Program—are helping to address persistent staffing challenges and build a sustainable pipeline of qualified educators.

The district’s leadership remains committed to transparency, prudent financial controls, and continuous facility enhancement. These efforts are shaped by a deep awareness of community economic pressures and rapid demographic shifts. Looking ahead to 2026–27, the district will focus on enrollment trends, cost-recovery strategies in food service and transportation, tighter controls on fund allocations, and alignment with evolving state policies on special education and at-risk funding.

Challenges persist, including rising health and property insurance costs, difficulty recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers, and the ongoing need to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) standards for a large at-risk student population. Yet, through strategic planning and community engagement, USD 480 continues to adapt and innovate—positioning itself to serve students with equity, resilience, and fiscal responsibility.

Supplemental Information for the Following Tables

1. Summary of Total Expenditures by Function (All Funds)
2. Summary of General Fund Expenditures by Function
3. Summary of Supplemental General Fund Expenditures by Function
4. Summary of General and Supplemental General Fund Expenditures by Function
5. Summary of Special Education Fund by Function
6. Instruction Expenditures (1000)
7. Student Support Expenditures (2100)
8. Instructional Support Expenditures (2200)
9. General Administration Expenditures (2300)
10. School Administration Expenditures (2400)
11. Central Services Expenditures (2500)
12. Operations and Maintenance Expenditures (2600)
13. Transportation Expenditures (2700)
14. Other Support Services Expenditures (2900)
15. Food Service Expenditures (3100)
16. Community Services Operations (3300)
17. Capital Improvements (4000)
18. Debt Services (5100)
19. Miscellaneous Information – Transfers (5200)
20. Miscellaneous Information Unencumbered Cash Balance by Fund
21. Reserve Funds Unencumbered Cash Balance
22. Other Information – Enrollment Information
23. Miscellaneous Information Mill Rates by Fund
24. Other Information – Assessed Valuation and Bonded Indebtedness

Note: FTE is the audited enrollment 9/20 and 2/20 (if applicable) and estimated for the budget year, which includes preschool-aged at-risk and virtual enrollment. Enrollment does not include non-funded preschool. Beginning 2017-2018, full-day Kindergarten is 1.0 FTE. Beginning 2021-2022, three-year-old at-risk students were funded. This information is used for calculating Amount Per Pupil for Sumexpen.xlsx and Budget At A Glance (BAG).

KSDE Website Information Available

K-12 Statistics (Building, District or State Totals) Report Generator:

https://datacentral.ksde.org/report_gen.aspx

- Attendance / Enrollment Reports
- Staff Reports
- Graduates / Dropouts Reports
- Crime / Violence Reports

School Finance Reports (Data Central) website below:

<https://datacentral.ksde.org/default.aspx>

- Assessed Valuation
- Cash Balances
- Headcount Enrollment
- Mill Levies
- Personnel (Certified/Non-Certified)
- Salary Reports

Kansas Building Report Card website below:

<http://ksreportcard.ksde.org/>

- Attendance Rate
- Graduation Rate
- Dropout Rate
- School Violence
- Assessments
 - Reading
 - Mathematics
 - Writing
- Graduates Passing Adv. Science Courses
- Graduates Passing Adv. Math Courses

Accountability Reports website below:

<https://datacentral.ksde.org/accountability.aspx>

- Performance Accountability Reports
- Financial Accountability Reports
- Longitudinal Achievement Reports