

# USD 446 enrollment projection shows higher numbers than previous year

BY ANDY TAYLOR  
chronicle@taylornews.org

**INDEPENDENCE** — Early enrollment projections in USD 446 shows a slight increase, which was good news to Independence school board members at their monthly meeting on Monday night.

Superintendent Jason McAfee told the board that the USD 446 Central Registration, which was held Aug. 1-2, was a success, with 1,557 total students enrolling in classes during the two-day registration.

With pre-registrations and post-registrations added to the mix, USD 446 has 1,730 students so far enrolled for the start of the 2024-25 school year, McAfee reported.

"This would indicate a little bump of enrollment over what we experienced last year," he said.

McAfee reminded the school board that the official enrollment certification day in Kansas is Sept. 20. On that day, schools will report their official enrollments to the Kansas State Department of Education for financial aid purposes.

Enrollments also are provided to the Kansas State High School Activities Association that same day for high school classification purposes.

## Tennis, theater programs saluted

Two extracurricular activities at Independence High School were recognized for their achievements in the final weeks of the 2023-24 school year.

At Monday's USD 446 Board of Education meeting, the board congratulated members of the IHS boys' tennis squad for claiming the class 4A runner-up team title. Also saluted was the class 4A doubles team of Camden Julian and Hayden Denney for winning the state championship.

Recognized at the meeting were five of the six members of that state runner-up team: Camden Julian, Carson Merrick, Keith Sanders, Tucker Gregory and Matthew McLendon.

IHS boys' tennis coach Gavin Webster said the IHS boys' tennis program had 28 total athletes during the spring season. The team had an amassed record of 359-147, which is a 71 percent winning percentage.

The program also accomplished several amazing feats, including the SEK League title, the class 4A regional title, the class 4A runner-up trophy.

The class 4A board also heard of the accomplishments of the IHS theatre department, which had seven students nominated for the Jester Awards — a statewide high school musical theatre competition sponsored by the Music Theatre of Wichita.

Elizabeth Bennin, IHS theatre instructor, said winning a Jester award carries significant clout. It's akin to winning a state championship, but also earning a ticket to Broadway, she said.

Bennin said IHS student Jenna Bates was the recipient of a Best Supporting Role award at the 2024 Jester Awards ceremony in April. Bates performed the role of Scuttle in the IHS musical production "Little Mermaid."

The IHS theatre program also received Best Scenery award for the "Little Mermaid" production, Bennin said.

## Proposed tax rate to see bump

A slight nudge in the USD 446 tax rate is forecasted in the 2024-25 budget cycle, according to the school district's proposed budget plan, which was announced Monday.

The board agreed to set the 2024-25 budget's property tax rate at 44.750 mills, which is .141 mills higher than what was being assessed on local

taxpayers during the 2023-24 budget cycle. That translates to about 0.33 percent increase in the tax rate.

The higher tax rate is projected to increase the district's tax collections, also known as a tax levy, by \$140,770. The additional tax dollars are needed, Superintendent Jason McAfee reasoned, due to increased utility costs (\$42,500), increases in faculty and staff payroll (\$353,000) property and liability insurance increase (\$125,500) and special education cost increase (\$125,000).

The district's budget will have a projected spending authority of \$47,889,438, of which \$5,785,802 is derived through the tax levy.

A summary of the school district's budget plan is printed elsewhere in this issue of the Montgomery County Chronicle.

A public hearing will be held at 6:50 p.m., Monday, Sept. 9 at the Community Room at Independence High School. The board will hear comments or concerns from the public at that hearing regarding the proposed budget plan.

To assist school patrons understand the financial picture of USD 446, the school district has prepared a public document titled "Budget At A Glance," which is available through the USD 446 website (www.indyschools.com). On the website, patrons can click on "Accountability Reports" in the top right corner, then follow the listing to the document titled "Budget At A Glance."

The document includes information as to how taxpayers dollars are spent in USD 446.

## Larger paychecks coming

Salaries for all USD 446 personnel will increase for the 2024-25 school year, courtesy of a series of unanimous votes concerning salaries and compensation by the USD 446 Board of Education on Monday night.

**Teacher salaries:** The board gave its unanimous approval to adopting a negotiated agreement pact with the Independent NEA bargaining unit, which is the official union representing teachers.

The new contract language calls for the \$800 added to the base salary, which now brings that salary to \$44,900.

That means a first-year teacher with a bachelor's degree will receive a minimum of \$44,900 for the 183 contractual days in the agreement.

All teachers are granted additional compensation based on years of service as well as advancement in their post-bachelor education. The extra compensation is known as "steps and columns," which is based on a salary schedule that appears like a set of stairs.

Other details of the contract calls for the school district to add an additional \$89 per month to the employee health insurance option (single plan) and a \$5 per month hike in the employer contribution to a 403b retirement plan. That now brings USD 446's total employer contribution to \$66 per month.

The new contract also calls for "Milestone Payouts" to be given to teachers when they attain their years of consecutive service on 10-year intervals: \$100 for 10 years, \$200 for 20 years, \$250 for 25 years and \$300 for 30 years.

**Classified staff:** Classified support staff, which includes secretaries, janitors/custodians, food service, transportation workers, paraeducators, and assistants, will receive an 85 cent increase to their hourly salary as it falls on the payroll schedule.

Not only would it result in an 85 cent per hour wage hike for all support staff

but it would also bring the minimum starting base wage to \$12.00 per hour, said Superintendent Jason McAfee.

These changes would approximately equal a 7.6 percent increase for this individuals who are currently on the first step of the payroll schedule.

The approximate net cost increase for the additional income for classified support staff will be \$93,000.

**Administrators:** All USD 446 administrators and directors are expected to see a 3 percent increase to their salaries for the 2024-25 school year. The 3 percent salary hikes will be granted to Kellie Puderbaugh, director of learning services; Kurt Seiler, high school principal; Michael McCambridge, high school assistant principal; Marcus Lanning, high school activities director/assistant principal; Carmen Chism, middle school principal; Sam Carnes, middle school activities director/assistant principal; Noel O'Kane, Jefferson School principal; Haley Barker, Jefferson School assistant principal; Justin Woodward, Eisenhower Elementary principal; Lisa Paige, Eisenhower Elementary assistant principal

Directors to be given 3 percent salary raises include Jennifer Denney, health services director; Gregg Doub, maintenance and custodial director; Zella Johnson, food service director.

Two directors are granted 15 percent pay hikes due to their new duties. They include Gina Godinez, director of finance, and Dustin Osburn, technology director.

The net increase to the school budget for the higher salaries for administrators and directors will be about \$51,140.

**Substitute teachers:** USD 446 substitute teachers will be paid more in 2024-25 than in the previous year. The board agreed to increase the substitute daily rate to \$120, which is up from the \$110 that was paid to substitute teachers during the 2023-24 school year.

McAfee said the increase would keep USD 446 in line with the substitute pay rates of surrounding districts, which has become increasingly competitive in recent years due to the lack of available substitute teachers.

The estimated impact on the USD 446 budget for the additional substitute wages will be about \$16,400, McAfee said.

## Other business

In other business at Monday's USD 446 Board of Education meeting, the board:

- approved the resignations of Blake Acuff, custodian; Rocky Blatto, fourth grade teacher; Rose Bojorques, Jefferson School English language arts paraeducator; Martha Herrera, high school paraeducator; Tonya Starnes, IHS building secretary; and Alice Whittet, Eisenhower Elementary School paraeducator.

- accepted the employment of Alayna Bennin and Lisa Haynes, middle school ESOL paraeducator; Branda Blanks, middle school registrar; Lisa Cagle, Eisenhower reading lab Title aid; Anna Cheever and Madelyn Crawford, transportation monitors; Taylor Clark, high school bookkeeper; Clayton Craig, Eisenhower music teacher; Debra Fuhrman, Vickie Ward, Mary Melton, Jerravonnie Jackson and Iesha Lornes, food service; Kathryn Garcia, transportation bus driver; Will Wilkinson, middle school assistant basketball coach; Cheryl Woolsey, Jefferson School Title paraeducator; Tim Hardy, high school registrar; and Abigail Parker, Early Learning Center paraeducator.



Ani Rexwinkle . . . Field Kindley High School grad returns to alma mater to be agriculture education instructor.

# Rexwinkle's career trajectory takes a stop in Coffeyville

BY ANDY TAYLOR  
chronicle@taylornews.org

**COFFEYVILLE** — When Ani Rexwinkle began her pursuit for a veterinary medicine degree in 2021, she had no idea that her journey would take a pit stop in her hometown of Coffeyville.

But, it has. And, she's looking forward to what this brief pause in her college career will show her.

For now, Rexwinkle, who was a 2021 graduate of Field Kindly High School, has returned to her alma mater to serve as an agricultural education teacher for the 2024-25 school year.

In short: she's returned to her home stomping grounds. "I never thought I would come back to Coffeyville . . . and be a teacher," she said with a laugh. "But, that's what I'm doing now."

Rexwinkle earned a bachelor's degree in animal science from Oklahoma State University in May with the goal of pursuing entrance into OSU's School of Veterinary Medicine. She decided to take a hiatus from the school books, which is why she returned to Coffeyville.

At least one year in the classroom might help her restore her compass needle . . . and get her on track to qualify for veterinary school.

Or, could one year in classroom change the direction of her career compass?

"At this point, I'm still hoping to get into vet school, but we'll see where this goes," she said of her impending work as agriculture education teacher. "It feels kind of strange to be back, because when I walked into my first staff in-service meeting, I looked around and realized that most of the faculty were my former teachers. Now, I'm one of their peers."

Rexwinkle brings years of farm experience — plus three years of a university studies — with her to Field Kindley. During her own high school career, she thrived in the area of exhibiting cattle.

Now, she says she is ready to help a new generation of agriculture-minded students in the livestock showing.

"This time, I'd rather be outside the showing than in the middle of it, where everyone is staring at me," she said. "I'd like to train kids how to judge animals and correctly show their livestock."

Rexwinkle will work with Melissa Strausburg, who is the co-teacher for agriculture education at Field Kindley High School. Rexwinkle and Strausburg will share advisor duties for Field Kindley's FFA Chapter.

She said her years of experience as a Field Kindley student and as a local farm kid helped her attain a four-year university degree in a span of three years.

She joked that there was one course in her animal science degree pursuit that was as foreign to her as the man on the moon. It was a course in zoology, where she was introduced to creatures like starfish and aquatic sponges.

That's an entire galaxy away from her usual world of dealing with Limousin and Angus cattle.

"One thing I did learn was the lococal respiration in sea turtles. That means they breathe through their butts," she said with a laugh. "A few days in that zoology class, I realized I needed to drop it. So, I did."

"I doubt if I will ever deal with any sea turtles in my world as a Kansas school teacher or a veterinarian."

# NODINE LEGAL

REPRESENTATION WITH DISTINCTION  
Serving the People & Businesses of Southeast Kansas



## Practice Areas

- ✓ Elder Law and Asset Protection  
Nodine Legal helps families prevent the financial devastation of nursing home care.
- ✓ Real Estate Law
- ✓ Criminal Law
- ✓ Estate Planning
- ✓ Probate and Trust Litigation
- ✓ Family Law  
Divorce, custody, support, and paternity
- ✓ Business Startup and Disputes

We Deliver Customized Legal Solutions



Nodine Legal

www.nodinelegal.com  
4301 W. Main St. • Parsons, KS 67357 (620) 717-7668

Lucas Nodine, Attorney, is responsible for the content of this advertisement

**Coffeyville Stockyards, LLC**  
• Calf/Yearling Sale Every Wednesday 9am  
Coffeyville, KS  
• Cow/Bull Sale Every Thursday 9 am  
S. Coffeyville, OK  
• Hog, Sheep & Goat Sale Second Monday Every Month 5PM  
Coffeyville, KS

Owners & Operators:  
Tylen Layton (918) 440-7081  
Doug King (479) 903-3622

We accept cattle all week until 10PM with hay & water.  
FREE on the farm appraisal. FREE advertising of your livestock that is consigned here. We GREATLY appreciate your business.  
"Come sell 'em in the 'Ville'."

North Town Office- (620) 251-5460  
South Town Office- (918) 255-6200  
coffeyvillestockyards.com

