

Reflector-Chronicle

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Abilene weighs future of after-school program

By Gail Parsons

Abilene Reflector-Chronicle

The Abilene school district may soon face changes to its after-school programming as new federal requirements tied to the 21st Century Community Learning Center grant raise concerns about long-term sustainability.

During a recent school board discussion, Superintendent Dana Sprinkle outlined challenges tied to the upcoming grant cycle, which the district must apply for shortly after spring break. The district is currently in the final year of its existing grant.

The grant, overseen by the Kansas State Department of Education and the Kansas Enrichment Network, supports after-school and enrichment programming. However, updated requirements for the next cycle are prompting the district to reconsider whether applying again is in its best interest.

“We felt like we needed to give you some background information because our next 21st Century grant application is due right when we come back from spring break,”

Sprinkle told board members.

Increased requirements and uncertain funding

District officials expect approximately 40 school districts to apply for the grant, but fewer than 20 awards will be funded.

“We know that with the available funding that they’re going to be awarding, our chances of receiving that grant are about 50/50, right now,” Sprinkle said. “And we know that if we write an application with revised programming, and are decreasing that programming, that’s going to further reduce our likelihood of being awarded that grant.”

The application itself is extensive, nearly 70 pages, and includes new mandates that significantly affect district operations.

One big change is that districts can no longer charge participation fees for students enrolled in the after-school program. Previously, the district relied on a mix of grant funds and program fees to sustain the program.

In the most recent year:

- The district spent \$143,568.30 on the program.

- It received \$70,000 in grant funding.

- Program fees generated about \$65,000.

- Donations accounted for about \$8,000.

Without the ability to charge fees, the district would need to cover additional costs itself.

The new grant rules also require summer programming for at least two weeks, four hours per day, four days per week, something the district has struggled to staff in previous years. Additionally, the 21st Century funds were not adequate to cover the cost of the summer program, Sprinkle said.

Costs could outpace funding

If Abilene continues its current school-year programming and adds the required summer sessions, projected costs would reach about \$156,000 annually.

Under the new grant structure, the district could receive \$125,000 per

year for the first three years. Funding would then drop to \$100,000 in years four and five.

That would leave the district responsible for \$31,000 to \$56,000 annually, not including administrative time and reporting requirements associated with the grant.

Additionally, about 20–25 percent of the grant funds are tied to mandatory activities and reporting requirements, such as conferences and external evaluations.

Difficult choices for the district

Board members discussed whether continuing with the grant makes sense or whether the district should shift to a fully fee-based after-school program.

Sprinkle said either option would require major changes.

“Either direction, we are going to have to significantly change the programming structure that we have in place because of the costs that are associated with that,” she said.

If the district moves to a fee-based model, the program would likely

serve fewer students and possibly fewer locations, with enrollment limits based on available staffing.

District leaders also acknowledged the decision could affect some families who rely on affordable after-school care.

“There is the possibility that some of our students that would benefit from programming may not be able to access that,” Sprinkle said. “That’s a difficult thing for me to say.”

Exploring other options

Several potential alternatives were discussed during the meeting, including:

- Operating the federal grant program at only one school site while charging fees at others.

- Seeking community sponsorships to help cover student participation costs.

- Considering volunteer support for enrichment activities.

- Restructuring programs so multiple schools share one after-school location.

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Photo by Tim Carpenter/Kansas Reflector

Leawood Republican Sen. Kellie Warren, chairwoman of the Senate Judiciary Committee seen here at a March 17, 2026, legislative meeting, convinces the Kansas Senate to approve a House-Senate agreement to require app stores to confirm the age of customers and make certain teenagers have parental consent to purchase or download apps. The bill is on idle in the Kansas House.

Kansas Senate embraces bill to compel age-verification, parental consent on app downloads

By Tim Carpenter

Kansas Reflector

TOPEKA — The Kansas Senate passed legislation Wednesday requiring app store providers to verify the age of Kansas customers and confirm minors had consent of an adult before purchasing or downloading an app.

The Kansas House has yet to take up House Bill 2422, and approval of the second chamber would be necessary before sending the package to Gov. Laura Kelly. The Senate vote was 34-6, but the legislation was aggressively opposed by Senate Minority Leader Dinah Sykes of Lenexa.

Prominent digital marketplaces targeted by the bill included Google Play Store, with 3 million available apps for Android users, and

Apple App Store, which allowed users to download more than 2 million applications for Apple devices.

Sen. Kellie Warren, a Leawood Republican and chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, said the Legislature ought to help parents shield children from big technology companies funneling “harmful” content and advertising to consumers. She said teenagers were downloading apps without knowledge of their parents.

“We all have seen the effect that social media, the internet, is having on our children,” she said. “In fact, we hear a lot about that from Kansas parents.”

In addition to requiring companies to verify age of account applicants, HB 2422 would mandate businesses subsequently delete

personally identifiable information used to affirm the age of adult and minor customers.

The measure would require Attorney General Kris Kobach to adopt regulations before Jan. 1, 2027, establishing age-verification methods app providers would use to confirm the age of account holders. The state’s attorney general would investigate alleged violations and impose civil penalties of not less than \$7,500 for a confirmed violation of the statute.

“It’s a small step, but important step, to keep our kids safe online,” Warren said.

Sykes, a Democrat running for state insurance commissioner, said the

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Abilene City Commission approves reallocating bond money to other projects

By Ed Boice

Abilene Reflector-Chronicle

The Abilene City Commission met Monday, March 23 for their second and last regular meeting of the month. They approved a couple of items, such as reallocating bond money toward five projects and replacing all of the Abilene Community Center’s HVACs.

Public comments

Bruce Johnson requested the commission consider prioritizing Walnut Street from the Abilene High School parking lot going south more on their list of important street projects in relation to the reallocating bond money topic the commission discussed in their prior meeting March 9.

Business items

The commission began the meeting by approving a community improvement district for Scooters along Buckeye Avenue. The district places a 1% sales tax used exclusively for building and parking lot improvements that are estimated to cost \$260,000. The commission held a public hearing with no public comments.

The commission then took steps forward to utilize bond money toward five other projects. Approximately \$1.17 million of the \$10.32 million total bonds will be reallocated. The first resolution adds the projects to the city’s capital improvement plan. The second resolution allows the city to legally use the funds towards the five projects. The following is a

list of the five projects and their estimated costs.

1. Resurfacing of the city’s three bridges, \$300,000

2. Abilene Community Center HVAC replacement, \$133,000

3. The city’s cost share of the Airport Hangar Project (eight hangars), \$575,000

4. Mill and overlay of Walnut Street from Seventh Street to approximately 13th Street, \$200,000

5. NE 14th Street from Buckeye Avenue to Brady Street project, \$350,000

The \$10.32 million in bonds was pulled for three large projects: 14th Street Industrial Park project, the 2025-2026 City Connecting Link Improvement Program (CCLIP) Buckeye Avenue Project and the construction of multi-purpose sport fields.

John Kollhoff, city commissioner, voted against both resolutions.

“I’m not saying we don’t need to find a way to pay for these projects or certainly some of these projects, but I think the way we’ve gone about this is backwards, and I’ll be voting against it,” Kollhoff said.

The commission then approved replacing all of the HVACs in the Abilene Community Center with new units. Kollhoff also voted against this item because he is against replacing all the units when only two are non-functional. All of the units are 20 years old.

When approving their insurance renewal with Smart Insurance, the commission approved creating a risk management reserve fund.

Next, the commission then approved two amendments on the city’s fee schedule. The amendments only reor-

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Weather Watch

Record

Today's forecast high — 91

Today's forecast low — 39

Wednesday's high — 96

Overnight low — 67

Precipitation — 0.00

2026 precipitation — 1.14"

Sunset Thurs. — 7:45 p.m.

Sunrise Fri. — 7:19 a.m.



Friday

High: 58

Low: 31

AM clouds, PM sun



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