



# Kansas State Department of Education Insight Podcast Transcript

## Episode 2 – Welcome Back to School

### **Intro:**

You're listening to the Kansas State Department of Education Insight podcast, where we bring you conversations and information on our vision to lead the world in the success of each student.

### **Host Dr. Randy Watson:**

Welcome back to Episode two. Thanks for tuning in to episode two.

I'm Randy Watson, commissioner of education and we're glad that you tuned in and that you join us for our episode. You know, when you do episode one, you're always hoping there will be an episode, too and we've made it. We've doubled our output already. Thanks to all of you that listened to episode one, and for those of you that are new subscribers to our podcast, we hope that you go back and listen to episode one. Welcome to episode two.

And I just want to kind of get you up to date on all things current, things just happening right now, and then we're going to turn our attention, this episode, is really going to be welcome back to school, Kansas. But before we get in on, welcome back to school. Let's talk about the hit of the summer. Nope, wasn't the Royals. I wanted it to be the Royals but wasn't the royals. It was the Sunflower Summer program. We ran that from July one to August 15th, and well over 60000 families in Kansas attended one or more of the over 70 venues that we had in our state, free to take their kids to zoos and libraries and parks and wildlife, places like the Cosmosphere and Exploration Centers, just all kinds of great places. So thank you for everyone that that did that. I know a lot of you are saying, hey, we've got to do this again next year. We're going to look at it. And, you know, we may not have the money to do, but we're certainly going to share that with the governor and the legislature and see what we can do.

Also recently, hot off the press want you to know, state board just recognized four Kansas schools as part of the Kansans can best practice awards for their child nutrition program. So we know that healthy eating and healthy living in terms of physical activity for young people are vital. When we look at the overall success of them. So we wanted to say congratulations once again to the foodservice programs and the directors and the professionals from USD 320 and Wamego, USD 312 in Haven, also Southern Lyon County in USD 252. And from the Child Care Links, Beth Carlson and that staff during those times. So congratulations again to all those food service programs for being recognized as outstanding. Speaking of outstanding. Again, part of the recent news.

Middle school students from Seaman High School just shared with the state board a project of the arts at Seaman Middle School that was selected by the National Women's History Museum to be featured in

a virtual showcase. And so shout out to Emma Noord, Emily Payne and Miley Propolish. Hope I Miley, I probably butchered that name, so I apologize for that. But they did a unique performance called Hedy Lamarr more than just a pretty face. I'm not even going to give it away. You ought to go check it out. You can Google that and see the remarkable presentation. So congratulations.

Our Food Service Award winners and to Seaman Middle School and to Emma, Emily and Miley and the teachers and staff that worked with them. Congratulations. Congratulations.

And before we get into the welcome back. Did you hear, Kansans Can Success tour?

We've already been to 16 cities just about to head out to another 16. Maybe by the time you hear this, we will already be out among another 16. We're headed to 50 total cities across Kansas to hear from you. So please come to our website. Look up Kansans Can success tour, find the day location will be near you. Hopefully, you can make that if you can't. We're going to be in town probably no more than 30 or 40 miles away from you in another location come there. But we need your input. It's been highly successful so far. We had over 800 voices that we heard in our first 14 sites, and we're looking forward to the sites that we'll be doing here in the future. We'll be wrapping that up by early September. So come out and join us.

And now, episode two, welcome back to school Kansas. First of all, that's just what I wanted to mention to you. Welcome back to school. The excitement, the excitement every kindergartner will be having of running into the school as fast as they can. Now, mom and dad, I know you're a little bit less excited about that. Some tears about maybe your oldest or your youngest getting ready for school. Well, how are my babies grown up? But they're excited. They're ready to roll. Seniors are excited. It's, you know, their last year the class of twenty-two. And it's just going to be a great year. But we know there's also going to be challenges throughout this year, both within academic and maybe within some things that are outside of our control. What we really want to focus on throughout this school year is making sure that while we have a great school year, we're being kind to each other, we're being generous with each other, that we're taking the time to listen to each other and really making sure that all of our schools are successful for this year and beyond. So I can't wait to see all of you in school.

And we want to check in with a couple of our important programs that. That plays a role in making sure kids are great with nutrition and on safety, and we already mentioned our child nutrition and wellness programs and those outstanding programs that we recognize. But again, this year, all Kansas students can receive free breakfast. And lunch was true last year. It's true this year. And we can learn a little bit more about those successful programs from a rock star director we have here in the agency. Cheryl Johnson, our director of Child Nutrition and Wellness. Cheryl, thanks for joining us today. Just talk a little bit to our listeners about the importance of school nutrition and wellness, both at the breakfast side and the lunch side.

**Cheryl Johnson:**

You are right. All Kansas students can receive a free breakfast and lunch through the national school lunch program each school day in the entire 20, 21, 22 school year. The United States Department of Agriculture continues to be committed to providing safe, healthy meals free of charge to children.

As the COVID 19 pandemic continues to threaten food and nutrition, security of our most vulnerable by providing free meals to all students, it eliminates the need to collect meal payments. This speeds up the service of meals and also reduces the contact and potential exposure to COVID 19.

The free school meals are safe, they're nutritious, they're delicious, and they really can help extend the family food budgets, too. I also want to extend appreciation to all of the Kansas school nutrition professionals who are working so hard day in and day out.

We just really appreciate their dedication to feed students healthy meals.

**Host Dr. Randy Watson:**

Really appreciate your work, all of your staff work. And I know, as you've just said, you appreciate the work that's going on in the field as we serve record numbers of kids both breakfast and lunch, and make sure that if nothing else, those are two really nutritious meals during the day.

Also, school busses are an important part of getting kids to school. And we have some safety tips with our school bus safety director, Keith Dreiling. Keith, let's talk about school bus safety. The campaign is that we need to make sure everyone knows about things that we need to remember as we head back to school. What to do if you see that stop arm out, how we can keep kids safe on the bus.

**Keith Dreiling:**

The school busses are transporting our most precious commodity, our children. And we really need to be very cognizant of their safety.

The motoring public, they haven't seen school busses, you know, for several months now with summer vacation, even though that school bus is 70 times safer than any other vehicle out there on the roadway. We still need parents. And the other motoring public out there to be aware of the dangers. The biggest danger for the students comes when that school bus stops and it is loading and unloading. This is the most dangerous time for those children. First off, we want to make sure the motoring public knows that when those eight-way red lights flashing red lights on the front and rear bulkhead of the bus, come on and the stop arm comes out. Traffic is required to stop from both directions. Makes no difference whether it's a four-lane street, three lanes of the street is equipped with what they call a shared left-turn lane. That does not exempt the motoring public from stopping. The only time the motoring public is not required to stop from the opposing direction is if it is a divided highway. And when we use the term divided highway, we were talking about a raised median or a grass median. Otherwise, it makes no difference how many lanes of traffic there are. All traffic is required to stop unless it is a divided highway. And like, say, on a divided highway, it would be the vehicles that are approaching the bus from the rear.

**Host Dr. Randy Watson:**

But how about the stop on red kids ahead? Keith, talk a little bit about that.

**Keith Dreiling:**

This is something that we started a couple of years ago. And as a result of the number of violations that we have on our one-day count, every year, we do a one day stop arm count.

We average somewhere in the neighborhood of a thousand violations a day. That's 1000 violations a day. Last year, we had 240 districts that reported we had 3355 busses and those busses observed 912 violations in just one day, the year before, we had 1021, the year before that we had 1002 violations. And this campaign, like I say, is just an effort to help the motoring public understand that we are talking about the safety of the kids. We have a number of posters that are available that you will see displayed.

We have bumper stickers on the rear of the school busses to help the motoring public bring attention to the fact that the school bus makes frequent stops. And when it does stop and those lights come on, students are getting on and off that bus.

**Host Dr. Randy Watson:**

Thanks, Keith. That was great information. And we're really glad that you were able to be with us today to provide it for all of all of us.

**Keith Dreiling:**

Thank you, Commissioner Watson, for giving me this chance to address this important issue.

**Host Dr. Randy Watson:**

We'll have some information about stop on red kids ahead on our website. You can go to [KSDE.ORG](http://KSDE.ORG) So. a lot of things. Child nutrition and wellness. We talked about bus transportation and safety. Now, we would like to hear from some educators. We would like for educators comment on what did we learn about the pandemic during the pandemic. We had to shift. We had to be online. Sometimes we were doing hybrid schedules. We had to rethink how we would do projects. We were in person a lot and we had to have quarantines. So there was a lot of learning staff did in the last year, and that they're going to bring forward they're better educators because of that hardship that we went through in the last year and a half. And so, it's going to be great as we hear some of those stories from the field, from teachers, administrators and others that we've collected that talk about lessons learned that they're going to take forward forever. So let's listen to a few of those.

**Lindsay Bower:**

My name is Lindsay Bower, and I am an English 11 teacher at Turner High School in Turnour USD 202. In teaching through the pandemic. I learned just how important school is to so many of our students.

It is more than just a building in which to be educated. It is a place that provides them consistency, stability, warmth, safety, inclusion, et cetera. And I think the students really came to recognize that as well. I had many tell me how much they missed the normalcy of school.

And so I think that we've all kind of gained a new appreciation for coming to school every day. And I hope to use that in my teaching this year to really focus on fostering that sense of community in my classroom and making sure that school continues to be a place that students look to with a positive mindset

**Cary Conover:**

My name is Cary Conover, and I am a journalism and photography teacher at Andover High School, USD 385. I learned throughout the pandemic that students have a real capacity for understanding the bigger picture that you are trying to teach.

I realize now over the last 10 years that I built this curriculum that really has a lot of little things, a lot of little ideas in it, lots of technical things in particular about photography and Photoshop. And sure, students would take my class and by the end of the class, they would really have chops.

I mean, they could work their way around a computer camera, et cetera. But I think now I've got this real recalibrated approach toward just thinking big and thinking more, just sort of soaring in terms of, you know, what's the importance of what we do as photographers, you know, what is the nature of our inquiry?

You know, I just really think that I've just gotten away so long doing little technical projects, and now I really want to dive in and do you know, more in-depth projects with them.

**John Cannon:**

My name is John Cannon, and I'm the principal at Park Elementary School, USD 405 in Lyons.

What I learned during the pandemic in my position was to give grace and empathy readily. Through the pandemic, we were able to see and hear and listen to our kids learn in a new way, in a different way.

But more importantly, we for our teachers and I, we were able to see inside our kids homes and see what things were like for them and to get a real understanding of what their lives were like at home.

And it made me think and then apply how I can give grace to people, even when it seems least deserving. And sometimes that's hard because we have perceptions and of people and what they think and what they believe in and really what it comes back down to is for me to be the leader that I need to

be, is to give that opportunity readily. So, how I look forward to carrying that on for this year is to just continue to be a to be a merchant of hope and a giver of grace and empathy.

I may not understand the position or what happened, but I am willing to listen and be there and thankful that they've told me.

**Samantha McCary:**

My name is Samantha McCary, and I am a seventh-grade math and science teacher at Liberty Memorial Central Middle School, USD 497.

I learned to set boundaries for myself, specifically between my teaching life and personal life during the pandemic. I do this by limiting time working outside of my contract hours and using every last minute during my planned time in an efficient manner.

This is always the goal. Sometimes I don't meet it. Collaborating with my colleagues also helps dividing and conquering. And realizing that my to-do list will never be done, so I must take care of myself physically and mentally in order to be the best teacher for my students, because they deserve it and I deserve it, too.

**Jennifer Mahin:**

My name is Jennifer Mahin, and I'm a technology integration specialist and a kindergarten through fifth grade STEM teacher at East Elementary School at USD 109. I think over the last year, I've learned that teaching during a pandemic is hard.

The past school year and even the start of the school year, like nothing I've ever experienced, I feel that teachers are resilient and really had to be innovative and redesign the way they have been teaching. For me personally, I've always been an early adopter for technology and always trying something new and just trying to be innovative. But for my district as a whole, I saw a lot of educators teaching methods greatly improve or change in the area of technology.

I have noticed a shift towards giving students a choice in how they show teachers what they know. I see educators switching to innovative, meaningful technology with student-centered learning. And I really see that continuing over the next school year as well.

**Host Dr. Randy Watson:**

Wasn't that outstanding? As we heard from those educators, the best and the brightest teachers are right here in Kansas schools, and we're grateful for them every day. That's the end of episode two. And we're so glad that you joined us.

But we want to make sure that you tune in next month, because episode three is going to be about a task force that I set up a few months ago to study graduation requirements for graduation in Kansas. That work has been taking place over the last couple months.

And we're going to be talking to some people on that committee and also things that are going on on that committee. Some of the topics you won't want to miss that. That'll be coming up in episode three. But until then, congratulations to everyone on starting a great school year in 2021-22.

I can't wait to get out and be out in many of the schools throughout the year. And thanks for tuning in to episode two.