

The Board of Education for Unified School District No. 297 called its regular meeting to order at 7:00 a.m. on September 10, 2026, at the District Office, with President Troy Hilt presiding. Board President Troy Hilt, Vice-President Shawna Blanka, Chris Hingst, Traci Neitzel, and ShayLinn Zwegardt were present. Board members Brooke Lohr and Bruce Swihart were absent. Also in attendance were Superintendent Mark Penka, High School Principal Delbert Schmidt, and Elementary Principal Susan Dinkel. Upon a motion by ShayLinn Zwegardt, seconded by Chris Hingst, the Board voted unanimously to approve the agenda with one amendment: moving the audience presentation to the top of the order of business to accommodate the presenter. The motion carried 5-0.

Under audience presentations, Jessica Matthies addressed the Board on behalf of the Match Day initiative. Jessica Matthies asked available Board members to volunteer to staff the event's information booth and answer public inquiries. She further reported that the Board had been allotted a \$100 donation to direct toward any approved booth. Following discussion, the Board reached a consensus to direct the \$100 donation to Indians in Action, the mini-foundation of St. Francis students.

The Board then entered into consideration of the consent calendar. Items presented for approval included the official minutes from the August 20, 2026, regular board meeting and Revenue Neutral Rate hearing, the monthly list of bills, regular financial reports, and a gift offer of \$7,240 from Redi-Mix designated for school concrete restorations. Upon a motion by Chris Hingst, seconded by Traci Neitzel, the Board voted to approve the consent calendar as presented. The motion carried 5-0.

In committee reports, the hiring committee recommended immediately transferring Jackie Butler from elementary secretary to District Clerk, and further recommended that the district advertise to fill the resulting elementary secretary vacancy. Chris Hingst moved to approve the personnel transfer and corresponding job posting as recommended. ShayLinn Zwegardt seconded the motion, and the motion carried 5-0.

Under old business, the Board reviewed correspondence from Hadley Gillum regarding Freedom Claims Insurance. Mr. Gillum reported that he could not match or beat the renewal premium offer from Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Kansas. The Board accepted the report as presented; no official action was taken on health insurance at this time.

The Board then addressed several new business items. Upon the recommendation of Superintendent Penka, ShayLinn Zwegardt moved to approve the hiring of Adam Guthmiller as assistant junior high track coach. The motion was seconded by Chris Hingst and carried 5-0.

Subsequently, under new business, Shawna Blanka moved, seconded by Chris Hingst, to approve the junior high and high school dual sports policy for inclusion in the student handbook. The motion passed 5-0.

Under new business, Traci Neitzel then moved to authorize the administration to dispose of obsolete and irreparable school equipment. ShayLinn Zwegardt seconded the motion, and the motion carried 5-0.

Superintendent Penka presented the unofficial enrollment update, noting a student headcount of 272 as of September 4, 2026, and compared it with historical data from previous years. This item was presented for informational purposes only, and no formal action was taken.

Additionally, under new business, the Board discussed superintendent goals and reached a consensus to contract with the Kansas Association of School Boards (KASB) to facilitate the development of these professional benchmarks.

In the final item of new business, ShayLinn Zwegardt moved to accept the immediate resignation of board member Bruce Swihart, whose term has 14 months remaining, with the vacancy to be filled by appointment at a special board of education meeting set for September 25, 2026, at 7:00 a.m. Chris Hingst seconded the motion, and the motion carried 5-0.

During the review of the school-improvement process, the administration reported that the school grounds are in excellent condition. It noted that they are currently gathering quotes for locker room renovations to be completed this school year. The Board requested a tour at the next meeting to evaluate the full scope of the refurbishing.

With no further business before the Board, ShayLinn Zwegardt moved to adjourn the meeting. Chris Hingst seconded the motion, and the motion carried 5-0. President Troy Hilt declared the meeting adjourned at 9:04 a.m.

A special meeting was scheduled for September 25, 2026, at 7:00 a.m. to fill the vacant board seat and the elementary secretary position. The next regular board meeting was slated for October 8, 2026, at 7:00 a.m.