## Students deserve our admiration, not constant surveillance

**√**here you are — a Kansas teacher supervising a high school hallway in between classes.

Students flood past you in a clattering blur of hightop sneakers, yoga pants and laughter.

One student strides past you, pulling a cellphone out of her purse to respond to an email. Another student, on her way to photography class, slides her digital camera into its case. A third student slings a backpack over his shoulders, laptop stowed safely in the main pocket.

Your job seems simple: keep these students safe. But how much surveillance is needed to protect them?

Will you monitor every message in the email account of an honor roll student? Will you inspect the images of the award-winning student photographer? Will you reach into the backpack of a random student to inspect his laptop?

A federal lawsuit filed last week by students in Lawrence alleges their



**Eric Thomas** 

school district has gone too far in its surveillance. The plaintiffs, former and current Unified School District 497 students, claim the use of Gaggle, digital surveillance software deployed by the district, unconstitutionally monitors them while infringing on their First and Fourth Amendment rights.

During an interview this week, Harrison Rosenthal, one of the attorneys representing the students, extended my hallway metaphor.

He said USD 497 is reaching into the private files of students and basically conducting what we think is a digital strip search. This would be

akin to the school going into lockers, opening the lockers, opening the bookbags — your private bookbags — and searching and rummaging around your personal files."

Mark Johnson, another attorney for the plaintiffs, said USD 497's use of Gaggle is worse than that. The surveillance isn't reaching into just one student backpack.

"It's everybody," Johnson said.

As the former director of an association dedicated to student journalism, I know and admire the journalism teacher, many of the students, and two of the lawyers at the heart of this lawsuit. Some of the students also have been my students at the University of Kansas.

Hearing their stories in conversation since the controversy began made it clear to me how overreaching and ineffective the district's surveillance has been. The 311-page lawsuit intricately describes the district's failures.

In this fully digital age

of American education, students at many Kansas high schools are now required to do most of their coursework on computer, often using software mandated by the district. In USD 497, this means software in the Google Workspace/Suite. And that platform is monitored by Gaggle.

This creates a disturbing domino effect. Students must attend school. They must use Google software. And therefore, they must submit to 24/7 Gaggle oversight of their every keystroke.

In this way, Kansas students are obligated to be surveilled.

The stated objectives of the district's contract with Gaggle is about student safety. One USD 497 agenda described Gaggle as "a digital surveillance tool that helps school districts manage student safety on school-provided devices and platforms by monitoring student accounts to identify and flag those who may be struggling and need help."

As the complaint details,

one district employee said in a meeting that student journalists were "valuing their constitutional rights above the mental health of their peers."

In an era of problematic teenage mental health and suicide trends, a seemingly sophisticated intervention or technological solution is enticing for our schools.

Embedded in the complaint is Exhibit O, a spreadsheet with 1,246 rows — each one detailing an instance when Gaggle found problematic content in a student's digital lives. Reading the words found in student documents creates a grim portrait of Lawrence students and the American teenage psyche: "i'm broken," "slit my wrists," "suicidal," "cutting," "i'm not okay," "voices in my head," "wanted to die," "i have no hope."

I asked Rosenthal why school districts shouldn't respond with surveillance like Gaggle.

"Student safety should be a paramount concern for the district, but surveillance can't come at the expense of constitutional

rights," Rosenthal said. "Safety does not mean dragnet, widespread, suspicion-less searches of every student's thoughts. And it's incumbent upon the district to craft a mechanism that keeps

with the Constitution.' As a parent of a high school student, I considered what my son's academic life would look like at a school with Gaggle - the school described by Lawrence students in the lawsuit.

It's a school where universal digital surveillance leads to clumsy, if any, intervention. A school where student journalists are stifled from independent reporting. A school where taxpayer dollars flow to a company that hovers over student creative work. A school where students are united not just by the hallways but by a sense that Big Brother is watching.

That is a school hallway I don't want my student walking down.

Eric Thomas teaches visual journalism and photojournalism at the University of Kansas.

**Public Notices** 

Leavenworth County

**Public Notices** 

**Public Notices** 

**Public Notices** 

State of Kansas

Leavenworth County

NOTICE OF HEARING TO EXCEED REVENUE NEUTRAL RATE AND BUDGET HEARING

will meet on August 20, 2025 at 9:00 AM at Leavenworth County Commission Room, 300 Walnut for the purpose of hearing and answering objections of taxpayers relating to the proposed use of all funds and the amount of ad valorem tax and Revenue Neutral Rate. Detailed budget information is available at Leavenworth County Commission Office and will be available at this hearing. BUDGET SUMMARY

Proposed Budget 2026 Expenditures and Amount of 2025 Ad Valorem Tax establish the maximum limits of the 2026 budget Estimated Tax Rate is subject to change depending on the final ass

	Prior Year Actual for 2024		Current Year Estimate for 2025		Proposed Budget Year for 2026		
FUND	Expenditures	Actual Tax Rate*	Expenditures	Actual Tax Rate*	Budget Authority for Expenditures	Amount of 2025 Ad Valorem Tax	Proposed Estimated Tax Rate*
General	34,724,207	21.488	37,752,277	21.945	38,843,672	25,670,621	21.939
Debt Service	1,987,758		2,001,440		2,001,665		
Road & Bridge	13,147,773	9.820	14,588,001	10.811	15,506,465	12,649,898	10.811
Health	1,511,611	0.491	1,568,918	0.444	1,552,949	507,484	0.434
Employee Benefits	10,501,897	0.555	11,566,500	1.256	12,733,000	1,904,273	1.627
Economic Development	330,818	0.307	85,658	0.046	85,658	71,572	0.061
Council on Aging	3,647,032	2.780	4,082,178	2.779	4,305,660	2,454,147	2.097
Juvenile Detention	504,260	0.338	430,231	0.282	505,814	474,344	0.405
Solid Waste	2,373,832		2,413,205		2,480,306		
ROD Tech	132,460		169,211		197,920		
Clerk Tech	26,719		31,000		25,000		
Treasurer Tech	1,460		20,000		20,000		
Special Alcohol	45,500		50,000		60,000		
Special Parks & Rec			45,000		50,000		
911 Taxes	635,855		747,600		778,444		
20 Year Sales Tax (171)	2,811,814		8,432,991		8,001,665		
Opioid Settlement	76,009		148,154		149,939		
Non-Budgeted Funds-A	3,743,597						
Non-Budgeted Funds-B	6,357,232						
Totals	82,559,834	35.779	84,132,364	37.563	87,298,157	43,732,339	37.374
					Revenu	e Neutral Rate **	35.636
Less: Transfers	18,577,372		16,155,599		18,619,962	•	
Net Expenditure	63,982,462		67,976,765		68,678,195		
Total Tax Levied	38,128,159	1	41,702,084		xxxxxxxxxxxxxxx	vvv	
Total Tax Levied							

2024

January 1, G.O. Bonds 25,260,000 Revenue Bonds Other

Outstanding Indebtedness,

\*Tax rates are expressed in mills \*\*Revenue Neutral Rate as defined by KSA 79-2988 Leavenworth County

Leavenworth County

23,885,000 Lease Pur. Princ. 173,586 Total

## **Public Notices**

IN THE DISTRICT COURT OF LEAVEN-WORTH COUNTY, KANSAS Probate Division Case No. LV-2025-PR-000136 In the Matter of the Estate of: Nancy Susan Miller. Deceased

**Notice of Hearing** The State Of Kansas To All Persons Concerned: You are notified that on August 1, 2025, a Petition was filed in this Court by KERRY J. STALEY, sister and heir of NANCY SUSAN MILLER, deceased, requesting: Real Involved Descent be determined of the following described real estate situated in Leavenworth County, Kansas: Unit C-1 SERRA RIDGE TOWNHOMES, according to the Plat of Survey filed May 21, 1985 in Survey Book 6, Page 21, being a portion of Lot 2, Chambers Subdivision, City of Leavenworth, Leavenworth County, Kansas.

Commonly known as 4016 10th Ave., Leavenworth, Kansas 66048; and that such property owned by the decedent at the time of death be assigned pursuant to the laws of intestate succession. You are required to file your written defenses to the Petition on or before September 12, 2025 at 8:30 a.m. of said day, in this Court, in the City of Leavenworth. Leavenworth County, Kansas, at which time and place the cause will be heard. This hearing will occur remotely. If you wish to participate in the hearing by video or conference call, please contact the Leavenworth County District Court at 913-684-0700 before the date of the hearing so you can be invited to join the hearing. Should you fail to file your written defenses, judgment and decree will be entered in due course upon the Petition. KERRY J. STALEY Petitioner Submitted by:

Crow & Associates /s/ Michael Crow Michael Crow. #07707 /s/ Noah Scrimsher Noah Scrimsher, #30133 302 Shawnee Street Leavenworth, Kansas 66048 Phone: (913) 682-0166

Fax: (913) 682-2130

E-Mail: mikecrow@c rowlegal.com E-Mail: nscrimsher@c rowlegal.com Attorneys for Estate Published in the Leavenworth Times, Aug 9, 16, 23, 2025

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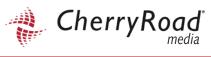
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