



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Douglas County develops Education Unified Command**

*Structure to support a coordinated COVID response and reopening of schools*

**LAWRENCE** – Building upon Douglas County’s use of the Unified Command (UC) structure to lead a comprehensive COVID-19 pandemic response, local government, health, education and business leaders will partner to provide a coordinated reopening and response strategy among education institutions. The goals: protect students, staff, and faculty; reduce community impacts; and, minimize disease spread. Leaders of Douglas County, City of Lawrence, Lawrence-Douglas County Public Health, LMH Health, University of Kansas, Lawrence Public Schools and The Chamber will participate.

Under the National Incident Management System, when a response involves a multi-agency or multi-jurisdictional approach, the Incident Command leadership of the response effort expands into a UC. The UC is a structure that brings together the Incident Commanders of the major organizations involved in the incident in order to coordinate an effective response, while at the same time allowing each to carry out their own jurisdictional, legal, and functional responsibilities.

“As the Unified Command, we are continuously developing a common set of objectives and strategies, sharing information, maximizing the use of available resources in our community, and enhancing the efficiency of our workforce,” said Dan Partridge, director, Lawrence-Douglas County Public Health. “We work in conjunction with the Douglas County Emergency Operations Center, which provides resources and assistance from the state and federal levels of government.”

The UC is responsible for overall management of the incident. This structure links the organizations responding to the incident and provides a forum for these entities to make consensual decisions. Under the UC, the various organizations blend together to create an integrated response team.

The Education UC will be led by Sarah Plinsky, Douglas County administrator; Craig Owens, City of Lawrence manager; Dan Partridge, Lawrence-Douglas County Public Health director; Russ Johnson, LMH Health CEO and president; Douglas Girod, KU chancellor; Anthony Lewis, Lawrence Public Schools superintendent; and Bonnie Lowe, The Chamber president and CEO.

“We believe this collaborative leadership structure has paid dividends, and we are looking to extend it because it will continue to take an intensive community effort to keep the virus at bay and reopen our schools and universities safely,” said Robert Bienecki, director, Douglas County Emergency Management.

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The Education UC's initial objectives include to:

- Identify and coordinate opening dates
- Ensure consistent and timely public information and develop a shared community understanding
- Provide for critical workforce, to include childcare, and ensure continuity of operations
- Create a uniform, minimum set of reopening standards including PPE, sanitation, movement, and other safety considerations
- Establish unified testing capabilities and protocols
- Establish common protocols for outbreak response and closures
- Develop plans and secure resources to effectively execute the uniform, minimum standards

“Our schools cannot do it alone. We need the continued support of the experts across our community to make smart and deliberate decisions with the health, safety and best interests of students and staff in mind,” said Anthony Lewis, superintendent, Lawrence Public Schools.

Members of the public can also check [douglascountyks.org/coronavirus](https://douglascountyks.org/coronavirus) or [ldchealth.org/coronavirus](https://ldchealth.org/coronavirus) for information about COVID-19 in Douglas County.

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