

Tribute to the Lawrence, Kansas Community Nursery School

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Capitol Words

Madam Speaker, the Lawrence, Kansas, Community Nursery School [LCNS] was founded in 1948 after a group of mothers attended a conference on preschool play offered by the University of Kansas Extension School and sponsored by the Lawrence League for the Practice of Democracy. They founded the school on three main principles--that the school must be: a parent cooperative; integrated, both racially and religiously; and low-cost. Today LCNS is the second oldest operating parent cooperative preschool in the Nation, and those principles remain at the corner of the school.

On April 17, 1948 the school opened with its first class of 10 mothers and 14 children. Financial support for the school came from the Lawrence League for the Practice of Democracy and the Oread Meeting of Friends. The tuition was set at \$1.00 per week. In 1951 the Kansas State Board of Health licensed the school, and in July of 1952 the school was incorporated under Kansas State Law as the Lawrence Community Nursery School. The school received its permanent license to operate in 1961.

The school was housed in various churches and schools for its first 6 years. After at least eight different locations, in the spring of 1955 the members of the advisory board, the board, and the general membership voted to start a 3-year building fund campaign chaired by Dr. Helen Gilles, a well known local pediatrician, to raise money to buy a permanent home for the nursery school.

The campaign was a huge success. With support of local businesses, members of the cooperative, and the community at large, they were able to raise over \$2,000 in their building fund by May 1956, more than 2 years ahead of schedule. In March 1956, Dr. Gilles presented the idea of buying the Wesleyan Methodist Church at the corner of 7th and Alabama Streets. In August 1956, they put a down payment on the church. In September 1956, the board voted to paint the school "barn red with white trim." This is how the building remains today, and it has become a permanent fixture in the Old West Lawrence neighborhood and the greater community as a whole.

Several months of renovations and sharing the school with the church followed. Although the site was used by the school in the fall of 1956, the church remained. In the summer of 1957 the church moved out, and the Little Red Schoolhouse was the home of the Lawrence Community Nursery School. Madam Speaker, I join with the LCNS community and with all Lawrencians in celebrating the completion of the 50th school year at their permanent home at 645 Alabama Street.

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