

**Club Name:** Boys & Girls Club of Lawrence, Kansas

[bgclk.org](https://bgclk.org/)

Boys & Girls Clubs of Lawrence serves more than 1,500 youth from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds on a daily basis in 15 sites, 14 of which are located in elementary schools. Its stand-alone site, the Don & Beverly Gardner Center for Great Futures, serves middle- and high-school-age young people through varied programming that emphasizes career exploration and workforce readiness.

The Club organization and the Lawrence School District enjoy a strong, long-standing partnership of nearly 20 years. The partnership hinges on close working relationships between Club and school professionals at every level; a district administrator serves on the Club’s board of directors. Both the school district and Club organization place a high value on helping young people explore careers and prepare for postsecondary education and the working world.

For these reasons, when the Club organization had outgrown its old stand-alone site and needed to build a new one, the school district offered a piece of land next to its Lawrence College and Career Center. This school offers hands-on career and technical education opportunities to juniors and seniors and allows them to earn college credits while still in high school. Also on the same campus is a technical skills training school known as Peaslee Tech, where Club teens can enroll in state-subsidized courses and earn certifications as nursing aides, emergency medical technicians, heating and air conditioning technicians, automobile mechanics, etc.

The school district transports youth from all of its middle schools and high schools to the Club teen center, which opened in 2018 and offers state-of-the-art spaces for STEAM projects, performing arts, audio and video production, culinary arts, gardening and more. Staff, some of whom are AmeriCorps volunteers, incorporate exploration of careers and postsecondary options in all of the center’s programs, which include Keystone Club, Youth of the Year, Teen Council, SMART Girls and SMART Moves. For example, the center has a Keystone advisory committee made up of community professionals that set up workplace visits or job shadowing opportunities based on the Keystoners’ interests. Through its school district partnership, the center provides youth with access to Career Cruising, a website for taking interest assessments and exploring different paths, as well as online SAT/ACT preparation.

Club teen center staff also work with other community partners to create mentoring opportunities for youth. Youth are paired with adult mentors to work together on projects in STEM clubs. The center also offers a mentoring and career coaching program called Convergence, in which teens from minority groups are matched with corporate professionals who are also from minority groups.

Recently the Club teen center partnered with the Lawrence Arts Center to apply for funding to engage Club teens in the arts center’s monthly Final Friday exhibitions. Club teens worked on all aspects of mounting an exhibition: making art, promoting the events, securing venues, hanging exhibits, arranging refreshments and music, and selling artwork. Club staff delighted in seeing the teens have a “light bulb moment” when they realized that in participating in that project, they were actually applying their skills in a real-world work setting.