



Notice: The Abilene Reflector-Chronicle will be closed Thursday, June 19 and no paper will be printed or published online in observance of the Juneteenth holiday.

Reflector-Chronicle

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Courtesy photo

From left, Sara Broers, Megan Welsch (Dodge City Convention & Visitors Bureau), Julie Roller Weeks (Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau), and Janet Kuhn (Hays Convention & Visitors Bureau) at the Midwest Travel Network Conference.

The Gunsmoke Trail garners Midwest Travel recognition

Abilene CVB

The Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau is proud to announce that the Kansas Gunsmoke Trail has been named the 2025 Collaboration of the Year by the Midwest Travel Network during its annual conference held in Grand Island, Nebraska.

The Kansas Gunsmoke Trail is a cooperative tourism campaign that connects four iconic Kansas communities: Wichita, Hays, Dodge City, and Abilene. Through shared storytelling, historic attractions, and cowboy charm, the trail captures the spirit of the Wild West and invites travelers to explore it town by town.

“If you’ve followed Kansas destinations this past year, you know this trail is drawing attention from travelers of all ages,” said Sara Broers, co-founder of Midwest Travel Network. “It’s fun to see how this collaboration includes four Kansas towns and Midwest Travel Network content creators.”

Julie Roller Weeks, director of the Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau, praised the strength of the partnership. “We know the best way to share Kansas is by working together,” said Roller Weeks. “The Kansas Gunsmoke Trail builds on the stories travelers already love, including legendary characters, classic TV shows, and unforgettable small towns, and brings them to life across the state. We are honored to be part of a collaboration that is putting Kansas on the map in a new way.”

Launched in 2023, the trail promotes cowboy heritage, small-town hospitality, and Western-themed experiences that travelers can enjoy both in person and online. The campaign has quickly gained momentum thanks to the enthusiastic support of local communities and tourism content creators from



Courtesy photo

As part of the conference, Julie Roller Weeks presented “Making Magic Happen: The Playbook for Small-Town Tourism with Big Results” to Destination Marketing Organizations from across the Midwest.

To learn more about the 2025 Midwest Travel Network Awards, visit <https://midwesttravelnetwork.com/midwest-travel-network-award-winners>. To explore the Kansas Gunsmoke Trail and plan your own Wild West adventure, go to www.KansasGunsmokeTrail.com

Abilene city approves bonds for 3 projects

Goodbyes said during Marsh’s final meeting

By Ed Boice
Abilene Reflector-Chronicle

The Abilene City Commission approved several items during the June 9 regular meeting.

Among the items was the issuing of \$9.15 million in bonds to fund three city projects and discussion of hiring an interim city manager.

Ron Marsh, city manager, also gave some final public remarks as this was his last Abilene city meeting.

Proclamation

Mayor Brandon Rein signed a proclamation for Elder Abuse Awareness Month for June.

“Whereas, too often, elder abuse threatens the livelihoods of older individuals, erodes their extraordinary potential, and increases their risk of death by 300% compared to seniors who have not been mistreated,” reads the proclamation, “and whereas, Abilene’s vulnerable and older adults of all social, economic, racial and ethnic backgrounds may be targets of abuse, neglect or exploitation, which can occur in families, long-term care communities, and medical settings...”

Regular meeting

The commission returned to the topic of hiring an interim city manager after their special meeting June 3.

John Deardoff with the Kan-

sas League of Municipalities attended the meeting to share his findings for candidates.

Deardoff said there are not many people available to fill in as an interim. He gave the names of two retired city managers who expressed some interest.

The commission decided to contact the candidates Deardoff recommended and then hold a special meeting to decide who they will choose. They set the date for the special meeting at 5 p.m. June 12.

The commission then approved two resolutions concerning the financing of the 14th Street Industrial Park project, the 2025-2026 City Connecting Link Improvement Program (CCLIP) Buckeye Avenue Project and the construction of multi-purpose sport fields with \$9.15 million in bonds.

Both votes went 4-1, with John Kollhoff, city commissioner, being the only dissenter. He once again spoke of his disapproval of issuing bonds for the CCLIP project, specifically to repair drainage structures and sidewalks.

“I think spending a million dollars on five blocks for stuff we don’t know we need is frankly bankrupt, and the process that we’ve gone through to get here I believe is just as broken,” Kollhoff said.

The commission then approved an amendment to an ordinance to add a railway car as a drinking establishments.

Next, the commission approved the purchase of a new skid steer for the Public Works Department. The winning bid was from Foley Equipment in Salina for \$69,579.61.

They next approved the purchase of a new street sweeper through Sourcewell.

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Abilene USD 435 students making strides in reading and math

By Gail Parsons
Abilene Reflector-Chronicle

Abilene School Board members received a comprehensive look at academic growth across grade levels in reading and math at their June meeting.

Assistant Superintendent Dana Sprinkle presented the Spring FastBridge data, which showed encouraging trends, but she also acknowledging areas for continued focus.

At Kennedy Elementary, which serves preschool through first grade, early reading and math scores remain strong.

“If you see a star next to that percentile, then than means that’s a best-ever FastBridge percentage for students that are above benchmark this spring,” she said as board members looked at a slide with gold stars next to the kindergarten and first grade reading scores.

Preschool and kindergarten teams earned praise for maintaining high achievement, but special attention was given to first grade.

That group began the school year with only 35% of students at or above benchmark in reading. After dipping to 29% mid-year, the students ended the year at 46%, the highest result in recent years.

“While I know that that’s not the end game that we are shooting for, this is the best result we’ve had for several years in this area,” Sprinkle said.

“A few years ago, we had students finishing the year at 29%. While this may not be the percentage that we want to see in the future, right now, there are percentages very similar to this across the state of Kansas.”

She attributed this rebound to targeted interventions, collaboration among staff, and the impact of LETRS training,

which emphasizes the science of reading.

Second and third graders at McKinley had best-ever percentages in reading accuracy and fluency, and comprehension.

Diving into the numbers a little deeper, Sprinkle said there was a 25% mobility rate in fourth grade, where nearly one-quarter of students either left or joined between assessment windows.

Fifth grade saw similar student turnover at 19%. Research shows such mobility can hinder achievement.

“These are the only two grade levels that I’ve had an opportunity to really dive into and match this up to look at mobility rates,” she said. “We’ve looked before at changes that have happened with new students that have joined us each year, but I haven’t taken into account those students that were leaving as well. I will continue

to take a look at this area of information as we review results.”

Eisenhower Elementary fourth and fifth grade students saw a decrease from last year; however, spring 2024 numbers were considerably higher than 2023.

Abilene Middle School data revealed more reasons to celebrate. Sixth and eighth grade reading scores demonstrated significant gains, and the percentage of students in the “high-risk” category for reading decreased across all buildings.

At McKinley, high-risk students dropped from 24% to 13%; Eisenhower fell from 23% to 18%; and Middle School held at 9% of students being at high risk and low risk then was reduced from 21% to 15% of students.

“There’s some significant work going that students may not be at that benchmark yet, but we are moving them across performance levels, and that’s something we’re

trying to track very carefully as well,” she said.

Across all grade levels, the percentage of students reading at or above benchmark climbed from 62% last year to 69% this spring.

“Our goal is still to be above 80% of students who are at benchmark,” she said. “But, we’re making some significant gains here and we need to celebrate that.”

Math data showed steady improvement as well, with several grade levels earning “best-ever” ratings.

While 12th-grade data was excluded due to low assessment participation, students across grades reduced high-risk math classifications: McKinley dropped from 17% to 12%, Eisenhower from 15% to 13%, and middle school from 8% to 6%.

“Many of our 12th graders are not enrolled in a math class,” Sprinkle said. “It becomes very difficult to get all of them assessed. If we have more than 25% of the group

that has not taken the assessment, it’s not a valid measure of that grade level.”

Looking ahead, the district will focus on standards alignment as part of its school improvement plan. Beginning in August, all K–12 teachers will receive professional development on updated Kansas standards and newly released toolkits.

The six-month target is full alignment in math across all levels, with a 12-month goal of ensuring curriculum resources match the standards.

“I’m guessing that we’re going to find ... there are some math lessons that may not necessarily match up with Kansas standards,” she said. “We don’t need to spend time teaching those lessons, but other lessons that we need to have a greater depth of knowledge. We’re going to use those guidance tools and the toolkits to make sure that we’re really targeting the standards the way we need to at each grade level.”

Weather Watch Record

Today’s forecast high — 84
Today’s forecast low — 64
Monday’s high — 94
Overnight low — 69
Precipitation — 0.00
2025 precipitation — 45.99
Sunset Tues. — 8:58 p.m.
Sunrise Weds. — 6:05 a.m.



Wednesday
High: 86
Low: 65
Partly cloudy



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