



## USD 497 News Release

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### **Board Discusses Superintendent Search, Performing Arts Facilities, & Legislative Priorities**

The Lawrence Board of Education Monday directed the district's Human Resources Department to develop a request for proposals from firms interested in assisting the board with the search for a long-term superintendent. Following the late June resignation of Superintendent Dr. Anthony Lewis, the board hired Interim Superintendent Dr. Jeanice Kerr Swift on August 12 to serve a one-year contract through June 30, 2025. Board President Kelly Jones has shared publicly that she welcomes Dr. Swift to apply for the long-term position.

Jones said that the board will interview interested firms, review their costs and services, such as wide advertisement of the position, broad recruitment of candidates, and facilitation of public input opportunities; and hire a firm to coordinate a participatory community selection process. "We want to have a process that really is inclusive of our students, our staff and faculty, and community and board members to make sure that those voices are heard, and that when we welcome our permanent superintendent, we all agree that we have a candidate that we are excited about and that we want to lead our schools," said Jones. She added that the board's goal is to hire a superintendent in March.

"I would like to thank you for giving us that report. I think it is wise to... use every effort to find high-quality candidates. This is sacred work that we get to do. I thank you for making these extra efforts so that we can all be involved," said board member Carole Cadue-Blackwood.

"When we did the interim search, we were on such a short timeline that we didn't have the luxury to involve all the people that we knew would want to be involved," said Board Vice President GR Gordon-Ross. "Now that we are starting the permanent search, one of the reasons we wanted to do the RFP and look at proposals, is to help us coordinate all of the input that we want to seek from the various stakeholders, so we can get a fuller picture of what the community is asking us to look for."

### **Performing Arts Facilities Study**

The board heard a report about an architectural evaluation of secondary school performing arts facilities completed by ACI Boland and partners. The study includes the condition of performance spaces, finishes, flow of movement, code compliance, and acoustics; seating, lighting, audio/video, and electrical equipment; and overall management. The firm also collected input from middle and high school principals and performing arts staff.

ACI Boland architect Doug Loveland, an alumnus of Lawrence High, said that nobody among the staff said that they wanted leading-edge equipment, instead most wanted it to be robust, durable, functionable, and teachable. He also shared that due to replacement schedules, most middle school students are learning on better equipment than they will have when they go to the high schools.

His report included a list of recommendations totaling \$6.5 million and noted that the same improvements completed over a span of more than eight years would cost more, approximately \$7.2 million, including 6% inflation.

"I am glad we have prioritized this work and taken a look at what our needs are and the input of staff," said Past President Shannon Kimball.

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Deputy Superintendent Dr. Larry Englebrick told the board that in addition to the 130-page report on performing arts centers, the board will receive an athletics facilities study in November, and then a more comprehensive look at other infrastructure capital improvement needs, such as roofs, heating and cooling equipment, boilers, asphalt and concrete, and building exteriors. “I wish I could say that within our budget we could fund these improvements,” he said. “I have a feeling we are going to be quite surprised at the total that comes up.”

### **2025 Legislative Priorities**

In advance of the January opening of the Kansas legislative session each year, the board approves a list of legislative priorities. The board discussed this draft document Monday. It includes advocacy of full funding of special education as required by state law, increased base state aid per pupil, rejection of proposals to spend public tax dollars on private education, and returning to a parent opt-out process for student surveys that inform health, wellness, and safety initiatives. Other key priorities include embracing academic freedom and the teaching of critical thinking skills, repealing statutes that target and discriminate against students and staff, supporting a long-term, sustained commitment to state funding for the KPERS retirement program, and providing universal free meals to all students. Additional legislative priorities support each goal area of our district’s strategic plan. The board also recommended good governance policies and practices.

“Yes, we made some progress last session (on special education funding), but last year, our district covered 53% of our special education services out of general or supplemental funds,” said Kimball. “While we are very grateful for the additional funding and that additional commitment, there is still a very long way to go.”

Kimball also noted that the general school finance formula sunsets in 2027. “It is very important that our priorities call out that the problem is not the formula; the problem is the amount of money that has been appropriated to fund the formula,” she said.

### **Fall Community Engagement**

During her Superintendent’s Report, Dr. Jeanice Swift shared plans for fall community engagement, including face-to-face opportunities for conversations and an online survey to collect additional input. “We want to hear from everyone in the community,” said Dr. Swift. “We will use what we hear and learn in our conversations to inform and align our work this year with the thoughts and direction, experience, needs, and aspirations of our students and staff, parents, families, and greater community.” As the schedule of community conversations and survey are finalized, the public may find them at [www.usd497.org/Superintendent](http://www.usd497.org/Superintendent).

### **Cell Phone Policies**

Noting that changes are in the offing, President Jones reiterated that existing cell phone policy protects elementary and middle school instructional time from distractions of student cell phone use and supports high school teachers’ discretion in determining whether students may use phones in class. Dr. Swift previewed upcoming discussions of cell phone policy with students, families, and staff, with a goal of implementing policy changes in January.

### **Personnel Action**

Following an executive session, the board approved as part of its consent agenda a resolution to terminate the contract of a high school math teacher for breach of contract and failure to report to work. The educator has ten days after the date of notice to file a written request for a hearing before the board.

### **Board Schedule Change**

The board moved its October 14 scheduled meeting to October 15 at 6 p.m. at 110 McDonald Drive.