



## USD 497 News Release

Julie Boyle, Executive Director of Communications  
110 McDonald Drive Lawrence, Kansas 66044  
785-330-1662 / [jboyle@usd497.org](mailto:jboyle@usd497.org)

January 27, 2025

### **Board Hears Boundary Committee and Community Engagement Updates**

The Lawrence Board of Education reviewed emergency procedures during a work session at 5:30 p.m. Monday, identifying posted maps of building fire exits and tornado shelters and other safety protocols. The board's regular meeting began at 6:00 with two executive sessions to discuss school security and legal matters protected by attorney-client privilege.

### **Board President's Report**

President Kelly Jones shared that she received a threat of violence over the weekend and filed a police report, encouraging others who feel threatened to do the same. Jones also requested state lawmakers reject bills that discriminate against individuals' rights and bills that redirect public funds to private school vouchers. Additionally, she noted that "Public Education Legislative and State Board of Education Updates" and "Reports of Board Committees" have been added to board meeting opening items as standing reports.

### **Public Education Legislative Update**

Past President Shannon Kimball gave a legislative update, sharing among other news that vouchers and tax cuts were among bills introduced, the K-12 Budget will be discussed in committee this week, and the Governor's budget included more special education funding and support for free school meals. Kimball noted that March 12 is an advocacy day at the statehouse for school board members.

### **Public Comment Guidelines**

As part of its consent agenda, the board approved minor modifications to its public comment guidelines. The first change is intended to ensure district compliance with its streaming platform's acceptable use policies. It includes that the district may edit a board meeting video to comply with the platform's rules, and that patrons may request an unedited version from the clerk of the board. The other change clarifies the inclusion of the board's anti-bullying policies in its public comment guidelines. "We certainly want to hear from patrons about what policies and issues matter to them," said Jones. "We also want to make sure we have an environment that models for children our social-emotional curriculum and anti-bullying policies."

### **Second Solar Energy Project**

The board approved a contract with Cromwell Environmental Inc. for \$245,770 for the installation of a solar energy project at Sunflower Elementary School. Cromwell assisted the district with its first such project by installing solar panels on the roof at Prairie Park Elementary last spring.

### **Boundary Advisory Committee Update**

Deputy Superintendent Dr. Larry Englebrick thanked members of the Boundary Advisory Committee (BAC) for their commitment to their work. Charged by the board to study ways to better balance high school enrollment, the committee has met since September. It reviewed enrollment projections and analysis provided by RSP and Associates last week and suggested no boundary changes for next year, a more comprehensive review of K-12 school boundaries and building capacities on an ongoing basis, and continued study of feeder schools.

**MORE**

Key points from RSP’s data analysis include a projected decrease in district enrollment by 220 in five years. High school enrollment will decrease the most, by 135 students, during that time. Projections indicate Free State will be at 1,675 students, and LHS at 1,440, a difference of 235 students.

A continuing trend is smaller incoming kindergarten classes than graduating senior classes. Meanwhile, residential development has slowed with limited potential to finish large student-yielding projects in the next five years. Additionally, Hillcrest and Schwegler Elementary are forecast to be over 100% capacity while Deerfield, Prairie Park, and Woodlawn are projected to be under 70% capacity in five years.

“The committee did some great work analyzing the data we received and making that decision, knowing that there was not a capacity issue. I encourage administration to look for ways for students to be able to access the full curriculum,” said board member Anne Costello, who serves on the BAC.

The board indicated its interest in reviewing the transfer policy to provide families choices when possible.

### **Community Engagement Update**

Interim Superintendent of Schools Dr. Jeanice Swift updated the board about common themes that emerged in the analysis of input received through fall community engagement efforts. These efforts included 55 in-person conversations. Additionally, approximately 1,193 individuals – students, staff, parents, and community members – responded to an online survey, answering questions about district strengths, areas for improvement, and priorities.

A KU team analyzed the data, identifying these five key themes:

- 1. High-Quality Teachers and Staff. Appreciation and Value for Teachers and Staff. Importance of Teacher & Staff Retention, Resources & Support.**

The community continues to recognize and commend the tireless efforts of teachers and staff who go above and beyond for students despite the challenges they face, such as large class sizes and resource limitations. Addressing teacher and staff retention, increasing salaries, and ensuring a strong system of support is in place were identified as critical to maintaining a high standard of education.

- 2. Class sizes and equitable resource allocation are necessary to support both teachers and students. Commitment to Academic Excellence. Value for Programs and Desire for Enhanced Program Offerings**

Ensure access and opportunities for advanced learning. Offer an enhanced menu of rigorous, rich academic program opportunities at all levels. Programs such as AVID, arts, music, and environmental science were frequently mentioned as standout examples of impactful initiatives. A renewed focus on academic rigor is essential, including a priority for foundational reading, writing, and math skills, as well as opportunities for advanced learning.

**MORE**

### **3. Prioritize Safety and Discipline**

Safety concerns, including concerns with bullying, violent behavior, and perceived insufficient consequences for disruptive behavior, were consistently voiced. Stakeholders emphasized the need for consistent enforcement of discipline policies and proactive measures to ensure a secure environment for all.

### **4. Value for Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging**

Efforts to promote inclusivity for all students, specifically for LGBTQ+ students, neurodiverse learners, and other marginalized students, were praised. More consistent equity and inclusivity implementation across all schools is needed.

### **5. Imperative of Transparency, Communication, and Engagement**

The district must improve its communication processes, consistency, clarity, and timeliness across all levels to rebuild trust and foster collaboration. Timely updates and clear policy explanations are needed. Consistent engagement, including two-way communication, with families is vital.

“This report provides that North Star direction,” said Dr. Swift of the perceptions of our community. “We have our marching orders and our directions from the community.”

Swift said that our district will use the community’s feedback to guide strategic decisions by developing a plan for long-term sustainability. “The path forward is rooted in opportunity, partnership, and accountability,” she said. “This report is proof that in Lawrence the center still holds, and that center is the heart for every child in our community.”

“I just want to say thank you to (Dr. Swift), KU, and the team for the work. You’ve really laid a great foundation for when we’re ready for the next strategic plan. We have the framework and the vision, and we know what the community wants,” said Vice President GR Gordon-Ross.

“I’m very excited about the work you have put together. It is really good to see that there is coherence in the feedback,” said Kimball. “This is the foundation of the strategic planning process.”

###