



December 9, 2024

Hello, Lawrence Public Schools Team and Community,

I will always work to share clear, factual, and timely information directly with you. I am reaching out to update you with information about steps we are taking in the district to ensure a priority on the excellent teaching and learning that occurs in our classrooms, and to minimize the distraction of cell phones.

Conversations have been ongoing for some time regarding the importance of prioritizing instruction, the quality learning of our students, and the critical work of our teachers in the classroom by reducing the distraction of cell phones during instructional time. Reducing the distraction of cell phones and personal devices in classrooms has been a request from our teachers and school teams, as well as the top request received during my conversations this fall with parents and the community.

The Board of Education tonight approved a change in policy. Thanks to the work of team members and our principals, and in tandem with important conversations among our students, teachers, and parents over preceding weeks, we have clear, specific guidance to support an orderly transition to a cell phone-free classroom instructional environment, beginning January 6.

In addition to changes occurring at the secondary level, we will also engage in a thoughtful conversation over the coming months about how best to enhance the quality of student learning by reducing screen time for elementary students, PreK-5th grade across our classrooms, with recommendations for next steps coming forward in the spring.

Research clearly demonstrates the benefits: improvement in academic focus and achievement and enhanced student well-being and mental health. This critical step of implementing a cell phone-free instructional environment at secondary, grades 6-12, and reducing screen time at the elementary level, PreK-5th, is well worth the effort in the many benefits it will bring for our students and the quality of our classroom environments.

I know that we will all work together to support our students, teachers, school teams, and families as we work through this time of change, challenge, and learning during spring semester 2025.

You may want to read Policy JCAA and associated policy guidance, familiarize yourself with our cell phone expectations and explore additional background information. All of this information is posted on our USD 497 website for clear reference.

As we move through the spring semester, we will continue our conversation and learning together in implementing cell phone-free classrooms and fine-tune this work to prepare for any further adjustments that may be needed for fall 2025.

Thank you for your support of our 10,500 students and of the amazing teachers, school leaders, and staff who serve them each day.

Sincerely,
Jeanice Kerr Swift
Interim Superintendent of Schools