



Superintendent Report

Board of Education

Monday, February 10, 2025

We are delighted to be celebrating February, and many thanks to our students, teachers, staff and leaders, parents and community for all your support of our students and the Lawrence Public Schools.

Safety of Students and Staff First

Safety remains our top priority in the Lawrence Public Schools, and we will consistently connect with our staff, parents and community when concerns arise.

I have communicated directly with our staff and with all parents today regarding a situation of concern at Prairie Park Elementary.

You may review our February 10, 2025 [Statement](#) for more information.

ALL Are Welcome in the Lawrence Public Schools

We continue to receive questions and concerns shared regarding immigration policy at the federal level. I want to reiterate our strong commitment to protecting the safety and privacy of all our students.

Further, it is important to note that all children have a constitutional right to equal access to education regardless of their immigration status or the status of their parents.

The fundamental right to access public education is constitutionally protected, and cannot be taken away by the president or state or federal legislators.

We will continue to follow the law and our district policies, which have not changed.

Families are welcome to reach out to their school principals with any questions or concerns.

We value our diversity as a strength, just as our community does as evidenced by the input we received during our fall community engagement efforts and survey. As you will hear later this evening when we discuss our regular equity reports, our schools continue working toward equity in representation, access, meaningful participation, and positive outcomes for all students.

This board's policies clearly define our value of inclusion and prohibitions against discrimination in all of its forms. The Board's legislative priorities, shared with all members of the Douglas County delegation last month, include support for equal rights for all students and staff regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation, and share the board's opposition to bills that compromise the rights, safety, and integrity of individual students.

Leadership Lawrence Governmental Panel

I appreciate the opportunity to participate in the Leadership Lawrence Governmental Panel discussion, and especially valued the opportunity to share alongside President Jones and along with Member Costello, who is also engaged in that impressive community group. Members of the City, County and School District responded to discuss issues of leading in our Lawrence community.

USD 497 Student Updates

It was a busy weekend for our students. Our best spellers represented their schools at the Douglas County Spelling Bee Saturday. A familiar face, **Maci Perrins**, a Southwest Middle School sixth grader, won her third county championship and another trip to the statewide competition, where she placed second last year. Maci spelled "astringent" to best other participants this weekend.

Congratulations to brothers **Daniel and Lawrence Dao**, both Lawrence Virtual School students, for winning first place, a \$1,250 prize, and qualifying for state competition in the Douglas County Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge this weekend. The Daos have previously shared their research about artificial intelligence with the board and Board Policy Committee. "Don't Panic AI Tutors" was the name of the

business they pitched in the contest. Other students from Lawrence High School and Billy Mills Middle School captured second, third, and honorable mention in this competition, also taking home cash prizes for their innovative business ideas.

Lawrence High School student artists were highly successful in the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards Midwest Regional competition in the Visual Arts categories. The Lawrence High students listed here earned an American Visions Award, 1 Gold Key Portfolio; 2 Silver Key Portfolios; 1 Honorable Mention Portfolio; 15 Gold Keys; 8 Silver Keys; and 11 Honorable Mentions.

All Gold Key recipients will now compete nationally in New York City. Congratulations to these student artists and their teachers.

Lawrence Schools Foundation Ovation!

I attended the Lawrence Schools Foundation's Ovation! event a week ago Sunday and admired our students' many talents. The Graham Edmonds Standing Ovation Award honored Lawrence High senior **Renee Dvorske**, who directed the show; and the Foundation also presented \$1,000 Crystal Apple Awards to **Emily Boedeker, Woodlawn and New York music teacher, and Kirsten Hermreck, West Middle School 7th grade teacher and coach**. Since its inception in 2016, Ovation! has raised more than \$110,000 to help the Foundation support our students and staff.

Boys and Girls Club of Lawrence Youth of the Year

Congratulations to the Boys and Girls Club of Lawrence Youth of the Year, **Arabella Gipp**. Arabella is an LHS senior and has received Youth of the Year honors for three consecutive years. She was named the Kansas Youth of the Year in 2022.

In addition, Junior Youth of the Year honors recognized **Aiden King, Sunflower fifth grader**. As a preview of coming attractions, both Arabella and Aiden will be guests on our next Lawrence Public Schools Podcast, so please listen for that episode.

All-City Choir Concert

I enjoyed the All-City Choir Concert last week at the Lied Center. Vice President Gordon-Ross did a great job as Master of Ceremonies. The middle and high school choirs performed exceptionally well. Between performances, students and staff honored Dr. Dwayne Dunn, who plans to retire at the end of the school year after 13 years as director of choral activities at LHS. Congratulations to Dr. Dunn and all of our fine student musicians.

Preparations In Progress for School Year 2025-26

A flurry of activity is underway as our secondary students prepare to enroll in their courses for next fall, middle school students have visited the high schools for tours, high school counselors have visited the middle schools to talk to students, and middle and high school co-curricular groups - theater, band, choir, and orchestra - have toured, performing for the elementary and middle schools and sharing highlights of their programs.

Last week marked 100 days of school for our kindergartners. Here you see Hillcrest kindergarten students celebrating with paper crowns. A few are even dressed up as if they were 100 years old.

Kansas Teachers of the Year Nominees Visit Lawrence Public Schools

I was fortunate to welcome a group of Kansas Teacher of the Year nominees to our district last week, hosted by last year's Lawrence Elementary Teacher of the Year Kristin Oswald, Schwegler's librarian. This group of 9 educators visited Schwegler, West Middle School, Lawrence High, Community Connections at Pinckney, and the Lawrence College and Career Center, where they enjoyed a special luncheon prepared and served by Chef David Weakley's Advanced Culinary students.

RunLawrence Gifts Marathon Clubs

Thanks to our partners with RunLawrence. Its annual Thanksgiving Day Run held at Woodlawn Elementary has become a popular community tradition. This year, our school marathon clubs will share \$10,200 in proceeds from the run. Additionally, the Lawrence Schools Foundation recently received a large donation of warm coats from Velocity Church and the KC Dream Center. The Foundation is working with our school counselors to get these coats to students who need them. We continue to appreciate the generosity of our community!

Be SMART

It was my honor to meet last week, alongside President Kelly, with local community partners from [Be SMART](#). This organization advocates for safe and responsible gun storage and use by reminding everyone to Be SMART by Securing guns in the home and vehicles; Modeling responsible behavior around guns; Asking about guns in others' homes; Recognizing the role of guns in suicide; and Telling others to Be SMART.

The organization shares that 4.6 million children in the U.S. live in a house with at least one loaded and unlocked gun. Let's all share this valuable information in order to protect our children and keep them safe.

Communication and Engagement

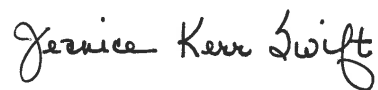
We continue to engage and inform our community highlighting the work of our USD497 students, staff, the board and our schools. Analytics from January and February outreach demonstrate that we continue to average approximately 20,000 engagements per newsletter and continue to build a following on the Lawrence Public Schools podcast. Thanks to all for continuing to engage with us as we work to inform our USD497 community.

Weather Watch

Finally, we are closely monitoring the progress of the forecast for another winter storm coming this week; we will be watching the weather tomorrow night and Wednesday with student and staff safety at the top of mind, as always.

Thank you, Board Members, for the opportunity to share this Superintendent Report; it is an honor to serve the Lawrence Public Schools.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jeanice Kerr Swift".

Jeanice Kerr Swift
Interim Superintendent of Schools
Lawrence Public Schools