



USD 497 News Release

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Lawrence School Board President Announces Dr. Jeanice Kerr Swift as Superintendent



“Lawrence, I am telling you – she's truly an exceptional superintendent. It's why she enjoys the support of board members, district administrators, and LEA leaders,” said Lawrence Board of Education President Kelly Jones in announcing Dr. Jeanice Kerr Swift as superintendent of schools, pending formal board approval Monday. Dr. Swift has served as interim superintendent since August 30, 2024, following the June 29 resignation of Dr. Anthony Lewis to lead the Durham, North Carolina schools.

“One of the things I love about Dr. Swift is that the challenges in front of us do not distract from her resolve to do what's right for kids. She has a practical, common-sense approach to education leadership that's infused with ambition, backed by over 30 years of experience and an equity focus. I have heard directly from students and educators that she has already improved our policy practices, communication approaches, and instructional strategies.

“When you observe Dr. Swift's work, you can tell she's entirely focused on improving the educator, student, and family experiences. Since September, she has led a district needs assessment that engaged hundreds of students, staff, families, and community members. The input gathered is a strong foundation for strategic planning, which Lawrence Public Schools needs to guide us during this national period of uncertainty for public educators and our students,” said Jones.

When the board's search committee reviewed applications submitted to the Kansas Association of School Boards from across the country, Jones said that it was clear that Dr. Swift was the most qualified candidate and had the full support of the board and committee members. “The committee saw no need to further extend the search process at additional expense to our district and community,” she said.

“In just over six months, Dr. Swift has proven to be the strong, dedicated leader our district needs. She balances that strength with genuine care and compassion for our students, staff, and families—qualities that are evident in everything she does. Dr. Swift is exactly what Lawrence Public Schools needs right now,” said board Vice President GR Gordon-Ross.

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“It’s an exciting time in our district, as we have received clear, congruent, and unified direction this past fall directly from our students, teachers, staff, building leaders, and school families as to how best to move forward in the Lawrence Public Schools,” said Swift. “I am honored and grateful for this opportunity, and thankful to the Board of Education and all on the team and in this community for their amazing support. We look forward to continuing our important work together, meeting the challenges we face, and taking the action steps necessary to ensure that we truly serve ‘Every Child, Every Day’ and learn, grow, and thrive in our excellent Lawrence Public Schools.”

Upon arriving in Lawrence, Swift immediately began engaging the community. She met hundreds of school families, staff, and community partners during back-to-school events and visited every campus during the first week of school. She continued this outreach throughout the fall, inviting individuals and groups to join her in conversations about district strengths, challenges, and top priorities.

“From her first day at the Lawrence Schools Foundation’s Kids Expo in August, it was evident that Dr. Swift is a boots-on-the-ground superintendent,” said Kristen Ryan, assistant superintendent of human resources and employee relations. “Her experience, leadership, and ability to connect the vision of student learning and staff support to the day-to-day work has enabled our district to have a laser-like focus on the critical mission of supporting our schools.”

On January 27, Swift presented to the board a report detailing input gathered from 55 face-to-face conversations and 1,193 online surveys completed from September to December. Five themes emerged:

1. High-Quality Teachers and Staff
2. Academic Excellence, Student Support and Enhanced Program Offerings
3. Safety and Discipline
4. Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging
5. Transparency, Communication, and Engagement

“This report provides that North Star direction. We have our marching orders and our direction from the community,” said Swift, adding that this input will be used to guide strategic decisions through the development of a plan for long-term sustainability. “The path forward is rooted in opportunity, partnership, and accountability. This report is proof that in Lawrence the center still holds, and that center is the heart for every child in our community,” she said.

Swift has already worked with the board and staff to respond to one of the community’s top concerns by implementing a new cell phone policy and guidance in January. Establishing cell phone-free instructional environments to curb the distractions of personal electronic devices, these new expectations reinforce our district’s focus on learning. Student cell phones must be turned off and put away during instruction.

“I love how she jumped right in and started working, even stepping in to teach a class when she first got here. That’s the dedication to the students and their learning that I looked for in a superintendent,” said board member Yolanda Franklin of Swift.

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Board member Bob Byers said that the board's two unanimous decisions to hire Swift – as an interim and as superintendent – speak volumes. "We brought in an experienced educator with 10 years of superintendent experience and a dedicated leader with a child and family focus. Dr. Swift hit the ground running and demonstrated her commitment to move the district forward, getting out in the community and giving stakeholders an opportunity to voice their viewpoints while working to ensure that our students and staff were being served," said Byers.

Sharing that her family chose to move to Lawrence because of the educational systems, board member Carole Cadue-Blackwood said, "Dr. Swift exemplifies the importance of role models for this great community. She began her educational career in the classroom and continues to roll up her sleeves when needed. We have the unique opportunity to demonstrate that Lawrence is a place of opportunity to overcome broken rungs and make glass ceilings irrelevant."

Swift is a lifelong educator, most recently serving the Ann Arbor Public Schools in Michigan as superintendent for more than a decade. In Colorado Springs School District 11, she served as assistant superintendent, teaching and learning executive director, principal, assistant principal, teacher coach, and a secondary English teacher for 15 years. She also taught secondary English and Spanish for ten years in the Hurst-Euless-Bedford School District in Texas. Swift earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Texas at Arlington, her master's at the University of Colorado, and a doctorate in educational leadership at the Morgridge College of Education, University of Denver.

The Michigan Association of School Administrators named Swift its Superintendent of the Year in 2018. The National School Public Relations Association recognized her as a Superintendent to Watch for demonstrating dynamic leadership with a strong emphasis on communication.

"Dr. Swift leads by example, holding herself and all those around her to the highest standards in support of our students, staff, and families. Her ability to actively listen, empathize, and problem-solve with courage and clarity will help our district thrive," said board Past President Shannon Kimball.

Noting that Swift has made tremendous efforts to learn what Lawrence is all about, board member Anne Costello added, "She has the experience, dedication, and passion to set this district on a great path. I look forward to continuing our work together to provide all students in Lawrence Public Schools the best education possible."

Dr. Swift is the tenth superintendent to lead Lawrence USD 497 since district unification in 1965. Her predecessors include Dr. Carl Knox (1962-84), Dr. Dan Neuenswander (1984-92), Dr. Al Azinger (1992-98), Dr. Kathleen Williams (1998-2000), Randy Weseman (2000-09), Dr. Rick Doll (2009-2016), Kyle Hayden (2016-17), Interim Superintendent Dr. Anna Stubblefield (2017-18), and Dr. Anthony Lewis (2018-24).

Enclosed: Lawrence Education Association Letter of Support

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Friday, 21 February, 2025

To our LEA members,

Since our conclusion with the interim superintendent search, Josh Spradlin, Julie Donley, and I continued our work as members of the Superintendent Search Committee. One of our duties was to ensure that your needs in a superintendent were heard alongside members of the Board and District administration. Both the School Board and District administration were adamant about our involvement in the search, and they expressed how important LEA's input was to this selection process.

For the Superintendent search, the Board chose to hire Kansas Association of School Board (KASB) to assist the District with finding the best possible candidate to lead our district. Our committee collaborated on how to gain insight from all of our interest groups and planned on using the same interview process we had used in August for the interim superintendent search. In our committee meetings, we reviewed what data was collected from surveys, Dr. Swift's community sessions, and the smaller focus groups for each building and program invited. Multiple LEA members and staff expressed that they wanted a superintendent who is a strong communicator, values staff (and the time they dedicate to our profession,) and is also a direct and transparent decision maker. Through the search process, it became clear to us that Dr. Swift exemplifies these traits and more.

We have seen Dr. Swift's work in action in the short amount of time she has been here. Immediately after her appointment as Interim Superintendent, she sought out input from multiple interest groups in a variety of ways. She used community and staff conversations to inform her goal setting and began sending out regular communication via frequent emails and even a new podcast. She does not only listen to staff and students about our needs, but also celebrates us.

It is why with great honor, we are excited to announce our support of the hiring of Dr. Jeanice Kerr Swift as Lawrence Public Schools Superintendent and look forward to her continued support of our union and our needs. We appreciate that LEA was included throughout the selection process, and not as an afterthought. This speaks to the district's commitment to be more proactive and to continue honoring the input from educators and the community at large.

In solidarity and community,

Emerson Hoffzaes
Josh Spradlin
Julie Donley