



## USD 497 News Release

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

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### **Board Hires Superintendent; Discusses Enrollment, Class Size, and School Calendar**

#### **Unanimous Vote for Superintendent Swift**

The Lawrence Board of Education on Monday unanimously approved hiring Interim Superintendent Dr. Jeanice Kerr Swift as superintendent of schools, effective July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2028, pending the successful negotiation of a contract. The board authorized its leadership to enter negotiations with Dr. Swift and finalize the terms of her employment contract, subject to final approval by the full board.

[President Kelly Jones announced the pending action Friday](#), sharing that after carefully considering district leadership needs, data from extensive community engagement, and applications of candidates from across the region and country, it became evident that Swift is the most qualified candidate. “She possesses the vision, experience, and dedication necessary to continue advancing the district’s goals. The committee sees no need to further extend the search process at additional expense to the district and community,” Jones said.

Serving as Lawrence interim superintendent since August 30, Swift is a lifelong educator, most recently leading the Ann Arbor Public Schools in Michigan as superintendent for more than a decade. She also held district and school administrative and teaching roles in Colorado and Texas public schools.

“For me, it’s about how you treat people. I think what you bring to the district is connection. You have demonstrated that you have passion to help students achieve their best, and you keep us moving forward,” said board member Bob Byers of Swift.

Vice President GR Gordon-Ross said that he appreciated Swift showing the board where our district is doing well and where we need to make changes. “I have been impressed with your ability to synthesize the input from all stakeholders and bring back that feedback, both the good and bad, and start to work on how we are going to get there,” he said, adding that Dr. Swift has defined where our district should go. “All seven of us (board members) will be right there beside you as you take us forward,” said Gordon-Ross.

“I am honored and deeply grateful for the opportunity,” said Swift, adding her appreciation for the community engaging in conversations with us this fall. “I feel like we have a clear and collective direction, and we are ready to get to work and move forward.”

#### **Hiring of District/School Administrators**

Following robust selection processes, including staff and community input, the board approved hiring Free State Assistant Principal Tina Mitchell as district director of equity and student and family engagement, and Billy Mills Middle School Assistant Principal/Athletic Director Sara Murray as Quail Run Elementary principal, effective July 1, 2025. [Find News Releases](#) about both positions on our website.

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### Enrollment and Class Size Report

As part of our district's process of continuous improvement, Swift and James Polk, data and assessment director, shared a comprehensive review of enrollment and class size for the 2024-2025 school year. "There are hundreds of hours behind really understanding where we are at every grade level throughout the district and using that information to shine the light on whether our 'equity talk' and 'equity walk' match," Swift said.

This year, 10,358 PreK-12 students enrolled in Lawrence Public Schools, a decline of 1.4% from last year's total, with the largest drop (2.7%) at the middle school level. At the same time, our preschool enrollment continues to climb; it is up 6.2% this year.

The report also looked at student demographics. For about 1 in 20 students, English is a second language. There are 20 languages spoken by students in Lawrence Public Schools. About 2 in 5 students come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and about 1 in 6 students are on an IEP related to a disability.

Reviewing class sizes, the elementary average ranges from 18-25. At the middle level, from 23-26, and at the high schools, from 20-22. "I am really proud of these class sizes," said Swift, adding that few could compare.

Elementary classes across the district show a minimum size of 15 and a maximum of 30, both at fourth grade. Elementary class size averages range from 18 to 23. Middle school English language arts (ELA) and math classes have a min. of 15 and a max. of 31 for an average of 23, while science has a min. of 19 and social studies, 18, and both max. out at 30, for averages of 25 (science) and 26 (social studies). High school ELA has a class size min. of 4 and max. of 29 for an average of 22; math's min. is 8 and max. is 31 for an average of 21. The science class min. is 8 and max. 30 for an average of 20; and social studies has a min. of 9 and max. of 30 for an average of 22.

Swift and Polk shared several observations and takeaways about the data:

- Diversity is a strength in the Lawrence Public Schools; we welcome our students and the unique gifts they bring to our classrooms each day.
- We observe some stabilization in the 2023-24 to 2024-25 enrollment with the smallest change/decrease in enrollment over 5 years at -1.4%, reduced from a -2.3% reduction in the prior year.
- The focus to preserve smaller class sizes in K-2 and 3-5 over previous years, to ensure critical early literacy and literacy development shows and must continue.
- With very few exceptions, core class sizes have been maintained within an acceptable range.
- A significant highlight this year is the observed growth in preschool enrollment; we will continue work to expand preschool learning opportunities for our students across the district.
- While enrollment of student groups remains fairly consistent across levels, we observe a distinction in one area: a higher percentage of students with a home language other than English (ESOL) at the elementary level (7.6%), compared to 4% at middle and 3.6% at high school.
- Opportunities exist at elementary, middle, and high school, to streamline, to ensure efficiencies, and to innovate to add a wider selection of desirable programming opportunities for students, while continuing to maintain class sizes within a desirable range.

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- Next steps in fulfilling the direction of parents and community and our commitment to students, teachers, and staff will include the enhancement of programs and ensuring additional program opportunities for students.
- In meeting the moment, and the direction we have received from our community around providing additional program opportunities for students, and as a preview of program enhancements to come in spring, we will add an exciting elementary Science specials class for all students at elementary schools.
- I am calling on our leadership teams - district, school, and LEA - to work together as we move forward to implement an increase in daily professional/personal planning time for teachers to accomplish their work for students. We will take the next step to ensure a second planning time at elementary and high schools for school year 2025-26. (Middle schools have team and personal plan times.)
- We will continue to collaborate, communicate, and update the board and community frequently on these improvement efforts throughout this spring.

“It’s an exciting time in the district as we leverage opportunities for continuous improvement. Our direction is clear. We will streamline our resources, innovate organizational practice, and prioritize resources to our schools and in support of our staff, to prioritize enhanced opportunities for students and an increase in support for our quality staff,” said Swift.

“I am somewhat surprised to see some of the low class size data in some of the high school classes, especially in required classes. We must be good stewards of our resources to provide opportunities to everyone across the district,” said Past President Shannon Kimball.

Board member Carole Cadue-Blackwood said, “With 20 languages spoken in LPS. I look forward to looking at curriculum that reflects our diverse population so we can continue to attract families here to Lawrence.”

### **Calendar Update**

Dr. Swift shared that with the use of nine inclement weather days, our school community will need to plan to use the April 21 make-up day built into the school calendar. “We will continue to review the status of school year 2024-2025 and have a plan to the community by March 14,” she said of meeting state-required instructional hours.

### **Superintendent’s Report**

Dr. Swift reiterated Lawrence Public Schools’ core values of welcoming everyone and celebrating our diversity, recognizing these are challenging times. “Our practice will continue to be support, embrace, and celebration of all,” said Swift. “It is not just what we do, it is who we are.”

President Jones added that the board’s legislative priorities affirm support for members of the LGBTQ+ community, and the board continues to watch legislative action on discriminatory bills harmful to students.

### **Public Education Legislative & State Board Updates**

Kimball gave a legislative update, sharing among other news that it is Public Schools Week. During its February meeting, she said that the state board updated its at-risk programs list and took the first step toward removing the graduation requirement that students complete the FAFSA.

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Kimball said that in the Kansas Legislature, the budget bill (HB 2007) passed with \$10 million in additional special education funding, much less than KSDE’s recommendation and the Governor’s budget, which were in the range of \$72-\$84 million. She added that the Senate passed a voucher bill in the form of tax credits for individuals sending their children to private schools and a bill (SB 47) that public education advocates see as micromanaging how local school board members manage their meetings.

**Consent Agenda**

The board approved on consent: second reading modifications to standing Opening Items: Public Content and Public Comment, Capital Outlay expenditures for the purchase of seven vehicles from Laird Noller Automotive Inc. at a total cost of \$368,192, an agreement with ABcreative for the purchase and installation of additional playground equipment at Sunflower Elementary in the amount of \$52,287.32 to be reimbursed by Sunflower Elementary PTO donation, and a lease agreement with Apple Financial Services for 2,300 MacBook Air laptop computers at a total cost of \$2,611,288; and the acceptance of bids for HVAC Upgrades from AAIM Services, LLC., Kruse Corporation, and Piping Contractors of Kansas, Inc., at a total project cost of \$387,020 from Capital Outlay funds.

**Executive Session**

The board met in executive session to discuss non-elected personnel matters, taking no action.

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