



USD 497 News Release

Julie Boyle, Exec. Director of Communications
110 McDonald Dr. Lawrence, KS 66044
785-330-1662 / jboyle@usd497.org

June 9, 2025

Lawrence Board of Education Reviews 2024 Graduation Rates

During Monday's Lawrence Board of Education meeting the board heard its annual graduation rate report. This report focused on 2024 graduation rates: the most recent data available. Comparing district graduates with the bald eaglets taking flight near Big Bear Lake in Southern California on the news, Superintendent Dr. Jeanice Kerr Swift said that 'our eaglets' take flight not after 13 weeks, but after 13 years in school.

Dr. Swift defined our district's goal as consistently improving and sustaining high rates of graduation toward 100% of students graduating on-time in four years. She celebrated that the overall four-year, on-time graduation rate has continued on an upward trajectory over a 10-year span, including rebounding above rates of pre-COVID years. In addition, four- and five-year graduation rates have increased over time among five traditionally underserved student groups: African American, Hispanic, and Multi-Racial Students; Students with Disabilities, and Students Experiencing Poverty (as measured by eligibility for free or reduced-price school meals).

Swift cited continued concerns that disparities exist among the graduation rates of African American, Hispanic, and Native American Students; English Language Learners (ELLs), Students with Disabilities, and Students Experiencing Poverty (as measured by Free and Reduced-Price Lunch Qualifiers). She said that a critical concern is widening disparities for Native American Students and ELLs.

"Refining and strengthening our work to continue to increase supports for all students as well as focused strategies for groups of students that have been traditionally underserved continues as a seminal priority across the district," Swift said.

Lawrence High Associate Principal Mike Gillman shared that credit recovery efforts start as soon as a freshman's second semester or whenever a student falls behind on the path to earning the required credits for graduation. College and Career Center Principal Mark Preut added that the district provides various options to support a wide range of student needs. These include the Center's CTE pathways and Academy, Lawrence Virtual School, Community Transition and Project Search programs serving students ages 18-21 with special needs, and Adult Education Services, in which adults may earn a high school diploma or complete their GED.

"I'm excited that we offer opportunities for people to come back and find success by graduating a year or two, or 20-30 years, after their class graduated," said Preut.

Board member Bob Byers said that he applauds the work and thinks the district does an excellent job. "What are we missing?" he asked.

"If they are in school, we can get them through," answered Free State High School Principal Amy McAnarney. "We have had a decrease in attendance rates since COVID, and our teachers will tell you that makes all the difference."

MORE

Page 2 – June 9, 2025, Lawrence Board of Education Meeting

James Polk, director of data and assessment, shared the following as part of the graduation report:

- The district’s 2024 four-year cohort graduation rate of 87.3% increased 4.5% over six years.
- Its five-year cohort graduation rate of 87.4% in 2024 is up 3.8% since 2019.
- Graduation rates increased for Multiracial (by 7.9%), Hispanic (1.8%), and White (1.8%) students; Students with Disabilities (18.7%), and Students from Poverty (9%).
- Rates decreased for English Language Learners (-12%) and Native American (-4.1%) and African American (-3%) students.
- The district’s 2024 graduation rate was 87.3% in comparison to the state’s 89.5%. The district cut this difference in half in six years.
- Our graduation rate was 89.6% in comparison to the last national rate on record, 86.9% in 2022.

Polk shared that “because every student counts,” the decline in graduation rates for Native American students represents three students and for ELLs, six students.

“We have our eyes open and understand the assignment is to overcome the obstacles and barriers that get in the way of an on-time graduation for every child,” said Dr. Swift.

“This does shine a light on the inequities our students of color face, especially our Native American students,” said board member Carole Cadue-Blackwood, who advocates teaching Indigenous history and languages.

The board’s Equity Advisory Council reviewed 2024 graduation rates, asked questions, and provided input.

School Meal Prices

In advance of the board’s consideration of setting 2025-2026 meal prices at its next meeting, Nutrition and Wellness Director Julie Henry shared information about the recommended ten-cent increase in full-price school meals due to rising food, supply, and labor costs. School families may qualify for free or reduced-price meals and student fee waivers. The district also serves all children regardless of ability to pay.

“Our policy is if a child wants a lunch, we feed them a lunch,” said Henry. “(Food Service) doesn’t want to make money or lose money, we just want to break even every year.”

Consent Agenda Items

As part of its consent agenda, the board approved:

- A three-year extension to its lease agreement with Greenbush Education Center for the use of Wakarusa Valley at a cost of \$6,835.58 per month or the three-year average of custodial, utility, and maintenance expenses. Greenbush also provides in-kind professional learning services.
- The purchase of four snowplow blades for \$35,476 from capital outlay, the engagement of Gordon CPA Auditing Accounting Consulting at a cost of \$28,550 to perform its annual financial audit, and the authorization of fund transfers to close the district budget for the fiscal year ending June 30.
- Dr. Swift’s selection of Christine Caffey as Hillcrest principal, effective July 1. Caffey is a former Hillcrest student and teacher and currently serves as a behavior specialist; and Sunset Hill Principal Jeremy Philipp, who is completing his eighth year in that role, as assistant principal/athletic director of Southwest Middle School.

The [board meeting video](#) and the [Superintendent’s Report](#) may be found online.