



**Superintendent Report
Board of Education**

Monday, December 8, 2025

Hello Members of the Board and Community,

As we continue our work through these busy weeks of December, I am especially grateful for the diligent work of our students, teachers and support staff to ‘stay the course,’ to finish this semester strong over the coming nine days of school. We are all deeply grateful to our parents and Lawrence community for continued partnership and support of our students, staff, families and schools.

Community Engagement

It has been delightful to be engaged in the community at recent events; December is such a busy time with many activities and across the Lawrence Public Schools, and I value these opportunities to connect.

It was such a joy to be out at the [Lawrence Farmers’ Market](#) for their wrap up of the season on November 22nd. We were able to visit with many individuals and families who stopped by our USD 497 table, connecting with families of several rising kindergarteners, seeking information about enrollment for next year, and also with current students and parents, families, staff and community members.

Pictured here is Farmer Steve who sources his tomatoes to our USD 497 kitchens and shares that he is proud to work in partnership with us to ensure our students have fresh, locally-sourced food across our schools; we’re proud of this work, also! Also, Senator Marci Francisco and an array of very cute kids and pups were among those who stopped by our table.

I really appreciate those individuals who checked in just to say hi and thank us for being there, and appreciate the quality connections and conversations in the community. Also, it was wonderful to greet incoming Member Matt Lancaster who stopped by with his family!

Many thanks to Summer Workman for coordinating and being present for this Lawrence Farmers Market event.

Brassmas 2025

Last Friday, low brass musicians from USD 497, the University of Kansas, and across the Lawrence community convened for Brassmas 2025!

This year, Brassmas was held at the Lied Center of Kansas, and featured 150 musicians on stage together ranging in age from 12 to over 84! The program featured a special performance by the KU

Tuba/Euphonium Consort, as well as a selection of holiday favorites to help kick-off the festive month of December. The concert ensemble was conducted by Dr. David Earll, Tuba/Euphonium Professor at the University of Kansas.

We are grateful to our music educators for inspiring our students and working to ensure such quality experiences, performing on one of the very best stages in the midwest, are a part of the Lawrence Public Schools quality performing arts programming.

Kennedy Early Childhood – Military Send-Off

Kennedy Early Childhood Center recently gave thanks to one of their school families with an active-duty Army parent enjoying their last day in Lawrence prior to an overseas deployment, and the family moving out-of-state.

Kevin Ohurlund, a Major in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and father of a Kennedy student, received a great send-off celebration from the Kennedy school team.

We want to thank Major Ohrlund for his service, and the entire family for their sacrifice, as well as Kennedy teacher, Mrs. Donna Lang, who organized the farewell celebration event. Teachers, staff, and students lined the hallway from Mrs. Lang's classroom to the front entrance, waving American flags, streamers, and signs to wish their friend and his family a warm and loving send-off.

I know we will all keep Major Ohrlund and the family in our thoughts and are sending our warmest wishes for safety, success, and new opportunities ahead.

Deerfield Elementary's Stocking Cap Creativity

Deerfield Elementary recently shared a heartwarming example of creativity and care in action. Special education teacher Ms. Cindy Carlson invited students in Ms. Hamburg's Kindergarten class to design their own ideal stocking cap and then surprised them by custom-making hats based on each child's artwork. A photo of the students proudly wearing their hats and holding their original designs captured the joy of this special project and highlights the thoughtful ways our educators make learning meaningful.

Liberty Memorial Central Middle School Field Trip to STEAM Studio

Future engineers, artists, and innovators from Liberty Memorial Central Middle School took a [field trip to Multistudio's STEAM Studio in Kansas City](#), putting their problem-solving skills to work through creative, project-based STEAM challenges. In education, STEAM (the acronym for Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math) is a framework that emphasizes creativity, design thinking, and inter-disciplinary problem solving.

One task had teams of students racing against the clock to engineer the tallest possible spaghetti towers capable of supporting a marshmallow. The LMCMS Mustangs experimented with a number of clever architectural strategies and designs like triangle trusses, wide bases, and reinforced beams of extra spaghetti.

The middle schoolers also gained coding and design skills to create "dream neighborhoods" for an assigned "Ozobot." These were small robots able to scan and track along colored lines to perform programmed tricks, like the crowd favorite of a "tornado" spin. Each bot came with a personality, such

as Gamebot or Thinkbot, and students built spaces to match: game-controller houses and snack shops for Gamebot, skate parks and gyms for Fitbot, and winding trails and parks for Trailbot.

It was a beautiful display of teamwork and innovation, and I am so proud when our students have the opportunity to expand their learning beyond our traditional classroom settings. Many thanks to our community partners at Multistudio for their support of our students and their high-interest STEAM learning.

Free State Theatre to Perform at Kansas Thespian Festival

Free State High School's Theatre Troupe 5773 has earned the distinguished honor of performing ***The Addams Family School Edition*** at the [2026 Kansas Thespian Festival](#). This achievement reflects the remarkable talent, dedication, and artistry of our students and staff members. Productions selected for the festival are chosen through a rigorous process, making this invitation a true testament to the excellence of the Firebird performing arts program.

To celebrate and provide our community with another opportunity to enjoy the show, Free State will host a "home" performance of ***The Addams Family School Edition on January 4 at 2 p.m. in their auditorium***. The performers will then take the stage at Wichita's Century II Concert Hall on January 9 at 7 p.m., representing our school and community on one of the state's largest theatre platforms.

We are incredibly proud of our student performers, technicians, pit musicians, and the educators who guide them.

Lawrence High School Student Art Display

On Thursday, December 4, Lawrence High art students exhibited their work at the **29th annual High School Visual Arts Competition**, along with 14 area high schools. This event was held at the [Tim Murphy Gallery in Merriam](#), with hundreds of students, parents, friends, and artists gathered for the announcement of award winners.

Lawrence High students swept the 2D category with Kaiea Blum taking 3rd, and Wren Jay receiving 2nd and 1st place. In the 3D category Lawrence High students Piper Journey and Jayden Moore took home 1st and 2nd respectfully.

The show will remain open for public viewing this month through December 27th.

Staff Spotlight

Congratulations are in order for **Dr. Jayci Roberson**, Director of Elementary, who successfully defended her dissertation on Monday November 24th, and has been finalized for Ph.D. completion. Dr. Roberson's research, *EXPLORING URBAN DISTRICT STRUCTURES: INFLUENCES ON PRINCIPAL LONGEVITY* was completed in fulfillment of a Doctor of Philosophy in Education, in the Leadership in Educational Administration program at Capella University

We are so proud of this impressive accomplishment, Dr. Roberson!

Communications: Winter Weather Communications

As the month of December has arrived, it is no surprise that we experienced our first wave of winter weather early last week.

As a reminder, we send messaging only when there *is* a change to the school day schedule; last week, our team utilized our ParentSquare communications platform to inform our school community of a phone outage on Monday, and later that day of the decision to cancel all after school practices, events, and activities.

This is a good time to remind our families, students, and staff, to ensure that contact information that many have changed has been updated at your school. You may review inclement weather procedures on our web site: <https://www.usd497.org/parents-and-students/policies/inclement-weather-procedures>

As general best practice, we strive to communicate any cancellation or schedule adjustment decisions with as much advance notice as possible. Closure notifications will be sent to staff and families via ParentSquare, and also shared widely via our web site, Facebook page, as well as to local media partners.

I would like to thank the hard work of our Facilities and Operations team for their efforts to keep up with winter weather, and always working around the clock to ensure a safe opening of schools. Last week we observed a great return of investment on the board's approval to purchase snow removal equipment, as our teams were able to complete their snow clearing work in far less time, making schools safer for everyone.

As a reminder, safety remains our top priority, and though we work hard to get winter weather calls right, predictions of weather are not always perfect; the ultimate decision on inclement weather school day attendance is *always* up to families. Circumstances and conditions vary widely across the community, and we appreciate that once the school district decision is made, each family will also need to evaluate in real time, based on their individual situation. All parent reported absences are excused on winter weather days.

Preview of Enhancements: 2026

As we look ahead to 2026, and preview enhancements in planning for 2026-27 school year, we are pleased to share the exciting news of preschool classrooms coming next year at **Deerfield** and **Prairie Park Elementary Schools**. These two school campuses will be beautiful locations to continue the early childhood expansion work we began this year at Sunflower and Woodlawn, as well as prior classrooms at New York Montessori and Kennedy Early Childhood Center, bringing our total number of preschool locations to six schools and placing the district at the 50% mark in offering preschool at elementary schools across the district.

Winter Break

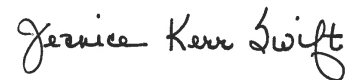
As a note, all district buildings will be closed to the public from December 22 through January 2nd. We are already looking forward to welcoming our students and teams back on Tuesday, January 6, 2026 for the first day of a brand new spring semester.

Quality public schools are a hallmark of engaged, caring communities who value children, their quality education, and our collective future. We are grateful for your partnership in support of students, staff, schools, and our Lawrence community.

Thank you for the opportunity to share this Superintendent Report, and for the honor of serving the Lawrence Public Schools.

As we prepare to wrap up 2025, moving toward winter break in a few days, we share best wishes with our entire Lawrence Public Schools community for a safe, warm and peaceful winter break. We hope you enjoy this 25 seconds of beautiful music from last Thursday's band concert at Southwest Middle School; this Southwest Band is performing under the direction of Director Debbie Woodall-Rutledge.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeanice Kerr Swift". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jeanice Kerr Swift
Superintendent of Schools
Lawrence Public Schools

P.S. I have shared a Superintendent communication regarding [Administrator Group clarification, which can be referenced here](#).