



**Superintendent Report
Board of Education
Tuesday, January 27, 2026**

Hello Members of the Board and Community,

As we wrap January this week, I continue to be encouraged by the way our students, staff, and families are navigating this time of year with focus and care for one another. January has centered our district on perseverance through our CharacterStrong emphasis, and this month has also brought intentional conversations around dignity and unity. All are values that align closely with the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Many of our board members, alongside representatives from our leadership team were in attendance at the 9th annual MLK, Junior Community Breakfast hosted by the **Jayhawk Rotary Club** on Monday, January 19. This was an inspiring event, with beautiful vocals from **Vanessa Thomas**, and a moving keynote from guest speaker **Deborah Dandridge**, Field Archivist and Curator of the African American Experience Collections at the Kenneth Spencer Research Library. A highlight of the morning is that **Ewa Adedipe, Free State High School**, was awarded the Jayhawk Breakfast Rotary Club MLK scholarship for \$1,500. Our attendees were so grateful for the chance to congratulate Ewa and her family following her acceptance, which included beautiful remarks to the assembled group of community leaders, friends, and neighbors.

Together, these themes celebrated during the last week remind us that learning and leadership are rooted not only to focus on academic growth, but also in how we show up for one another during moments of challenge and opportunity.

The work across Lawrence Public Schools continues to reflect this commitment, and I am grateful for the momentum we are building as we move forward together.

One Dream: Honoring Dr. King's Legacy

Last week, Lawrence Public Schools proudly hosted our annual [MLK One Dream event at the Lied Center of Kansas](#), bringing together students, staff, families, and community members for an evening of reflection, celebration, and connection.

This year's theme, ***Mission Possible 2 – Building Community, Uniting a Nation, the Nonviolent Way***, honored students and staff members who exemplify Dr. King's legacy through compassion, leadership, and a commitment to dignity and belonging. The program featured powerful student performances and reflections that lifted voices across our district and reminded us of the role schools play in building stronger, more connected and united communities.

All our student performers and emcees were wonderful, and I especially wanted to share this brief clip of **Ja'Liana Ayala, a junior at Lawrence High School**, singing "Stand Up," by Cynthia Erivo. As you will hear, Ja'Liana offered a remarkable culmination for our One Dream 2026.

Thanks to our communications team, school teams who nominated award winners, and to all who

helped plan, perform, and attend this meaningful event. Congratulations to our student and staff honorees who through their daily actions continue to model what it means to live out Dr. King's values in our schools each day.

New York Montessori School's Community Meal

Community connection was also on full display at **New York Elementary School**, where families, staff, and neighbors gathered last Tuesday for a community chili feed that welcomed approximately **500 members of the Lawrence community**. This year was the 39th annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Chili Feed.

The event reflected the welcoming spirit of the New York community and the importance of schools as community gathering places. Shared meals like this one strengthen relationships, foster belonging, and create opportunities for families and staff to connect outside of the school day. It was so beautiful to not only see students with their friends and loved ones enjoying the evening, but also area neighbors and residents who attended without having a child currently enrolled at New York.

I want to thank the New York Elementary team, volunteers, and community partners who made this evening possible.

Free State High School: Performing Arts Day

Free State High School recently hosted [Performing Arts Day](#), welcoming elementary and middle school students from across the district for a day of exploration, performance, and inspiration.

Student leaders from Free State shared their talents, experiences, and pathways in the performing arts, providing younger students with a firsthand look at creative opportunities available as they continue their educational journeys. Events like this highlight the power of peer-to-peer learning and reinforce the role of the arts in building confidence, collaboration, and student voice.

Thank you to the Free State students and staff who planned and hosted this engaging experience for our younger learners.

Community Conversations: Join the Conversation!

Our Winter 2026 [Community Conversations](#) are currently underway, and I continue to be grateful for the time and thought our community members are dedicating to this work.

Strategic Plan



Community Conversations That Count

Lawrence Public Schools is in the next phase of our multi-year strategic planning work.

As a reminder, we are hosting a variety of ways for our students, staff and community to share feedback:

- 1) Mid-year check in survey - both a traditional survey (15 min),
- 2) Pulse check survey (5 min),
- 3) Share your thoughts feedback opportunity, and
- 4) In-person meetings.

These engagement sessions and surveys provide an opportunity to reflect on progress connected to district priorities, share experiences from across our schools, and identify areas where we can continue to grow. Alongside district leaders, I look forward to listening and learning directly from students, staff, families, and community members as we build on the momentum of this important feedback process. Additional engagement opportunities will continue throughout the winter, and I encourage all members of our community to participate in a way that works best for them.

Clarification: Immigrant and Refugee Students in Lawrence Public Schools

We often receive questions regarding our processes for immigrant and refugee students and today, have shared a reminder with staff about our district processes.

In the Lawrence Public Schools, we remain deeply committed to supporting ALL our students and their families, regardless of national origin, religion, or immigration status; we stand in strong support of our students and their families.

It is important to note, despite announcements, that the law has not changed. The [Kansas State Department of Education statement](#) clarifies, “...**We remind school personnel that their ultimate responsibility is the education and protection of all students. All students have a constitutionally protected right to receive an education.**”

We will continue to work every day to ensure that ALL children are welcomed, embraced, and valued as important members of our USD 497 learning community in each of our classrooms and schools; this fundamental core value and practice remains firm today.

Our team will continue to abide by all state and federal laws and board policies in ensuring student safety and protecting student information. Further, in keeping with the law, we will not share any student data without a warrant, subpoena, or other lawfully issued court order. Our team will continue to follow the law and abide by board-approved policies regarding investigations and/or arrests on school grounds.

In the Lawrence Public Schools, we view diversity as our strength, and we respect and value each of our students and their families. We are honored to work and live in a diverse, international school environment, and we value this as a gift that enriches and strengthens our community.

We understand that many of our children and families are experiencing concern as a result of recent national developments, and we will continue to reassure all within our community of our ongoing engagement and support. As is true every day, we all remain ready to support our children and families who are experiencing concerns.

Specifically, we are sharing the following:

- **In keeping with federal law, we will continue in our commitment and practice to ensure that a child’s immigration status will have no impact whatsoever on their education in Lawrence Public Schools.**
- **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.**
- **In Lawrence Public Schools, we will not ask about a child’s immigration status at school. Public school districts have a legal obligation to enroll students regardless of their immigration status and without discrimination on the basis of race, color or national origin.**
- **It continues to be the policy of the Lawrence Public Schools not to allow any individual or organization to enter a school site if the educational setting would be disrupted by**

that visit.

- Any request by the U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement Office (ICE), state or local law enforcement agencies acting on behalf of ICE, or agents or officers for any federal, state, or local agency attempting to enforce federal immigration laws to visit a school site should be presented to the Superintendent's Office for review as to whether access to the site is permitted by law, a signed judicial warrant is required, or any other legal considerations apply; this review should be made expeditiously, but before any immigration law enforcement agent or officer appears at a school site.
- Should ICE or other immigration law enforcement agents request any student information, the request should be referred to the Superintendent's Office to ensure compliance with Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), student constitutional privacy, standards for a judicial warrant, and any other limitation on disclosure; this review should be conducted expeditiously, but before any information is disclosed.

In addition, we will continue to partner and coordinate with our many excellent Lawrence community organizations and resources to connect additional support for our families beyond the school setting.

We have included links to the following resources for further reading, in case they are helpful:

- [NEA: How Educators Can Support Immigrant and Migrant Students](#)
- [ACLU: FAQ For Educators on Immigrant Students in Public Schools](#)
- [Ed.gov: Educational Resources for Immigrants, Refugees, Asylees and other New Americans](#)

We will follow the law and board policy, and we are committed to serving as a model for all our students who are our greatest responsibility and our best hope. Our children are valued in our classrooms for who they are, and the gifts they bring.

We remain committed that all our children will continue to experience the safe haven of a warm, welcoming, and supportive classroom environment on each and every day at school.

Inclement Weather Reminders

Throughout the year in Kansas, a variety of weather conditions can impact school operations, and right now, winter weather remains an important consideration. Because of this, I want to encourage families to **stay connected** with the district in several ways to receive timely updates about school schedules, cancellations, or delays.

As a reminder, whenever there is a threat of severe or inclement weather, our communications team will notify only when school, athletic events, or district activities are canceled or adjusted. **If operations are continuing as normal, no notification will be sent.**

If a decision has been made to close school due to weather, parents, guardians, and staff will receive real-time messaging via text, email, and voice calls from the district. Additionally, the community-at-large can track cancellations via our Facebook page and web site, as well as through area media coverage.

I want to thank families and staff for their flexibility and patience as we navigate changing conditions. Our district closely monitors weather forecasts and road conditions and communicates decisions as early as possible to support family planning and staff safety. This includes not only snow and ice accumulations, but frigid temperatures as well.

Families are encouraged to ensure their contact information is up to date so they receive timely notifications through ParentSquare and other district communication channels. We especially value our facilities, and operations teams who work behind the scenes to keep our schools safe and running during winter weather events, and our parking lots and sidewalks treated in advance of return to school after an inclement weather day.

Upcoming Events

Ovation! USD 497 Talent Show

The **Lawrence Schools Foundation** and Lied Center of Kansas are proud to announce the tenth annual, district-wide talent show for middle and high school students this Sunday, February 1, 7:00 pm. [Ovation!](#) proceeds will benefit the Lawrence Schools Foundation and showcase the amazing talents of USD 497 students. Held on the main stage of the Lied Center with full production, the community will come together to celebrate Lawrence's talented youth, with acts ranging from instrumentalists to singers and dancers, and more.

Parent & Teacher Conferences: Partnering for Student Success

Parent/Teacher Conferences will take place on February 11-12 (early childhood and elementary) and between February 9-12 (middle and high schools), and I encourage families to take advantage of this important opportunity to connect with their child's teachers.

These conferences provide valuable time for families and educators to share insights, celebrate growth, and work together to support each student's learning and well-being. Strong partnerships between home and school play a critical role in student success, and these conversations help ensure that students are known, supported, and encouraged as they continue through the second semester.

Thank you to our teachers for the care and preparation they bring to these meetings, and to our families for their continued partnership in supporting student learning.

Coming Soon! 2026-27 Preschool Enrollment

As a reminder, early enrollment for Lawrence Public Schools preschool programs opens next week on **February 2nd** and runs through **March 22nd**. Our preschool programs provide a strong, joyful start for our youngest learners, building foundational skills, curiosity, and a love of learning that lasts well beyond the early years.

Families will be able to apply for preschool opportunities at **Kennedy Early Childhood Center, New York Montessori, Deerfield, Prairie Park, Sunflower, and Woodlawn Elementary Schools**. With six of our elementary sites now offering preschool, this reflects our continued commitment to expanding access to quality early learning in neighborhood schools across the district.

Families with preschool-aged children are encouraged to explore these opportunities and take advantage of this early enrollment window. We anticipate acceptance notifications sent to families by April 1st based on eligibility and availability. Additional information and enrollment details are available at www.usd497.org/preschool.

Board of Education Appreciation Artwork: "Heart Hands"

As we wrap up January and this School Board Appreciation Month, we are excited to share a special piece of student artwork that reflects care, connection, and belonging across our schools. As our Board

of Education welcomes a new member, and others begin new terms of service, this artwork serves as a meaningful reminder of the students, families, and community members you represent and serve.


Each year at **Deerfield Elementary School** during Transition Day, Kindergarten students visit first-grade classrooms to meet their future teachers and learn about what lies ahead. As part of this experience, students create “heart hand” artwork, coloring their hands in ways that represent themselves and connecting them together as a symbol of welcome and unity. These heart hands are displayed in first-grade classrooms and serve as a reminder to students that they are valued and supported as they take their next steps. Special thanks to **Deerfield Kindergarten teachers – Andrea Kelly, Kristen Fisher, and Jenny Humburg, and 1st grade teachers – Megan Bland, Stacy Katzenmeier, and Jennifer Day** for helping us with this year’s special recognition.

We are pleased to present this artwork to our Board of Education members as a gesture of gratitude and appreciation. It represents not only the creativity of our youngest learners, but also the heart of Lawrence Public Schools where relationships, belonging, and care are foundational to learning.

The strength of Lawrence Public Schools is rooted in a connected community that believes in its children, takes action to support their schools, and remains committed to their success. Now, more than ever, a community in partnership and support is key and critical. Thank you for your partnership, your perseverance, and your continued support of our students and staff.

It is an honor to serve the Lawrence Public Schools and to share in the important work ahead.

Sincerely,

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

Jeanice Kerr Swift
Superintendent of Schools
Lawrence Public Schools