



USD 497 News Release

Jake Potter, Executive Director of Communications
110 McDonald Dr. Lawrence, KS 66044
(785) 832-5000x1662 / jake.potter@usd497.org

March 23, 2026

Superintendent Statement Jeanice Kerr Swift

Leadership Appointments for 2026-27 School Year

It's an exciting time in Lawrence Public Schools as we enter this spring season; we are pleased to share the appointments of several leaders in key roles beginning in the 2026-27 school year. In all the following appointments, a clear pattern emerges: experienced, proven leadership, commitment, talent and passion are matched to areas of challenge and opportunities for growth in the organization.

In addition, in keeping with our goal to streamline district operations, the following appointments are achieved **without addition** to the number of administrative positions in the district. With these strategic appointments, we are able to align work more efficiently to ensure opportunities for students, to match leadership roles and programming to serve in key areas of need for the Lawrence Public Schools.

Principal, Choice Campus at Centennial and Lawrence Virtual School

We are pleased to share the appointment of **Zach Harwood** as principal of **Choice Campus at Centennial and Lawrence Virtual School**. Harwood has served as principal of the Lawrence Virtual School since July 2023, and the additional leadership responsibilities at Centennial will begin July 1, 2026. During the last three school years at LVS, Harwood has paired innovation with a sustained commitment to personalized learning and ensuring every student is known, motivated, and supported.

Bringing innovation to ensure opportunities for students for whom traditional school is not the best match is the motivation and drive of Zach Harwood, and we are excited for the next chapter at Lawrence Virtual School and Centennial.

Renovations are currently underway at the Choice Campus at Centennial in advance of enrolling students for the 26-27 school year. Harwood will continue to provide oversight of the Lawrence Virtual School, while also working with team members to design the personalized, flexible learning option for interested high school students at Centennial.

Lead Principal, Student Support Pathways

We are excited to share the appointment of **Mark Preut** as **Lead Principal, Student Support Pathways**, with direct leadership responsibilities for the Academy Program, located at College and Career Campus, Adult Education, Diploma Completion, Juvenile Detention

Center, Credit Recovery, and Attendance/Truancy Intervention Programs. Preut has served at the Lawrence College and Career Center since July 2024, following 13 years of service at Lawrence High School. Preut will continue to serve as principal of the Academy, and with expanded leadership responsibilities scheduled to begin July 1, 2026.

Over Mr. Preut's long dedicated service in Lawrence Public Schools, he is widely known for his commitment to students first, and specifically his excellent work on behalf of our most vulnerable students. His experience, connections and partnerships will strengthen the work as will the ability to focus on a critical portfolio of student support pathways.

Preut received his bachelor's degree from the University of Kansas and master's degree from Benedictine College. Prior to joining Lawrence Public Schools, he also held principal positions with Atchison County Schools and at Maur Hill-Mount Academy.

We are also sharing the assignment of district leaders who will continue to serve, moving the district forward in areas aligned to their experience and expertise.

Assistant Superintendent, Student Support Services

Ms. Kristen Ryan will dedicate her energies, bringing a strong background in school and district leadership experience and excellence to Student Support Services.

In leading the Student Support Services team, Ms. Ryan and the team will launch the new Lawrence Public Schools Welcome Center, and continue to deepen the work in many student support areas, including Title IX, Mental Health and Trauma Informed practice, CigT/GEI processes, supporting school teams to align a robust, responsive system of supports to activate early and often to ensure student success.

Assistant Superintendent, Human Resources and Employee Relations

Ms. Samrie Devin will dedicate her many years of experience, depth of knowledge and extensive background in USD 497 and the Lawrence community in service to Human Resources and Employee Relations.

Ms. Devin has already launched efforts this year to renew, innovate, and invigorate district recruitment efforts, engineer next steps in ensuring both a teacher and school leader pathway and pipeline in the district, and she serves as a lead on the team to ensure beneficial working conditions and competitive compensation to attract and retain talent in the Lawrence Public Schools.

Principal, Prairie Park Elementary

Based on observed job performance and in response to significant feedback from both staff and parents, we are pleased to name **Denise Johnson** as building principal of **Prairie Park Elementary**. Johnson has served as interim principal of Prairie Park during the 2025–2026 school year and brings more than 20 years of experience in Lawrence Public Schools.

In naming a principal for Prairie Park early, prior to April, as well as in adding preschool programming, this wonderful Prairie Park school community will have the 'wind at its back' in building on the foundation of this year, and turning the page to their next chapter.

“When children feel seen, heard, and valued, they thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. It is an honor to partner with Prairie Park students, staff, and families to foster a school culture rooted in joy, belonging, and high expectations for all. I will work to ensure that every student feels successful, accepted, and empowered to grow as a learner,” said Johnson.

Prior to her interim role, she served as Director of Elementary Curriculum, where she supported educators across the district and helped lead the district’s focus on literacy and instructional improvement.

In keeping with our commitment to streamline district operations, these appointments will be achieved **with no addition** to the number of administrative positions in the district. With these strategic appointments, we are able to align work more efficiently to ensure opportunities for students in Lawrence Public Schools.

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