



USD 497 News Release

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Board Shows Appreciation for Dr. Lewis' Leadership; Discusses Superintendent Searches

"We are a board that has been honored to serve with him," said Board President Kelly Jones of Dr. Anthony Lewis, who resigned as superintendent, effective August 9. "It has been an absolute honor to get to serve next to you and to watch and learn from you and your leadership." Jones' comments, and those of other board members, came during a special meeting of the Lawrence Board of Education held Tuesday to discuss upcoming superintendent searches.

"What I appreciate about you is how you deal with students. I have noticed that when we walk in the buildings, you are usually the one they go to. They know you and obviously care a great deal about you," said Vice President Bob Byers, whose words were echoed by others on the board.

"Just in the time that I have been here, I see the dedication that you have shown from day one," said new board member Yolanda Franklin. "When I told my grandson that you are moving, he cried. He said that he just got a chance to know you... That connection you got with him is just foretelling of the dedication you have to our students and to this community, and I truly will miss you," she said.

GR Gordon-Ross recalled Dr. Lewis' hiring among the first things he did as a board member. "Like Yolanda, I had one member of my household who was truly devastated that you are leaving... It is those types of stories that are not unique to us as board members and our kids... That is what makes you special... You could go into any building and know the kids. You don't just recognize them, you know them. You know their names. You know their stories. You know their families," he said.

Growing up in Lawrence, board member Carole Cadue-Blackwood said that this wasn't always the case. "In my nearly 50 years of living here, not once, would I know the superintendent if I saw them at the store," said Cadue-Blackwood. "You are one of those people I see out in public, and I know you, and you know my children, and you know my nieces and nephews. There are no words for that," she said, thanking Dr. Lewis for championing caring adult connections with students.

Anne Costello, also new to the board, added, "I appreciate how hard you work... I don't think people realize just how many hours you have committed to this district, week in and week out, with all the things that you do."

Past President Shannon Kimball also served on the board that hired Dr. Lewis. "I am lucky that I got to work with you as our superintendent, and I wish you so much success and happiness in your new role. I am excited about where we are as a district and the opportunities we have ahead of us, because you have set us up in so many different ways for success. You have done some really hard work in this district, and I thank you for that," Kimball said.

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Jones worked with the other board officers, Byers and Kimball, to develop a tentative timeline for the superintendent searches. They recommended working with the Kansas Association of School Boards to select an interim superintendent in August. KASB offers these services at no additional cost as part of the district's membership.

The board would develop in September a Request for Proposals from search firms interested in conducting a community-engaged search. Jones estimated that the board could select that firm in October. "Between November and March, we would move to identify a permanent superintendent, including engaging the community and making sure all stakeholders get a seat at the table and making sure that everyone has a voice.

"This is the most important thing we'll do as a board. We are receiving resumes from people all over the country already," Jones said.

She also shared qualities, experience, and characteristics desired in a superintendent. These were used in the district's recent superintendent searches and include:

- Emphasis on educational equity.
- Expert communicator.
- Leads the district in establishing positive cultures in schools.
- Collaborates with district educators to assess and refine curriculum and instructional strategies.
- Student-centered approach to decision-making.
- Prioritizes student and staff safety.
- Operationalizes budget-building processes aligned with the district's strategic plan and vision.

Jones said that Lawrence is an extraordinary community and how the community shows up, including how it shows up online, will impact the search. Costello said that she was disheartened by comments she read on social media around Dr. Lewis' resignation. "I would like us to think about how that is going to reflect on us to candidates who are interested in coming here," she said.

Addressing some online comments, Costello shared that the board is required by law to hire a superintendent and read a list of qualifications necessary to become one. She likened a district of this size to a large business, asking "What business with 1,500 employees would operate without a CEO?" She also noted that the average tenure for a superintendent in Kansas is five years, adding, "We need to find the best candidate who is the best fit for the district."

"This work is the most important work we'll do," said Kimball. "I think it is really encouraging that we are already hearing interest in our district from all over the country. This is a district that people will be excited to lead. I see so much optimism and opportunity for us as a community and as a board in this process. It makes me really excited for what comes next," she said.

The board meets July 8 for its 2024-2025 organizational meeting, including its election of officers. Other meetings prior to the start of school are July 22 and August 12. School begins August 13 and 14.

The board also met in executive session to discuss matters of non-elected personnel.

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