



## USD 497 News Release

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### Board President Announces Interview with Second Interim Superintendent Finalist



Lawrence Board of Education President Kelly Jones has called a special meeting from 6:00-8:30 p.m. Wednesday, July 31. The board will meet in two executive sessions to discuss non-elected personnel matters, with no action to follow. Members will discuss the interim superintendent contract and interview a second finalist, Dr. Thomas Ahart of Iowa.

A 33-year veteran educator, Dr. Ahart has provided consulting services to superintendents and leadership teams for the Council for Great City Schools since 2022. He previously served Des Moines Public Schools, the largest school district in Iowa, for 14 years, including a decade as its superintendent, and holding associate superintendent and principal roles.

“I have always loved Lawrence,” Dr. Ahart said, “and USD 497 is a great size: large enough to provide a wide range of opportunities but small enough to build a true team/family culture. I’m very impressed with the work the district has done in the recent past on facilities. More importantly the district has committed itself to equity, to true school improvement for all students — that’s tremendously important to me.”

In his time at Des Moines Public Schools, Dr. Ahart helped improve student performance by transforming culture. Taking his cues from research that shows students perform better when educators are engaged, he prioritized communication, relationships, and ongoing engagement to create positive, measurable change.

His prior experience includes service as a director of human resources, director of instruction, and a high school language arts teacher in Ankeny, Marshalltown, and Denison Community Schools and a school improvement consultant for the Heartland Area Education Agency, all of Iowa. He also taught high school language arts in the Roaring Fork School District in Colorado. Dr. Ahart earned a bachelor’s degree from the University of Denver and master’s, education specialist, and doctorate degrees at Drake University.

“Dr. Ahart’s integrity as a leader and track record in Des Moines Public Schools stood out to the board,” said Jones. “His efforts led to a strong and dynamic culture for staff, students and families, along with fiscal responsibility and budget solvency amid financial challenges. We are excited to share the pride we have in our district and community and explore how his experience and approach can help our staff, students and schools thrive in the months to come.

This hiring process began following the June 29 resignation of Dr. Anthony Lewis, superintendent of schools since 2018. The board interviewed USD 497 Deputy Superintendent Dr. Larry Englebrick Monday and plans to announce another interim superintendent finalist interview this week.

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## Page 2 – Interim Superintendent Search

Applicants for the interim superintendent position were collected and thoroughly vetted by the Kansas Association of School Boards, enabling the board to work to fill the position on a short timeline. Finalists' names and background information will be shared prior to their interview day in our district. All information about the search will be available at <https://www.usd497.org/InterimSuperintendentSearch>.

Each interview day this week includes a tour of our district led by educators, students, and building administrators, as well as candidate meetings with district administrators, certified and classified staff union leadership, and school family and community members serving on district committees. Individuals meeting with the finalists will have the opportunity to provide the board feedback via a survey. The board aims to fill the interim superintendent role by August 12. Dr. Lewis' last day in our district is August 9.

This fall the board will hire a firm to conduct a national search for a long-term superintendent to begin their service July 1, 2025. This timeline provides ample opportunity for expanded community engagement to guide the board in hiring the best person to lead Lawrence Public Schools and serve our community moving forward.

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