



## USD 497 News Release

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### Board Approves Policy Focused on Learning & Curbing Student Cell Phone Distractions

“The goal is about one thing – lifting up the teaching and learning in our classrooms,” said Dr. Jeanice Swift, interim superintendent, before the school board unanimously approved a new [Policy JCAA Cell Phones and Electronic Devices](#).

Swift said that district expectations are simple and developmentally appropriate.

- Elementary students may not use cell phones at school.
- Middle school students may not use them during class or passing periods; their principals may use discretion when deciding about student use of cell phones during lunch.
- High school students may not use personal electronic devices during class, unless for a specific instructional purpose as directed by the teacher. They may use them during non-instructional times, such as passing periods and lunch.

“We are preparing students to go to college and for adult life; it’s best that they learn to manage their cell phones,” said Swift. She added that this is a communitywide endeavor to support systemic change. “We know big changes like this are hard, but they are worth the effort,” she said.

Board President Kelly Jones said that the Policy Committee will continue to review the policy to see how implementation goes and whether refinements are needed. She said that she also wants to see continued discussion of a reduction in the use of district-provided devices with elementary students.

Swift agreed, saying that was the number one request she heard from parents during fall community engagement. “We want to use technology to help students with skill-building, but we want to be careful with our young students and their amount of screen time,” she said.

“I like the progression through the grade levels and the mindset that we are going to go into this and review it as we go and work on a culture shift using this work as a guide,” said GR Gordon-Ross, board vice president.

The previous cell phone policies protected elementary and middle school instructional time from the distractions of student cell phone use and supported high school teachers’ discretion in determining whether their students could use phones in class. Teachers and parents presented petitions to the board last summer, advocating for revisions to the policy, including a clear district stance and consistent districtwide implementation. They cited as concerns: students’ addiction to their phones, their lack of focus in class, constant distractions causing a loss of instructional time, and unsafe behaviors as a result of cyberbullying and social media misuse.

**MORE**

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The U.S. Surgeon General last summer issued an opinion about electronic devices and screentime, calling for a warning label on social media to alert users to its harmful effects on adolescents' mental health. Additionally, the Kansas State Board of Education established a task force on student screen time. This statewide group recommended to the state board that phones be turned off and kept away from students throughout the school day. The state board will consider approving the recommendations for Kansas schools when it meets this week.

### **Athletic Facilities Study**

On September 23, the board received an architectural evaluation of secondary school performing arts facilities. The study by ACI Boland included the condition of performance spaces, finishes, flow of movement, code compliance, and acoustics; seating, lighting, audio/video, and electrical equipment; and overall management. The firm also collected input from middle and high school principals and performing arts staff.

Tonight, the board heard a similar report from the firm about district athletic facilities. The study included a visual survey, comparison of local facilities with neighboring districts, site visits, and staff input.

"We confirmed major items that compare poorly to our identified peer districts," said Doug Loveland, architect. He cited among immediate concerns (1-3 years): track and tennis conditions (HS/MS), Free State Stadium press box and grandstand, Lawrence High grandstand, and seating areas at both high school softball and baseball fields. He listed as major concerns in the near term (0-5 years): high school gym conditions and counts, athletics and P.E. equipment conditions, and audio/visual capabilities.

Loveland also shared some examples of current pricing of similar projects at other districts:

- High school auxiliary gym/storm addition: \$8 million.
- High school weight room/wrestling room/storm addition: \$5-6 million.
- High school track resurfacing: \$375,000.
- Track Replacement (asphalt and surface): \$750,000-\$1.25 million.
- Tennis Complex (6 courts): \$1 million.
- Athletic Building Reskinning/Renovation: \$500,000-\$600,000.

Gordon-Ross asked how the prioritized list fits into the district's capital outlay plan. "We are currently reactive to situations..., we need to be proactive," said Dr. Larry Englebrick, deputy superintendent. "Our capital outlay budget cannot support the big picture."

Past President Shannon Kimball said that she supports a master planning process to address existing needs.

### **Proximity Learning**

The board approved a short-term partnership with Proximity Learning for the delivery of live, virtual instruction in World Language and Spanish courses at West Middle School this spring. A long-term substitute will staff the classrooms. The district can dissolve the Proximity partnership if a qualified teacher is hired.

### **Executive Session**

The board recessed to executive session to discuss non-elected personnel matters.