



SALEM•KEIZER
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

SUCCESS *in* SALEM-KEIZER



SKPS LEADERSHIP



Our students are capable of excellence, our district is moving forward, and our team has the skills and dedication necessary to make Salem-Keizer a proof point for the nation.

As we prepared for this school year, our school and district leaders committed to a single and transformative promise:

Salem-Keizer will offer our students excellent instruction focused on grade-level content in every classroom, every day.

On its face, this promise sounds simple, but it requires skill and unwavering focus. First, our students deserve excellent instructional materials that spark their curiosity, resonate with their lives and push their learning. Second, our educators deserve the conditions, training and time to support students. And finally, our schools need to be places of safety and belonging that support academic and emotional growth.

Our success will come one step, one lesson, one day at a time, accumulating over time. As we do our work, our core values — excellence, community, equity, students at the center, and relationships — serve as our north star, pulling us upward and forward together.

ANDREA CASTAÑEDA

Superintendent, Salem-Keizer Public Schools

I have served as a longtime educator, academic leader and community member in Salem-Keizer, and I firmly believe in the power of our public schools to improve lives and outcomes for all in our community.

Our schools are so, so precious. They form the basis of our neighborhoods, where we live, grow, learn and play. While we always strive to meet and exceed the needs of all students, school districts face numerous external pressures, funding challenges, and unpredictable situations. However, to be successful, we need to focus on what we can control and how we show up as a community.

If we are going to be a part of a community, it means we all must play a part in our community. Pick up a book and read with a child, volunteer in a school, or write an encouraging note to a teacher, a bus driver, a principal or any of our school staff. If we look out for each other, put students at the center, and believe the best about one another, great things will happen.



CYNTHIA RICHARDSON

Chairperson, Salem-Keizer School Board

SCHOOL BOARD GOALS

Third-Grade Literacy: 25.4% Annual target not met



Literacy is the cornerstone of all future learning, and in Salem-Keizer, we are strengthening that foundation every single year. Our elementary schools focus on creating a seamless transition from Pre-K through third grade, ensuring students build on their developing skills at every step. By pairing research-backed curriculum with deep teacher collaboration and training, we are seeing consistent progress toward our goal to have every student be a skilled and confident reader.

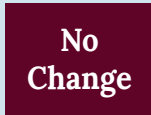
Our progress: The overall third-grade literacy proficiency rate increased from 24.2% in 2023–24 to 25.4% in 2024–25 – the highest rate since 2021–22 – but remains 2.9 percentage points below our district’s annual target.

Student Sense of Belonging

Elementary: 58% Annual target not met Secondary: 36% Annual target met



Our status: The overall sense of belonging rate for grades 3–5 students remained the same between spring 2024 and 2025; however, this metric remains below our target of 63%. Key staff in schools have been trained on how to use this information to improve the sense of belonging.



Our status: The overall sense of belonging rate for grades 6–12 students in 2024–25 remained above the annual target, with every ethnic group reporting levels at or above our annual target. Schools are continuing to build opportunities for connection and participation to improve the sense of belonging and also increase attendance rates.

Attendance: 56.9% Annual target met



Our progress: In our district we have more than 36,000 students. Regular attendance rates rose by nearly 1 percentage point in 2024-25 compared to rates in 2023-24. This exceeded our annual target of 54.4%. Over the past two years, kindergarten attendance rates have significantly increased, helping set a strong foundation for future years.

Ninth-Grade on Track: 84.6% Annual target met



Our progress: The percentage of ninth graders on track to graduate in four years increased by 4.2 percentage points from 2023–24 to 2024–25, and remained above our annual target.

Four-Year Graduation: 79.7% Annual target not met



Our progress: On average, graduation rates for the Class of 2025 improved, marking back-to-back years of slow but steady gains. The district’s four-year cohort graduation rate of 79.7% is up from 79.4%, representing 2,772 students graduating with either a regular or modified diploma. This metric still lags behind our annual target of 82.8% for 2025.

STRENGTHENING OUR

We are strengthening key district systems to improve our professional culture and core business practices for students, families and staff.

Layered Security, Rooted in Relationships

In Salem-Keizer Public Schools, safety is more than a set of protocols. It is a comprehensive, layered commitment to the physical security and felt safety of every student and staff member. By blending advanced technology with a deeply human approach, our district creates environments where students feel secure, valued and ready to learn.

As part of our commitment to safe schools for all, we are focused on enhancing the physical security of our buildings through a proactive, data-driven approach. This includes the implementation of layered security systems, such as advanced cameras, door alarms, and weapons detection technology, alongside rigorous staff training. By analyzing trends and refining our protocols, we aim to predict and prevent potential harm, ensuring that students, staff, and families have full confidence in the safety of their learning environments.

The heart of this work is the belief that the strongest security system lies in strong relationships. By prioritizing human connection and proactive intervention, Salem-Keizer is building a culture where physical safety is the baseline that allows academic success to flourish.

Creating a “Professional Calm”

For Ricardo Larios, principal of Stephens Middle School, school safety is defined by a feeling rather than a checklist. While modern security systems are the foundation, Larios believes true safety stems from “the everyday human connection” ensuring every student feels seen, heard and valued.

Stephens has successfully integrated weapons detection technology, which has evolved from a source of initial apprehension into a regular morning routine. Larios notes that while the scanners provide a crucial layer of physical security, their primary benefit is the “professional calm” they offer staff, allowing teachers to focus on instruction rather than what might be in a student’s backpack.

The core of the school’s strategy is a “relationship-first” philosophy. Staff are trained to monitor student well-being, intervening with support before issues escalate. This proactive culture is supported by real-time communication and bi-weekly safety meetings. In addition, students’ rating of their “sense of safety” in school is also seeing its highest peak since 2019. By prioritizing visibility and engagement, Larios and his team have created an environment where students feel connected and secure. As Larios insists, “If you’re going to be a staff member here, relationships have to be what you lead with.”

SKPS saw a sharp decrease in weapons and lookalike weapons on campus, dropping from 212 incidents in 2023-24 to just 64 during the same period in 2024-25. This improvement follows the intentional installation of detection systems across all secondary schools and a focus on holistic and scaffolded behavior response systems districtwide.

FOUNDATIONS

Removing Distractions to Build Connection

At Sprague High School, Principal Chad Barks views safety as an environmental state where students are free to learn without the weight of social conflict. While he acknowledges the necessity of modern security hardware, he maintains that the school's protective shell is primarily built on human connection.

“Yes, the systems matter, but it really is about relationships. When you talk about having more relationships and kids being connected with one another...you can watch that as it filters not just in the classroom, but through interactions at lunch.”

CHAD BARKES, PRINCIPAL
Sprague High School

This year, the school successfully combined high-tech screening with a phone-free classroom policy. The weapons detection system has already proven effective, successfully flagging a weapon earlier this year and providing staff with a “professional calm.” Simultaneously, the removal of digital distractions has led to more authentic dialogue between students and teachers.

Supported by graduation coaches and counselors, Sprague focuses on a “relationship-first” heart to reach every student. By balancing physical security with a dedicated investment in the student experience, Barks has created a culture where safety is the baseline for academic success.

Technology Guided by Trust

As a Campus Safety Specialist at Sprague High School, Eric Garibay Ceja begins his mornings calibrating weapons detection systems, but he views his real work as building human connections. Over the last two years, he has

watched security technology transition from a point of student skepticism to an “everyday norm.”

The efficacy of this technology was proven earlier this year when the system flagged a student carrying a weapon. Garibay Ceja, who handled the high-stakes encounter, credits both the hardware and his training for the successful outcome. However, he believes the pre-existing bond he had with the student was what truly prevented the situation from escalating. Regarding the incident, Garibay Ceja reflects, “It did what it was supposed to do and it showed the trust that we have in the system. I feel like that’s why it didn’t escalate... because we did have a relationship.”

Garibay Ceja emphasizes that safety is a “tag team” effort involving teachers and coaches who treat students as people first. He focuses on mentoring students through job applications and personal struggles. For Garibay Ceja, the ultimate goal is a secure environment where a family’s only focus is their child’s academic success.



IMPROVING STUDENT

We are building and refining new systems and processes to improve and expand our capabilities to support and empower all of our students.

Kaden's Journey of Belonging

Two years ago, Kaden's school day looked very different than it does today. Before arriving at Crossler Middle School, Kaden was a student at our district's Behavioral Health Center (BHC), a specialized program for students with acute behavioral health needs.

"When Kaden first came to us, he was hurting staff and punching holes in walls," recalls Aaron Johnson, Principal at the Behavioral Health Center, "but kids like Kaden are just craving love, understanding and patience. They need someone who believes in them."

By prioritizing mental health and skill-building over traditional discipline, our district is helping students like Kaden navigate their emotions and reclaim their education. Kaden's journey from the BHC back to his neighborhood school is a powerful example of what happens when we meet students where they are at and provide the support they need.

A Data-Driven Transition

Moving from a highly structured program to a general education school is a delicate process. It requires a coordinated effort from behavioral staff, school staff and families.

"We know it's time to transition a kid back when we have the data to say so," Johnson explains. The team tracked Kaden's stability in 15-minute intervals. When he showed he was ready, the move was slow and purposeful.

There were multiple conversations between the teams at the BHC and Crossler to ensure a smooth transition. They discussed what

works well for Kaden and what doesn't. Jen Williams, Principal at Crossler, admits she initially approached Kaden's transition with caution, but was impressed by his growth. "He has surprised me in all of the best ways. His transition pushed me to see the student over the behavior," she said.

The Power of Partnership

A key element of Kaden's success was the unwavering partnership of his parents. Principal Johnson noted that Kaden's mother was one of the most involved parents he had worked with, attending every meeting and advocating for his needs. "Without her involvement, he wouldn't be where he is today," Johnson says.

Principal Williams agrees, noting that his family provided the foundation of trust necessary for the school to do its work. "They are the experts on their child. They show up for him, and they show up for us. We became a beautiful team, and that partnership is why Kaden is thriving."

Building Agency Through Skills

At Crossler, Kaden worked closely with Behavioral Specialist Aaron Lawson to turn reactions into regulation. Lawson views behavior as a skill that can be taught, much like math or reading.

"The biggest thing is emotional regulation," Lawson says. "If a student isn't able to stay calm when things get tough, it's a hindrance to learning. Kaden's growth is remarkable. He's showing a side of himself we knew was there, but now it's there all the time."

AGENCY & WELLNESS

Kaden has become his own best advocate. He recognizes when he is overwhelmed and communicates his needs to staff before a situation escalates.

“I feel like I’m most proud because I’m showing love instead of aggressiveness,” Kaden says. “I proved to other people that I can be calm.”

KADEN, STUDENT
Crossler Middle School

The Power of Belonging

Today, Kaden is like any other student at Crossler. He is a member of the chess club, a competitor on the wrestling team and a student in culinary arts, where he loves making pizza bagels.

This sense of belonging is the ultimate goal of our district’s agency and wellness strategy. When students feel they are part of a community, they show up and succeed. “He brings this sense of hope,” says Principal Williams. “He’s a reminder that we are getting it right for all kids, not just the ones who show up ready for school, but all kids, just as they are.”

When asked what advice he would give to other students facing similar struggles, Kaden’s message is one of resilience. “Work for it,” he says. “You will be able to make a lot of good skills and friends. And it’s okay if you’re not perfect. You’re perfect the way you are.”

100% of our multidisciplinary response team members have completed the Behavioral Health Coaching & Training Academy Series. So far for 2025-26, this team has been deployed 35 times and served 31 schools, bringing 90% of support requests to resolution.



ELEVATING ACADEMIC

We are strengthening PK-12 alignment of systems and structures for curriculum, instruction, assessment and teacher growth.

A Unified Promise of Academic Excellence

At Claggett Creek Middle School, the “Aha!” moments in math class are starting to look a little different. They don’t always start with a teacher at a whiteboard; often, they start with a story about a pirate ship or a football contract. This shift is the heartbeat of a district-wide transformation to adopt high-quality instructional materials.

From “Searching” to “Teaching”

Without a modern curriculum, teachers have had to spend time and energy finding materials or creating materials that align with state standards. “Teachers have spent hours trying to identify what to teach,” says Erik Jespersen, Director of Curriculum & Instruction. “Having a coherent plan saves that time. Now, they can spend that time internalizing the curriculum and focusing on how to intervene for a student who is struggling.”



Craig Arnold, an 8th-grade teacher at Claggett Creek Middle School, has felt this shift firsthand. In his second year with the new math curriculum, he uses “productive struggle” to let students wrestle with the logic of a problem before formal instruction begins. “We pull the math out of the story, rather than just teaching them a calculation,” Arnold says.

A Coherent System

Adopting a new curriculum isn’t just about new textbooks; it’s about equity. Previously, a student’s experience could change drastically just by moving to a different classroom or school. Principal Robin Buckingham notes that the new materials have “leveled the playing field.” Now, veteran and new teachers alike are speaking the same language, ensuring every student has access to rigorous, grade-level content.

This coherence is maintained through Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), where teachers meet weekly to collaborate and analyze student work.

“They bring artifacts, actual student work, to analyze what’s working and diagnose where others might be struggling.”

ROBIN BUCKINGHAM

Principal, Claggett Creek Middle School

This collaborative approach is vital for all learners, ensuring that the unique backgrounds and diverse needs of every student are leveraged as assets rather than barriers to their success.

EXCELLENCE

Investing in the “Core Work”

The shift to high-quality instructional materials represents a significant, multi-year investment. Addressing the cost, Deputy Superintendent Danielle Neves is clear: “When we want our sports teams to achieve at the highest level, we make sure they get the best equipment. That’s exactly what we’re doing for our students.”

Neves emphasizes that this isn’t a top-down mandate. Committees of educators spend an entire year researching and piloting materials, including teachers from Title I and Dual-Language schools, to ensure the tools meet student needs. “Our educators work tirelessly to understand what’s going to meet the needs of our students best,” Neves says.

A Community Promise

The results are already showing. Last spring, middle schools across the district saw growth in test scores. For the leadership team, this momentum proves that the strategy is working.

“This isn’t just an investment in our kids; it’s an investment in our community,” says Jespersen. “We know that when our school system thrives, the entire community benefits.”

ERIK JESPERSEN

Director of Curriculum & Instruction

Salem-Keizer is ensuring every student is prepared for what comes after graduation. “Inside every one of our students is absolutely limitless potential,” Neves concludes. “It’s our job to light the sparks within them.”



More than

1,000 elementary teachers,
400 classified employees and
50 school administrators

collaborated in literacy-based training as we focus on adapting best practices and high-quality instructional materials to improve student literacy outcomes.

OUR DISTRICT

Salem-Keizer is one of the largest districts in the State of Oregon, serving tens of thousands of students every day. Each student arrives to our district with unique needs and experiences. As a district: we welcome, we protect, we respect—every student, every day, no exceptions.

Below are some of our current year-to-date metrics about our students and their involvement in their schools and their learning. Each and every one of our more than 5,000 staff show up to support our students in their journey to success and make incremental progress toward their unique goals every day.

37,325 Students

886	15,728	8,692	12,019
Pre-K	Grades K-5	Grades 6-8	Grades 9-12

87.1%

Average Attendance Rate (YTD) for 2025-26

Student Demographics

- 1% American Indian/Alaska Native
- 2% Asian
- 2% Black/African American
- 48% Hispanic/Latino
- 6% Multiracial
- 3% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- 37% White

11,245 (30%)

Students speaking a non-English Language at home

Graduation Rates



Early College

100% (52 graduates)
Twenty Seal of Biliteracy were awarded



McKay

83.1% (507 graduates)
Graduation rate for former English language learners is 93.6%, which is above the state average



Roberts

17.1% (62 graduates)
45.7% completion rate (104 completers)
Four-year cohort graduation rate improved by 3.2 percentage points over the previous year



South Salem

86.7% (475 graduates)
Five-year cohort graduation rate is 92%, nearly 8 percentage points above the state average

Student Programs

<p>2,246</p> <p>High school students in music courses</p>	<p>2,508</p> <p>High school students in athletics programs</p>	<p>3,142</p> <p>High school students in AP/IB courses</p>	<p>7,550</p> <p>High school students in CTE courses</p>
<p>2,083</p> <p>Students in the Talented & Gifted program</p>	<p>2,827</p> <p>Middle & High school students in AVID</p>	<p>7,203 (19.3%)</p> <p>Students receiving Special Education Services</p>	<p>8,463 (23%)</p> <p>Students who are English Language Learners</p>

<p>2,772</p> <p>Graduates with regular or modified diplomas</p>	<p>90</p> <p>Students completed school with an extended diploma or GED</p>	<p>340</p> <p>Students earned a Seal of Biliteracy</p>
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McNary
84.5% (430 graduates)
 Five-year cohort graduation rate is 90.5%, more than 6 percentage points above the state average



North Salem
81.8% (431 graduates)
 Graduation rate for Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students increased by nearly 13 percentage points and is above the state average



Sprague
93.3% (403 graduates)
 Students with disabilities graduated at a rate of 90.9, which is almost 19 percentage points higher than the state average



West Salem
94.4% (404 graduates)
 Seventh consecutive year of being above a 90% graduation rate

Board of Directors

Lisa Harnisch, Zone 1, First Vice-Chairperson; **Cynthia Richardson**, Zone 2, Chairperson; **Jennifer Parker**, Zone 3; **Satya Chandragiri**, Zone 4; **Karina Guzmán Ortiz**, Zone 5, Second Vice-Chairperson; **Krissy Hudson**, Zone 6; **Mel Fuller**, Zone 7

Executive Leadership

Andrea Castañeda, Superintendent; **Olga Cobb**, Deputy Superintendent, Elementary; **Danielle Neves**, Deputy Superintendent, Secondary; **Heidi Sann**, Chief Financial Officer; **Paul Odenthal**, Chief Operations Officer; **Robert Silva**, Chief Human Resources Officer; **Jonathan McIlroy**, Executive Director, Strategy & Analytics; **Aaron Harada**, Director, Community Relations & Communications

Our Core Values

Students at the Center

Excellence

Equity

Relationships

Community



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Published February 2026