



March 3, 2023

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Re: *Salem-Keizer School District's Failure to Protect Employees from Student-Inflicted Injuries*

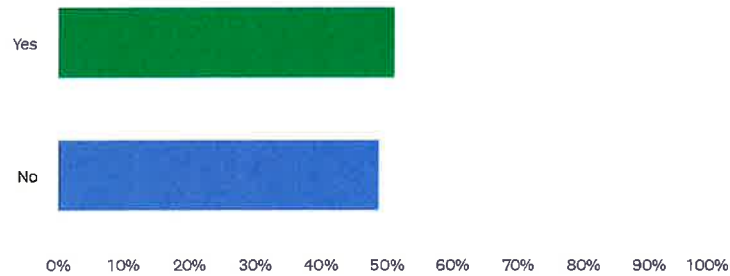
Salem-Keizer School Board:

According to a recent survey of 1,256 employees working in Salem-Keizer Public Schools, violent attacks by students are frequently occurring in our schools, causing physical injury and emotional trauma to staff and students.

Over 50% of employees surveyed report that a student has attempted to harm them or others in the last 12 months:

Q25 Has a student attempted to harm you or others in the last 12-months?

Answered: 952 Skipped: 304



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	51.26%	488
No	48.74%	464
TOTAL		952

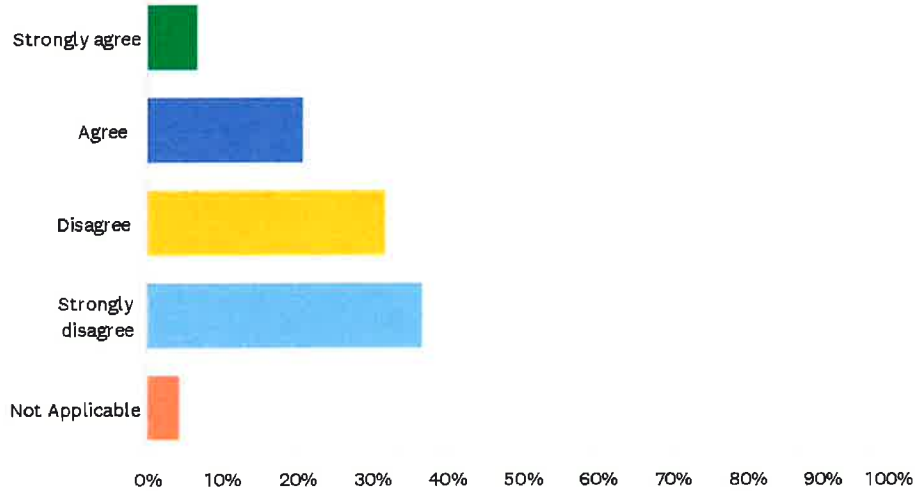
Employees report they are frequently injured by aggressive students in our schools. Injuries range from broken bones to lasting emotional trauma. One employee reported being “punched in the face” twice by the same student without any investigation. Another was kicked in the stomach so hard it caused bleeding. Multiple employees report students hitting and kicking them repeatedly, biting their arms and legs hard enough to leave lasting bite marks, scratching to the point of drawing blood. Employees have had their hair pulled out, received blows to their head, been pushed to the ground, and had objects thrown at them. There are simply too many instances of violence to list here.

The survey results also indicate the District is not always complying with its legal obligation to evaluate students with special needs after they act aggressively. Under Oregon law, any time a student with an individualized education program (IEP) or 504 Plan engages in conduct that places staff or students at risk of serious bodily injury, the District is required to conduct a behavior assessment and implement a behavior intervention plan. Yet just 23% of employees report the District is following this legal requirement and only 19% believe that behavior intervention plans adequately address student needs.

Even more troubling is that a majority of employees report they have not been adequately trained on what to do when a student becomes violent:

Q16 I have been adequately trained in all processes that I am expected to use if a student becomes violent:

Answered: 992 Skipped: 264



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly agree	6.65%	66
Agree	20.67%	205
Disagree	31.75%	315
Strongly disagree	36.69%	364
Not Applicable	4.23%	42
TOTAL		992

Staff report they don't have proper training, staffing, resources and tools to protect themselves and students from harm. After a violent attack occurs, employees are expected to promptly return to work, and students who witnessed the attack are expected to resume their learning, despite the likelihood of emotional trauma. Meanwhile, the student who engaged in the aggressive act is typically issued little—if any—consequence.

Other responses show that the District is not in compliance with OSHA regulations governing safety committees, workplace injury investigations, and training employees on how to report workplace injuries. **These reported OSHA violations are deeply concerning, given that the District was cited in 2019 for what OSHA considered “serious” violations of workplace safety regulations.**

And while the survey results alone are alarming, the reports from employees should serve as an urgent wake-up call to the District:

“I have had several students who made me feel unsafe in the classroom. Even after writing them up daily, nothing changed. After so many referrals, the district needs to actually do something.”
—Becca Dooley, Classroom Teacher

“Everyone deserves access to their education; no one deserves to be a human punching bag or deserves to be a witness to a teacher/staff member being beat up in front of them.” —Megan Butler, Classroom Teacher

“We need our safety to be taken more seriously. We wonder why staff are quitting and why we can't hire people, yet our safety is consistently an issue.” —Melissa Looney, Special Programs Instructional Assistant

“There needs to be a removal of students that harm others. It causes trauma to staff and students. ... It feels very surreal to be afraid of little kids, but many of us are. We do not have the tools to deal with them.” —Ann Koellmann, Classroom Teacher

“Anything that can be done should be done. Teachers are not bodyguards and not punching bags. It is the responsibility of the district to keep everyone safe, including the adults.” —Sarah Forbes, Classroom Teacher

“I accepted a job as a teacher. There should not be an accepted, implicit assumption of bodily harm on my part. I did not join the military, become a police officer, firefighter, etc. Simply because I became a Special Educator, I should not be expected to assume the expectation that I will be injured on the job. It is not alright.” —Virgil Paylor, Classroom Teacher

“I've done behavior in this district for 25 years and am shocked at the things that I'm seeing and experiencing at work. This district is failing miserably at protecting kids and staff.” —
Anonymous Classified Employee

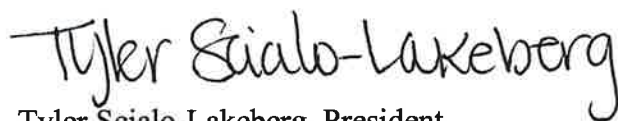
The survey results and statements above are not exhaustive – they are just a small sample of the violence that has become commonplace within our classrooms. Attacks by students not only cause injury to staff, but also cause emotional trauma to students who must witness an act of violence in their learning environment. Our students deserve better.

The District must take immediate action to protect employees and students from further harm and create a place where everyone feels safe. Among other things:

- Employees must be properly trained to respond to violent students and how to protect themselves and students from harm.
- Employees must be properly trained to report injuries and instances of student violence or aggression that put staff and students at risk of serious harm.
- Employees who are attacked by a violent student must be able to discontinue their immediate job duties to receive first aid, recover from the trauma, and complete an injury report.

- The District must ensure first aid kits are readily available to staff in each building, as many employees reported that they are not.
- The District must investigate every student-caused injury to staff and any incidents that place students or staff at risk of serious injury. As a result of such investigations, the District must develop and implement written recommendations to prevent future incidents.
- The District must conduct a behavior assessment and implement or update a behavior intervention plan for students with special needs who place staff or students at risk of serious bodily injury, as required by law.
- Students who engage in intentional acts of violence that cause injury or that place staff and students at risk of serious bodily harm should be disciplined appropriately and have their needs assessed to determine if it is safe for them to continue in their current learning environment. The District should also assess whether returning a student who has engaged in an act of violence will cause trauma to the staff and students who were subjected to the violent conduct.
- Staff should be equipped with personal protective equipment to protect themselves from a violent attack.

SKEA and ASK-ESP are prepared to work in partnership with the District to implement these and other changes that will keep our students and staff safe.



Tyler Scialo-Lakeberg, President
Salem-Keizer Education Association



Edie Buchanan, President
Association of Salem-Keizer Education Support Professionals