



April 4th, 2024

RE: Salem Keizer School District Superintendent Andrea Castañeda, Invest in Education not Weapon Detectors

Dear Superintendent Andrea Castañeda and Salem Keizer School Board members,

Youth members of Latinos Unidos Siempre, along with staff and community members represented by Alianza Poder, are mourning alongside our community. These past few weeks have been very difficult, as we navigate our limited resources to respond to the pain, chaos and uncertainty felt by our community in the aftermath of gun violence that took the life of a young Salem-Keizer School District student, and resulted in the serious injury of two other students. Our hearts and minds are with all of the directly impacted youth and their families, friends and loved ones, including the young people and the families who will be marked by the long-life impacts of the prison system as a result of this incident. We are also devastated and heartbroken to know that a middle school student was driven to take their own life with the use of a firearm.

During this time, as we've had to navigate and process these current events, we've also had to respond to the ongoing attacks from people in positions of power within the institutions that serve our students and families. We are deeply disappointed by the response of Salem Keizer School District Superintendent Andrea Castañeda. Instead of choosing to invest in evidence-based proactive and preventative measures, Superintendent Castañeda's reactive response further hardens and militarizes our schools and expands the systemic policing of students and communities.

We, as Latinos Unidos Siempre and Alianza Poder, oppose the most recent proposal by Superintendent Andrea Castañeda of bringing in weapon detector technology into Salem-Keizer schools. We also oppose any and all District proposals to expand policing and surveillance in schools. Through our collective expertise in working with people of color within the Latinx and immigrant communities, we know that weapons detection technology does not address the root causes of gun violence. Our experience is further supported by research that demonstrates that school hardening measures, like the metal detectors being proposed, do not make schools and communities safer, and instead drive racial disparities in our education system.

Weapon detectors are a band-aid solution that will come at the expense of improving our education system, access to student and family resources, as well as safe and welcoming schools.

- In other school districts weapon detectors result in thousands of hours lost in education due to the long lines that they produce. This would ultimately harm Salem-Keizer School District's goal of increasing attendance rates.
- 70 percent of high schools with weapon detectors have less than 60 percent of graduation rates.

- Weapon detectors have not proven to be fully effective in preventing violence and often do not actually detect most weapons.
- Weapon detectors have negative impacts on the psychological and emotional wellbeing of students, especially students who have past or ongoing trauma from policing and prisons.
- Schools with weapon detectors increase suspension and expulsion rates, and the Salem Keizer School District already has a disproportionate amount of Black and Latinx students being expelled.
- Weapon detectors are more prevalent in school districts with larger student populations that identify as Black, Indigenous, Latinx students and or other students of color.
- Weapon detectors will open the way for more intensified forms of policing.
- Although the Salem-Keizer School District states that they “are committed to ensuring all individuals are safe, and that all individuals feel respected and welcome in our buildings,” years of research suggests that weapon detectors make schools more unsafe and unwelcoming to Black and brown students, and actually are more likely to cause racially biased targeting.

What we need instead is investments in programs, education, and resources that prevent any form of violence and address student disengagement.

Gun violence is deeply rooted in systemic racism and discrimination.

We know that gun violence is not an issue that will be solved with weapon detectors or increased systems of policing. To address gun violence we must work together to increase and fund community resources that will support the wellbeing and positive development of children and youth. This includes addressing suicide with the use of firearms.

According to the Education Fund to Stop Gun Violence, “Gun violence is a public health epidemic that affects the well-being and public safety of all [people living in the U.S.A.]” To address this public health epidemic, we must advocate for social, policy and institutional change that tackle the social determinants of health. We must also do everything in our power to reduce the toxic stress levels felt by students and families served by the Salem Keizer School District.

The Social Determinants of Health according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services are:

- Economic Stability
- Education Access and Quality
- Health Care Access and Quality
- Neighborhood and Built Environment
- Social and Community Context

To improve the social determinants of health, our school district must continue to prioritize funding programs such as:

- Gender and culturally affirming student health centers
- Smaller classrooms

- More culturally diverse and responsive educators
- Cultural and gender affirming education, policies and extracurricular activities that create safe and welcoming schools
- Culturally and gender affirming mentors
- Culturally and gender affirming social workers
- Student empowerment through youth-affirming and youth-led programming and activities
- Culturally and gender affirming family support networks
- Positive development programs
- Access to leadership and community connection opportunities regardless of education attainment
- Restorative justice practices that promote and allow for accountability, healing and growth
- Funding to support students experiencing housing insecurity or homelessness
- Access to basic needs in common spaces (drop in spaces where students can access food, clothes, ect.)
- Culturally affirming re-entry programs (for those who have been incarcerated)

We ask that Superintendent Andrea Castañeda, the School Board and all other district administrators support our collective call to end the systems and cultures of policing in Salem Keizer School District that push so many of our Black, Indigenous, Latinx, students of color and disabled students into the school-to-prison and deportation pipeline.

You may reach us at info@lusyouth.org for any questions or concerns.

In solidarity,

Latinos Unidos Siempre

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