

District suspensions double: Spike directly follows public report from district



File photo of Keizertimes

By JOEY CAPPELLETTI
Of the Keizertimes

Suspensions in Salem-Keizer Public Schools have doubled in the 10 school days following the district's public release of discipline data at a Nov. 16 school board work session.

The Nov. 16 school board work session was one of only two times that the district planned on publicly releasing discipline data. District leadership presented discipline data from the beginning of the school year up until Nov. 5. During that period of time, there were 40 school days and 1,006 suspensions in the district — an average of 25 suspensions a day.

Public records obtained by the

Keizertimes show that between Nov. 5 and Nov. 22, a total of 10 school days, there were a total of 503 suspensions in the district and daily averages doubled to 50 suspensions a day.

The spike comes after multiple school board directors asked at the Nov. 16 meeting why the district leadership hasn't been more transparent with the release of discipline data.

Iton Udosenata, co-assistant superintendent in the district, said on a call Tuesday, Nov. 30 that the spike in suspensions wasn't due to any lag in data entry following the public report.

"A pattern that I've seen in my time as a building leader is that, especially around

the holidays, we'll see a spike in or increase in problem behaviors in school. And this is for a variety of reasons," said Udosenata. "We see it in November right before Thanksgiving. And we also often see it right before the winter break."

Data provided by Salem-Keizer district spokesperson Aaron Harada shows that suspensions were high during the same period in 2019. From Nov. 5 to Nov. 22 in 2019, there were 775 violations — 462 more than in 2021. There were three more school days during this period in 2019 however.

School board directors Satya Chandragiri and Marty Heyen asked at the Nov. 16 work session why the district stopped presenting discipline data every

month. Danielle Bethell, the board director for Keizer, has also said in the past that she wants the data to be shared more regularly.

School board directors have regular access to daily updates on discipline data through an online dashboard.

Last spring, following the removal of school resources officers from schools in March, the district presented discipline data monthly to close out the school year. The district is only scheduled to release discipline data twice this school year — once at the Nov. 16 meeting and again in February.

Board Chair Osvaldo Avila said at the Nov. 16 work session that district and board leadership made the decision not to show

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Danielle Bethell, a parent of two students in Salem-Keizer schools, took to Facebook on Nov. 23 to ask for help from her followers.

"In search of middle school/high school homeschool pods in the Keizer area, or nearby," she wrote. "If you operate or participate in one, please instant message me."

Bethell has served on the

Salem-Keizer school board since 2019 as the director for Zone 6, which encompasses Keizer. She represents more than 38,000 people and 10 schools on the board. Her post on Nov. 23 was on her private account that only her followers could see.

"Should I be nervous by this post?" one commenter wrote.

Bethell wrote in response that the decision to look at other options is "specifically about us, the choices we need to make for our children, and the lack of real education and safety being provided in our schools today."

"Fundamentally, the number one goal for us as parents is to be sure our children are raised in a stable, healthy environment. Our teachers are overtaxed, the hallways and classrooms are unsafe, whether you consider safety through physical nature or



Danielle Bethell | File photo of Keizertimes

mental/emotional, all of those challenges exist. I've been frustrated for some time and regardless of the role that I play in this community my children must come first," she added in her comment.

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'I've been frustrated for some time and regardless of the role that I play in this community my children must come first,'

— DANIELLE BETHELL

School Board Director,
SALEM-KEIZER ZONE 6