

# Parents, students protest mask requirements outside school district offices



Rally attendees line Lancaster Drive outside of the Salem-Keizer School District offices on the morning of Feb. 8. Photo by JOEY CAPPELLETTI of Keizertimes



**By JOEY CAPPELLETTI**  
*Of the Keizertimes*

Over 200 people gathered outside of the Salem-Keizer School District offices on the morning of Feb. 8 to protest ongoing mask mandates in schools. The rally's attendees, who stood along Lancaster Drive, held signs and waved American flags as cars drove by — with some honking in support.

Jenny Maguire, an event organizer and former Salem-Keizer teacher, said in a Feb. 4 email to the *Keizertimes* that the rally was to protest permanent mask mandates in schools and to advocate for mask-choice within schools.

While the protest had been planned since last week, it came one day after the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) announced that statewide mask requirements within schools would be lifted no later than March 31. Following the March 31 date, mask requirements decisions will fall to local districts and health authorities.

“By late March, health scientists expect that about 400 or fewer Oregonians would be hospitalized with COVID-19, the level of hospitalizations the state experienced before the Omicron variant began to spread. Mask requirements for schools will be lifted on March 31,” read a Feb. 7 press release from OHA.

Even with the OHA announcement,

Maguire wrote in an email Monday night that the rally was still happening and that OHA’s announcement “was not a win for Salem/Keizer.”

At the Feb. 8 rally, Mandy Breitenstein, an event organizer and mother of five, said that parents should

be able to “choose what is best for our children as individuals.”

“Salem-Keizer (School District) has not said anything about pulling back a mask policy. And so if anything, that makes our job more important, our voices need to be louder because our kids are at risk here and there’s nothing more important than our children,” said Breitenstein, who is also a former Salem-Keizer teacher. She resigned in October of 2021 after 14 years in the district due to vaccine mandates.

OHA’s press release said the mask requirements in schools will be lifted

on March 31 “to give school districts time to prepare.”

At a Feb. 8 school board meeting, Salem-Keizer Superintendent Christy Perry said the district “can’t make any change before March 31 but the decision will rest with us.”

“The thing to remember is that universal masking is still recommended by the CDC, recommended by Oregon Health Authority and recommended by Oregon Department of Education,” said Perry. “I’ll work with our health experts and work with board leadership on how do we navigate the decision



Parents and students wave as cars drive by on Lancaster Drive.

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