

# Salida Schools

2023  
Report to the Community



## School Board Members

**SUPERINTENDENT**  
Dr. David Blackburn

**ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT**  
William Wooddell

**DISTRICT 1**  
Karen Lundberg

**DISTRICT 2**  
Dr. Jodi Breckenridge Petit,  
*Vice-President*

**DISTRICT 3**  
Mandy Paschall

**DISTRICT 4**  
Joe Smith, *President*

**DISTRICT 5**  
Jenn Schuchman

**AT-LARGE DIRECTORS**  
Matthew Hobbs, *Treasurer*  
Dr. Ben Hill

**SECRETARY**  
Kim LeTourneau

Email us at:  
salidaschoolboard@  
salidaschools.org

## Board Meeting Dates

The Salida School Board meets the second Tuesday of every month. Meetings are open to the public. The next meeting of the Board is January 9, 2024 at The Crest Academy at 627 Oak Street. There will be a work session at 4:30 followed by the regular meeting at 6 p.m.

The board will have their annual retreat/work session on Saturday, January 20, 2024 at 8 a.m.

Scan the QR code to find more information about future meetings, agendas, a link to YouTube and other board activities.



# Letter From School Board President Joe Smith



Dear Salida School District Community,

As we look back on the past year, we are grateful for the unwavering support of our community, the dedication of our educators and staff, and the resilience of our students. The District is again ranked in the top 10% in the state. It has been a year of renewed focus with a dedicated Board collaborating with administration and staff on forward-thinking initiatives aimed at enhancing the educational experience for our students. We are proud to share some key highlights with you:

- **Student Safety:** The safety and well-being of our students is paramount. The Board continues to collaborate with local first responders through our Emergency Operating Plan which defines each entity's roles and responsibilities. Learn more on page 6.
- **Financial Stewardship:** The Board has diligently managed the District's finances to ensure fiscal responsibility and sustainability. The Board granted a historic pay raise to all teachers and staff last year, and continue to establish an overall financial philosophy focusing on staff salaries and benefits, facility maintenance and upgrades, and successfully running business operations. This will allow us to retain the best teachers and staff who are the critical component of our student's education, as well as honor our communities in the facilities we operate. Learn more on pages 9-10, 11.
- **Strategic Planning and Capital Improvements:** The Board has made facilities planning a priority this year, and many ongoing discussions around facilities are taking place this year. Two demographic studies this past year have forecasted that Salida School District will continue to grow 1-2% per year (about 10-20 students) for the foreseeable future. The District is looking to take care of our current needs, but also setup the community in the future for their needs. Learn more on page 5.
- **Collaboration with CMC:** Colorado Mountain College is a critical component to our student's high school education experience. Last year, three students graduated with associate's degrees, and many students are graduating with significant college credits. Additionally, CMC continues to offer other programmatic experiences to our students. Discussions are on-going for a solution that will place CMC in the Kesner building long term. Learn more on pages 13, 14,
- **Community Engagement and Outreach:** The Board values the input and involvement of our community members. Throughout the year, in addition to our monthly meetings, we have organized community forums to gather feedback on important decisions and initiatives. Additionally, this publication will be used as a tool to communicate to our community. The Board also plans to discuss other ways to provide timely and important information to the community on various topics. Commitment to community engagement ensures that the voices of all stakeholders are heard and considered in the decision-making process. QR Code Links to District and all school calendars on back cover.

Thank you for your ongoing support of the Salida School District. We are committed to the success and well-being of every student, and we look forward to another year of collaboration and achievement.

Sincerely,  
Joe Smith, President Salida School District Board of Education

## Letter From Superintendent Blackburn



The last 12 months have been progressively more 'normal' post-pandemic, with so many successes, from our basketball team making a run for the state championship, to another round of historic raises. The fall has been one of the best openings to school I have enjoyed in 25 years. Our community has bounced back faster and better than most, exiting the pandemic with all momentum moving forward.

Our test scores continue to place us as one of the top school districts in the state. Our students are participating in activities at all-time highs. Our Board of Education has remained stable and engaged. Our programs are fully staffed; while staffing continues to be a struggle, we are succeeding far better than schools around the state and country. Our facilities are being well maintained. Our community partnerships are robust and directly supporting students.

I am thankful to be part of a team and a community that continues to harness education's capacity to bring us all together.

Respectfully,  
Dr. David Blackburn



# Celebrating Continued Academic Success

The District was again recognized for strong state test scores. Overall the District was ranked 18th in the state out of 178 districts. The schools were 15th in reading and 16th in math. The District has been ranked around the top 10% of the state for over a decade.

Last year the Colorado Department of Education recognized Longfellow Elementary School (LES) with a Governor's Distinguished Improvement award, which honors schools that demonstrate exceptional student growth. The general goal for all schools in Colorado, is 50% average growth. This year's growth score for LES was 96%. That means almost every single student grew a full year of improvement between

third grade and fourth grade. The School has maintained this recognition for more than a decade.

The John Irwin Award is given to schools that demonstrate excellent academic achievement in the ninety percentile. The Crest Academy, the District's alternative middle school program, was again recognized by the state with this award last year, a status they have maintained for more than a decade.

The test data continues to be analyzed and



Students from The Crest Academy

drive the District's academic improvement planning. All of the buildings are working to improve their system for helping students that may need a second or third support in learning a topic. In addition, the District is working closely with the Economic

Development Council and the Colorado Mountain College to improve matriculation of students into programs of learning after high school (whether that is in the trades or a four-year degree).

## New Director Lundberg Brings Education Experience



At a special meeting of the board on September 8, 2023, five directors were declared elected by acclamation because there were no contested seats. All five were officially sworn in by

Chaffee County Clerk and Recorder Lori Mitchell at the Board's November meeting, including Karen Lundberg for District 1, Jodi Breckenridge Petit for District 2, Jennifer Schuchman for District

5, and At-Large Directors Matt Hobbs (4-year term) and Ben Hill (2-year term).

Lundberg is the only new member of the Board. She steps into the seat vacated by Carrie Mattix, who was recently honored with the Colorado Association of School Board's McGuffey award, acknowledging her years of service to the Board and community.

Many will recognize Lundberg from her time as the principal at The Crest Academy where she taught all subjects to middle school students following a number of years as a teacher at Longfellow

Elementary School. Lundberg shares, "There is more than one way to look at most tasks and I look forward to collaborating with other board members, the superintendent, R-32-J staff and students, and community members to make our District the absolute best it can be - without stressing the local taxpayers"

She also brings experience in communications, contracting, and after-school programs. She enjoys the many outdoor adventure opportunities of the Arkansas River Valley and maintains a busy travel schedule.



## CMC Partnership Provides Exceptional Opportunities for Salida Students

The Salida School District works in partnership with CMC Salida and 100+ local businesses to provide our students in-demand industry credentials, college credits (with no tuition costs) through concurrent enrollment classes, and work-based internships in the local community. We continue to see increased growth in these programs. A few highlights already for the '23-'24 school year:

- 163 Salida School District high school students, or 40% of the student body, took at least one concurrent enrollment class in the fall of '23. Research indicates that if students “practice college” while still in high school they matriculate and persist in post-secondary settings. Every year the participation grows and all credits earned are guaranteed to transfer to public universities and colleges in Colorado.
- Last year 3 Salida School District students received their associate’s degree through their participation in concurrent enrollment classes. Many more students are behind these initial pioneers who began when the community first annexed.
- A 300% increase in the CMC internship program! The Salida School Board sends a huge thank you to our local businesses and Fred Maxwell, CMC’s Internship Program Coordinator, for supporting this opportunity.
- 57 students are participating in our trades program through the National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCEER) and Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) certification classes.
- After 12th grade, students are also eligible to enroll in postsecondary courses and earn college credit at no tuition cost to them or their families. This system, known as ASCENT (Accelerating Students through Concurrent Enrollment), is a fifth-year high school program, allowing students to participate in concurrent enrollment at CMC after 12th grade. One more example of how our community is helping the next generation afford more training and education.

Salida Schools thanks the entire team at CMC Salida for their support of our students and community. They continue to prove their commitment as partners and visionaries for what an exceptional high school experience can provide to the success of our students.





The Neppel and Simpson staff families, with Assistant Superintendent William Wooddell and Superintendent Dr. David Blackburn, at the dedication ceremony.

## Spartan Heights

### A Community Partnership

The Salida School District (SSD) and Chaffee County Habitat for Humanity (CCHfH) celebrated the completion of construction at the Spartan Heights Subdivision with a dedication ceremony on August 10, 2023. Superintendent David Blackburn shared, “This project is a great example of what an education community can do when government, industry, and nonprofits all work together for the greater good.”

Habitat volunteers worked alongside construction trades students, who received on-site skills training, safety certification, and workforce readiness. Some students were SSD students who are also enrolled in the Colorado Mountain College credentialed program.

The partnership provided school district employees an opportunity to apply for the new homes. Jesse Neppel, a paraprofessional at SMS, and Shawn Simpson, an industrial arts teacher at SHS, both applied and were accepted to receive a CCHfH home.

To qualify with CCHfH they must fall between 30-80 percent of the area median income, have a need for housing, have the ability to repay a zero-equivalent mortgage, and provide 250 sweat equity hours per adult. This innovative partnership resulted in two local families realizing their dreams of homeownership.

# Prioritizing the People Who Make Us Great

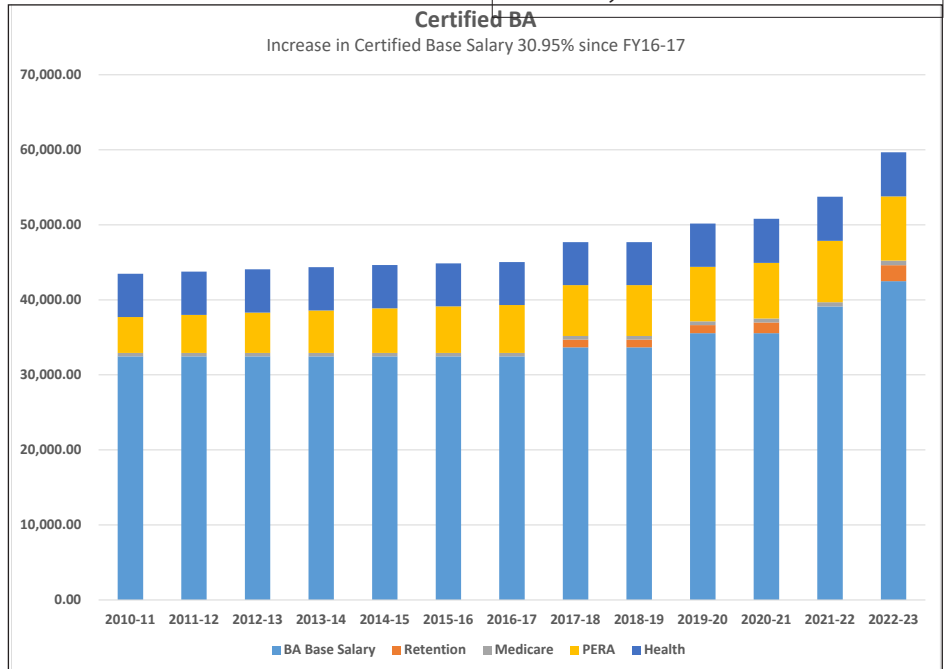
National and state staff shortages in schools have made compensation a central priority for the Board of Education, and the District has made significant investments year after year to staff pay. Last year, starting pay for hourly workers was increased to ranges from \$20/hour up to \$31/hour, and base pay for teachers has increased 31% over the last 7 years. This does not include the increases the District has opted to pay for health, vision, dental, Health Reimbursement Arrangements (HRAs), and life and accident insurance. In addition, the District pays a 21% match into all employee’s PERA retirement accounts.

The Board understands that employees continue to be impacted by inflation and Salida’s high cost of liv-

ing. The District will continue to make staff pay and benefits the top priority and are grateful for the important work Salida Schools’ employees do everyday to support our students, families, and community.



A few of the District’s dedicated staff, Marcia Veltri and Torrey Lengerich, each serving the District for more than 20 years.



Fiscal Year	Step Increase	Base Increase	BA	MA	Bonus	Retention	District Medicare	District PERA %	District Health
FY23-24	Yes	NO	42,500.00	47,148.00			NO	1.45%	20.14%
FY22-23	Yes, Plus Make Up FY21-22 & FY20-21	Yes -8.63% Increase to Base Pay	42,500.00	47,148.00			5%	1.45%	20.14%
FY21-22	NO	Yes - 10% Increase to Base Pay	39,122.60	43,769.00			NO	1.45%	20.90%
FY20-21	NO	NO	35,566.00	39,790.00			4%	1.45%	20.90%
FY19-20	YES	Yes - 5.59% Increase to Base Pay	35,566.00	39,790.00			3%	1.45%	20.40%
FY18-19	YES	NO	33,683.00	37,683.00			3%	1.45%	20.15%
FY17-18	NO	YES-\$1,000-Base	33,683.00	37,683.00	\$125/Year Served		3%	1.45%	20.15%
FY16-17	YES	NO	32,455.00	36,455.00	3% Cert/Class \$500/FTE		NO	1.45%	19.65%
FY15-16	YES	NO	32,455.00	36,455.00	Longevity \$100/yr-\$500/FTE		NO	1.45%	19.15%
FY14-15	YES, Plus Make Up FY10-11	NO	32,455.00	36,455.00			NO	1.45%	18.35%
FY13-14	YES	NO	32,455.00	36,455.00			NO	1.45%	17.45%
FY12-13	YES	NO	32,455.00	36,455.00			NO	1.45%	16.55%
FY11-12	YES	NO	32,455.00	36,455.00			NO	1.45%	15.65%
FY10-11	NO	Yes-3%	32,455.00	36,455.00			NO	1.45%	14.75%

# Facility Planning: Looking to the Future of the Salida School District

## Updated Master Facility Plan

This year, the Salida School District Board of Education has focused on facility planning. They are working to update the master facility plan to guide the future of the District and will post it for public comment in the spring.

## Demographics

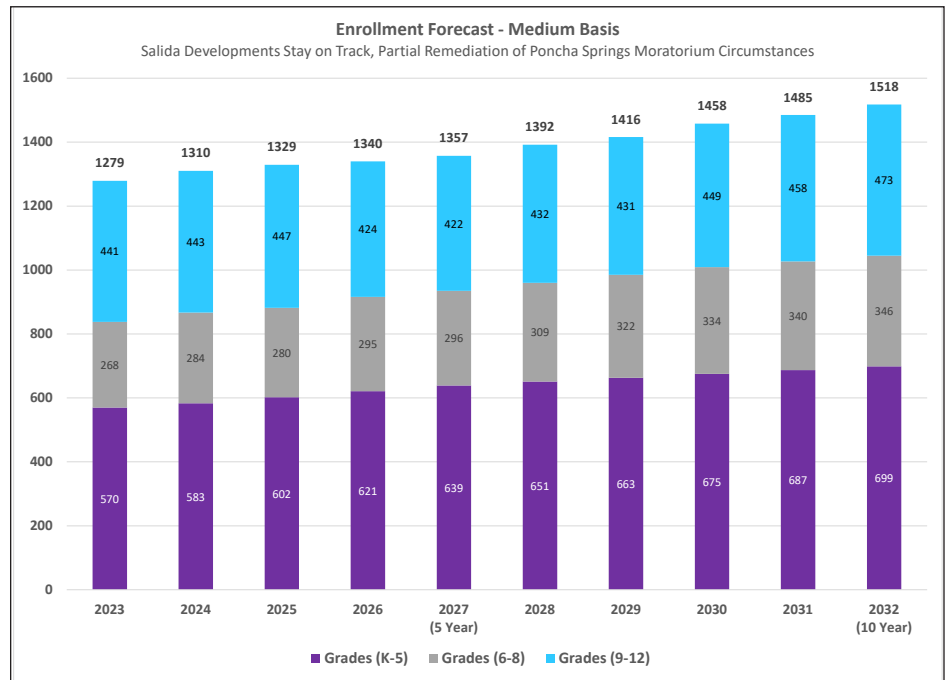
The Board ordered a new demographic study from Western Demographics in order to have current information to guide the planning process. The Board received a comprehensive report at their June board meeting. The report reviewed the planned housing projects and building permits, the local birth rate, the impact of 2nd and “resort” homes, as well as the demographics of those purchasing homes.

Colorado State Demographer, Elizabeth Garner, shared a presentation that supported the findings of the Western Demographics report. The board then felt comfortable to select the medium growth forecast from Western Demographics to guide the next steps. This model anticipates growth at 1.4% or 10-20 students a year. That equates to an additional 100 students in 5 years, and another 260 students in 10 years. This year the community did grow as predicted by 20 students, but that growth was absorbed by Salida Montessori Charter School.

## Today, Five Years, and Beyond

Currently, student capacity is being monitored at all buildings. Modular classrooms have been added on several campuses with more expected in the next 5 years.

The Board is considering several approaches to maximize the current available facility space, specifically: concurrent enrollment, allowing students to have classroom use at the



Kesner building; the increased enrollment capacity at the alternative middle and high school programs at Oak Street; and adding some modular classrooms. The Board is also reviewing policies about out-of-district enrollment and its potential impact to facility, staffing, and fiscal capacity limitations. Currently 10% of the student population is from out of district.

The Board wants to be prepared should all of the permitted housing projects be successfully completed as planned. They are working towards a long-term plan to extend the life of the current facilities significantly.

The Board is evaluating all of its assets to be sure that they have the right assets to support student programming and maintain low taxes. The Board is looking to shed some underutilized assets to invest in facilities that directly benefit student programs.

The Board is also looking to secure future land for the next generation to be sure they have the needed assets to solve those problems. The demographic study suggests that the future is only 20 years away.

## Maintenance and Care

The Board also sets aside money each year for future facility needs, like boilers and roofs. The Board is utilizing an industry standard model that compares RS Means to forecast capital projects and maintenance needs, which includes lifecycle expectations of HVAC, plumbing, and electrical components. The monies set aside will not be enough to cover all risks, but ensure the District has funds to address inevitable facility and program needs.

In addition to planning for future building needs, the Board continues to care for the current facilities and equipment. The Board is also working on laying out five years of probable capital projects. A priority goal is to delay any major new construction until the high school bond is paid off in 2030, and the elementary school bond is paid off in 2033. Meeting this goal supports a desire to minimize financial impact to the district’s tax payers.

A facility master plan should be ready for community review and feedback in coming months. This plan will enable the Salida School District to ensure the appropriate, efficient, and effective use of taxpayer money to continue its vital role in the community.



QR Code to access Western Demographics and the State Demographer Reports



## Commitment to Safety

The safety and well-being of our students is paramount. The Board collaborates with Salida Police Department through a memorandum of understanding that places a full-time School Resource Officer (SRO) in the Salida schools. The City of Salida deserves huge thanks for funding this SRO position. The District also works with all local law enforcement, fire and other first responders as outlined in an Emergency Operations Plan, or EOP. Together, these agencies participate in routine safety drills and joint training exercises and build working relationships with the safety of students as a top priority. This year the District hosted a parent seminar featuring information about the District's safety and security protocol with partners from Salida Police Department, Salida Fire Department, Family and Youth Initiatives (FYI), Department of Hu-



Salida Police Department teaching bike safety to Longfellow Elementary School 4th Graders

man Services (DHS), Colorado State Patrol, Salida School Board Members, and staff at Salida Schools. The Board continues to make capital improvements that strive to further enhance student safety. This year some of those improvements included enhancing

communication systems, adding more cameras, and ensuring security of all doors. The District will continue to work with local partners to find additional ways to improve safety for all students.

## Oak Street Facility Updates

The final phase of remodeling at 627 Oak Street is expected to be completed by August 2024. The building was purchased by the district in 2020 and has allowed for several important upgrades and fiscal advantages for the organization.

The District shed the fiscal responsibility of the lease at St. Josephs, and the lease from CMC pays for the 'mortgage' of the new Oak Street facility, flipping a revenue stream in a positive direction.

The first steps at the Oak Street location were to move the

central administration office and The Crest Academy, the district's alternative middle school program, to the building in time for the 2021-2022 school year. The Crest Academy moved into freshly remodeled classroom space, and has since received a new playground area for both student and community use.

Moving central admin and The Crest Academy created a space for other important community partners. Moving Crest left a space at Saint Joseph's school for the Salida Montessori Charter School, and moving the district's administrative offices out of the Kesner building opened up the perfect space for Colorado Mountain College Salida to establish their location in the community.

The Board is currently reviewing plans for the final phase of the Oak Street building remodel



The District's central administrative offices at 627 Oak Street.

that will bring the alternative high school, Horizons Exploratory Academy (HEA), to the location as well. This move will allow the two alternative schools to share operational costs and instructional resources.



Students at The Crest Academy enjoying the new playground.



# Navigating the Changes of Universal Preschool

In 2022, residents of Colorado passed Proposition EE, which promised universal preschool (UPK) for all 4 year olds. Implementation of the program was required to begin this school year, but there are still many unknowns related to funding and eligibility. Salida School District has been sorting through the changes, with many details still gaining clarity.

Previously the Colorado Preschool Program (CPP) was managed by the Colorado Department of Education (CDE). Those funds plus additional tax revenues identified by Proposition EE were rerouted to a newly founded department of the state government, the Colorado Department of Early Childhood (CDEC). CDEC funds only 10 hours of early education to four year olds if a community has available program capacity. Unfortunately, Colorado lacks capacity. It does not fund any special education

needs of students, which is still funded by CDE. Thus, it is not a universal preschool.

Salida Schools' early education program is a state model for children 1-year-old and walking through preschool. This is funded by the District and a federal Head Start and Early Head Start grant, which supports underprivileged families. Traditionally, the District had flexibility to combine CPP funds at the preschool level with Head Start, Special Education, or private pay funds (for District employees) to offer children and families full-day programming. The new UPK program eliminates this option for 3 year olds entirely and limits full-day options for 4 year olds given the strict qualifying factors for full day programming.

The overall program budget is subsidized by the District's general fund. District staff that utilize this benefit pay a third of



the cost of private pay. In addition, the District partners with the Children's Discovery Ranch to offer more slots to families. The District expects further changes to available slots next year as state funding becomes more clear.

There is a national and state struggle to operate early education programs and secure staff. Salida is one of the only districts in the state that pays preschool teachers (4yr olds) the same as k-12 teachers, and Salida is the only district that pays toddler teachers (1-3yr olds) the same as k-12 teachers. The District remains committed to investing in the children's early years to lay a strong foundation for the future.







The SHS Boys' Varsity Basketball - 2023 Reserve State Champions

## Extracurriculars Build Community, Support Student Achievement

The benefits of extracurricular activities are many. We like to brag about our results in the classroom, and also cheer on our kids who are pursuing their dreams in other ways. Salida Schools provides a variety of extracurricular opportunities for students who want to explore other interests in the arts, athletics, and other clubs and organizations.

Continuing research shows that student participation in activities outside of the classroom has both short and long-term positive effects for students and community members. Students who participate in extracurriculars are more likely to:

- Have improved academic performance;
- Have increased brain function,
- Learn how to concentrate and

develop time management skills;

- Broaden their worldview;
- Have higher self esteem;
- Learn essential life skills developed through goal setting, teamwork, time management, prioritization, problem-solving, analytical thinking, leadership, and public speaking;
- Make new friends, meet mentors, learn how to work with others including peers, teachers, coaches and community leaders; and
- Gain tools for improved mental health and stress reduction, improved mood, and a sense of purpose and fulfillment.

The District continues to see an increase in student participation numbers in most extracurriculars.

Fall sports saw an increase in most activities. Boys high school golf saw an increase of 31%, with 25 participants; combined middle school and high school football saw an increase of 28% with 75 players, and volleyball saw a combined increase between the two schools of 31% with a total of 87 players!

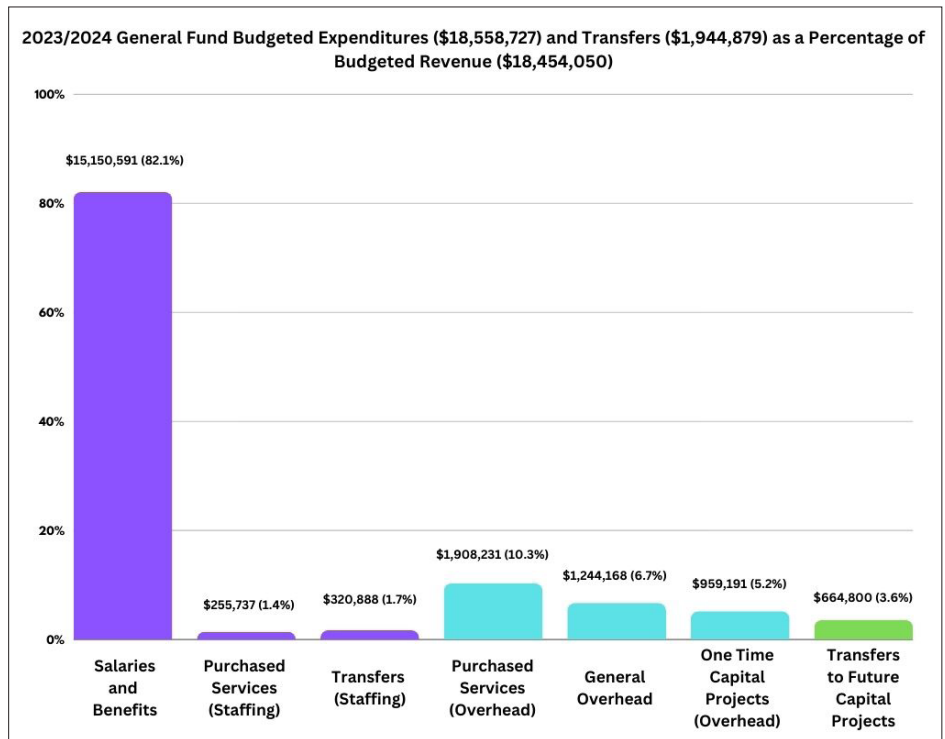
Other activities like marching band, knowledge bowl, performing and visual arts, unified sports like bowling and basketball, and student council also provide opportunities for students to explore interests outside of the classroom. The District continues to invest in the performing and visual arts to be sure all students have options, find ways to support opportunities for students to explore and excel.

# Building a Philosophy for School District Budgets

The Board of Education is currently committing to clearer targets to guide the proportional distribution of the general fund. Below is a graph that showcases budgeting assumptions that have been used to operate over the past five years. This graph uses the same assumptions as the above graph but categorized over a five year span to help compare budgeting assumptions.

## Draft Assumptions:

- State law mandates a 3% reserve for school districts, and the local district policy mandates an additional 12%. This 15% is set aside to manage any surprises, major fluctuations, or facility emergencies.
- After those reserves are accounted for, the Board is developing a plan to distribute the remaining revenues in four major categories.
- 80-85% distributed to staff compensation.
- 15-18% allotted to yearly recurring overhead expenses
- 1-3% set aside for one time capital projects related to overhead
- 2-4% is being saved for future capital needs
- The Board is looking to accept a tolerance of 2-4% of the budget realized in the audited actuals.
- The Board expects to finalize their draft financial plan in February, and will then post the documents for public comment and will be seeking community input as they move the strategic plan forward.



### Notes on the above chart:

- This chart shows money that is impacting the General Fund only and is from the Amended Budget Uniform Summary. (In the uniform budget summary Purchased Services are all one category. One-time projects and transfers to the capital reserve fund are also combined. These numbers were broken down more granular for this chart to include staff related expenses and overhead expenses).
- The transfers related to the Staffing column is the allocation from the general fund to the Food Service Fund (In previous years this also included transfers to the Colorado Preschool Program Fund.) The salaries and benefits within Food Service are greater than \$320,888, but that revenue is generated through other sources. Some examples would include state and federal funding for free and reduced meals, private pay at ECC, donations, etc.
- For FY 23/24 expenditures related to staffing are combined to 85.2% of the budgeted revenue. The current year's overhead expenditures are 22.2% of the budgeted revenue. Transfers for future capital projects are 3.6% of the budgeted revenue.
- For FY 23/24 the budgeted expenditures and transfers in the General Fund are 111% of the budgeted revenues.

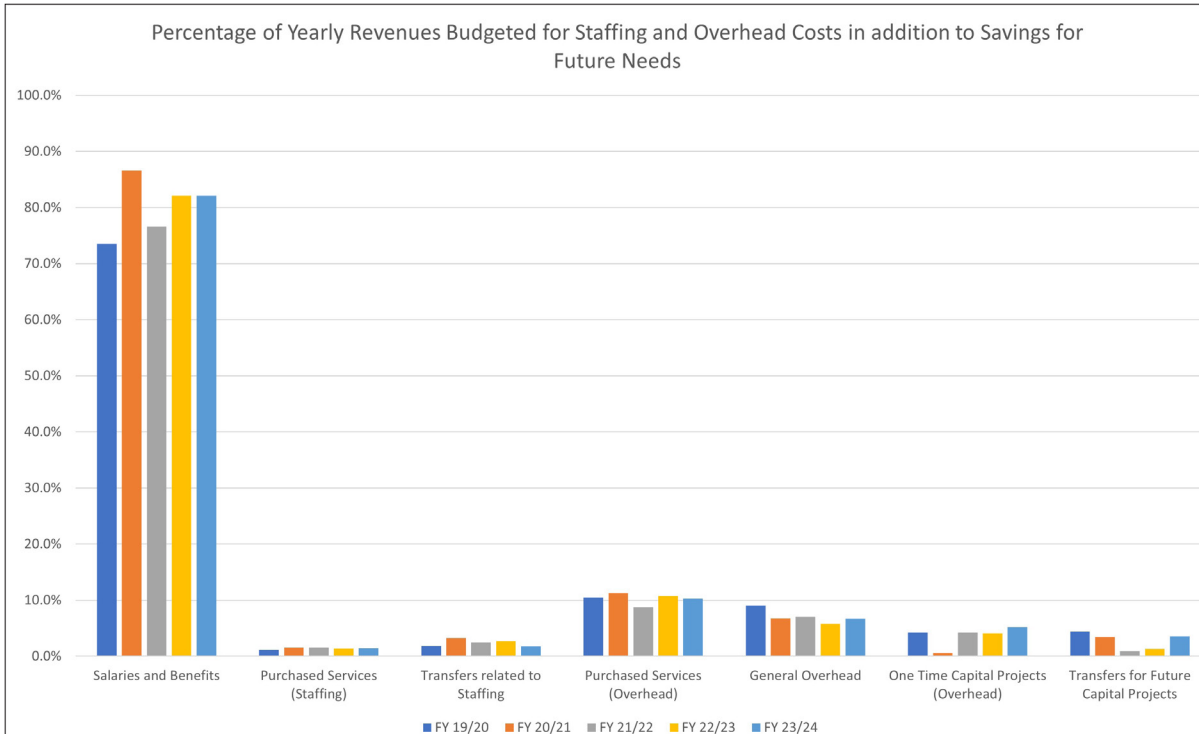
Some key takeaways from the data are that the District has made strides in increasing compensation packages of its employees, which is the primary expenditure within the district. In addition, in the last five years, the budget has exceeded 100% of predicted revenues. A health fund balance of unassigned reserves has been used to

cover these losses. Going forward that unassigned fund balance has been largely expended and won't be able to cover the difference in costs going forward.

Lastly, the District is looking at budgeting principles going forward that will intend to align expected expenditures more evenly with expected revenues due to the decreased fund balance.



# Building a Philosophy for School District Budgets Continued



- The goal of the above graph is to provide a comparative analysis over the previous five years that highlights the budgeting priorities of the district and informs the public of a broad view of how revenue is budgeted within the district's General Fund only.
- There are three major uses of funds within the district: Staffing, Operating Overhead, Savings for future needs. The first three columns are all representing items that are related to employing staff. Columns four through six represent overhead operating costs. The final column represents the district's savings.
- It isn't possible to compare every data point year to year as general accounting policies as well as Colorado Department of Education classifications have changed, however all the data was pulled from the previous five years' worth of uniform budget summaries found on the district website. The business office is always more than happy to sit down with any individual and discuss the assumptions made in formulating this data.

The Board expects to finalize their draft financial plan in February, and will then post the documents for public comment and will be seeking community input as they move the strategic plan forward.

## Clean Audit Returned for 2022-2023

The District had another clean audit completed by the external firm, Hoelting and Company Inc. The District has been focused on budgeting tighter and reducing any variances between the budget and the actual final revenues and expenditures. Last year's budget was within 4% of actuals. The District has

also been working to operate with a smaller unassigned fund balance, and spend more dollars on staff.

The budget this year is at 111% of expected revenues as the Board continues to use as much money to increase pay and maintain facilities. Next fiscal year (the District operates on a July 1 fiscal year start) the budget is expected to be more conservative as all pandemic grants will no longer be available to offset payroll and programming needs.

This year 85.2% of the operating budget was assigned to staff compensation. See the graph

on page 9 for further explanation.

The District, in response to consistent feedback from community and parents continues to invest heavily in the social emotional needs of students, recognizing that test scores are not the only metric to determine success after graduation. The District also is investing heavily in early childhood education.

The District also invests heavily in special education students' needs, with 11% of the budget going to those programs.

# Finances, Taxes, and School District Revenue

As most homeowners are aware property taxes have increased significantly this year. The largest portion of those taxes go to school, so, “Why is the District not flush with money?” The answer is all 178 school districts do not set their revenues. The property taxes from the entire state are pooled together and evenly distributed across the state according to a student headcount. On average, 90% of the District’s revenue is based on the total student population size, not the property taxes gathered locally.

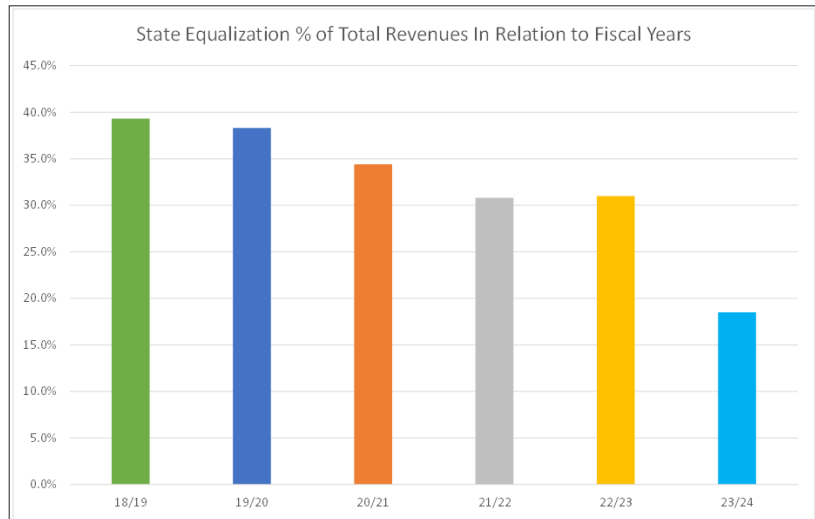
For every one dollar of state assigned total program revenue for Salida School district, the citizens of Salida are currently paying 81.5%. If the residents of Salida pay more locally, then the state withholds the equivalent amount and sends state dollars elsewhere in Colorado. (See the above discussion on state equalization to better understand how that has impacted the district recently).

Your local district’s revenue is not directly connected to local property taxes. If the entire state raises more property taxes, which is true this year due to historic changes in assessed values, then more generalized money goes to your local district. However, if your student count goes down, then your district’s revenue will go down, even though the local property taxes might go up.

In addition, the District is required to raise the Base Mills 1.0 per year until it reaches 24.793 mills. The process started with the FY21-22 mill certification. Due to the assessed values increasing, the total mills certified by Salida School District has actually dropped 0.857 mills since FY20-21.

## Cash Flow

The change in assessed values in Salida and Poncha Springs shifts the district’s cash flow, which is different from our



annual budget allocations. A decade ago the state paid more than 50% of the community school’s revenues in twelve regular installments. Now that ratio has flipped, and local taxes do not arrive in the business office until March and April, which is 8-9 months after the fiscal year has started. Meaning, that by April of this fiscal year the school district will have received \$1.8 million dollars less in revenue from the state.

Thus, our district, like Aspen, Cherry Creek and others with high property tax valuations, must work with the state treasurer’s office to secure a 0% interest loan to cover those lean winter months. The loan is 100% paid off at the end of the year, when all of the cash from local taxes has been collected. Due to property values in

this area increasing so much over the past few years, this is likely the way the district will continue to operate for cash flow.

Above is a graph which shows the change in total percent of revenues provided to the district through the state equalization process to help provide further context regarding how much of the budget is now coming into the district monthly compared to where that number was even 6 years ago.

## Mill Levy Overrides (MLO) and Proposition HH

An exception to the rule about how property taxes are distributed is Mill Levy Overrides (MLO), which are

*Continued on next page*



**QR Code to District’s Financial Transparency Details**



# Hopes and Realities of Healthy School Meals for All

In 2022, residents of Colorado passed Proposition FF. This legal change sought to offer all children in the state of Colorado free breakfast and lunch each school day. Now called the Healthy School Meals for All program, it allows Public School Food Service programs that participate in the National School Breakfast and Lunch Programs to provide free meals to ALL students this year.

Salida Schools decided to participate in this state program and is currently offering free food to all students for both breakfast and lunch. This new state reimbursement program provides a set dollar amount for every meal provided to students. This is the same rate as the Federal Free and Reduced Lunch program subsidizes at \$2.28 for breakfast and \$4.33 for lunch.

However, food and labor costs have gone up in recent years and the

reimbursement generated from the Healthy School Meals for All does not cover the total cost of food, supplies, and staffing that is currently required to feed our kids.

Historically the District has subsidized the food services program, however, with the increase in costs and the increase in the number of students now eating, those costs are going up. This year that means the district is planning to subsidize close to \$300,000 from the general fund in order to offer this service to our students. That is an increase of over \$100,000 from previous years prior to Proposition FF.

The District is evaluating after this first year whether to continue participating in the Healthy School Meals for All program, or to just offer free and reduced rates to families that have qualifying factors. The District is also analyzing a pricing structure

that helps lower that subsidy from the general fund.



Students from Horizons Exploratory Academy help with the fall harvest at the Guidestone Colorado garden, providing locally-grown produce for Salida Schools' kitchens.



Students at Longfellow Elementary School go through the lunch line with help from staff.

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local tax measures. Those MLOs are not student count dependent. One active MLO is a set dollar amount of \$664,635 and supports salaries. The other active MLO operates at 4.826 mills and was passed in 2012 to support salaries.

This year's budget was based on the May 2023 published assessed values, but will change six months into the budget year due to the Governor's

special legislative session. The surprise December legislative session resulted in adjusting assessed values similar to proposition HH's framework, even though the state voters clearly defeated proposition HH. The change will decrease the 2012 MLO revenues, which are percentage based. The result is a \$88,000 loss of revenue this fiscal year.

Lastly, the Colorado state constitution's amendment 23 requires the legislature to add 1% plus annual inflation to the school district's

annual revenues. The State has not been able to pay that constitutional increase since the great recession. That shortfall, known as the Budget Stabilization (BS) factor, has cost the Salida school district over \$14 million in the last 14 years.

The Governor's initial budget for next fiscal year seeks to finally cover the IOU moving forward. However, there will be no restitution for the revenue previously lost.



# CMC's 2023 Summer Learning Featured Heavy Equipment, History, and Outdoor Skills for Salida High School Students

Last summer, 15 students from Salida High School participated in Colorado Mountain College Salida's and Leadville's campus offerings for local high school students. Students received college credit and had the opportunity for some first-hand learning in three different subjects.

Tuition and fees for all three courses were free for students and covered by the Rural Coaction Grant through the Colorado Department of Education. The summer programs offered in June were designed for concurrent enrollment students in Lake and Chaffee counties. Students could choose from a heavy equipment operations course and lab, a Colorado history course, or an outdoor leadership course.

Ben Cairns, CMC vice president and campus dean for Salida and Leadville, said the program aimed to provide "meaningful education and connected skills in the summertime."



All three courses offered college credit towards multiple degrees and combined coursework, hands-on learning, team-building activities, and social events.

## CMC Salida course

The nine-day outdoor leadership course was based out of CMC's Salida campus. The course provided students with an intensive experience for those interested in outdoor leadership/guiding, wildlife management, forestry, wildland fire, and other fields. Students spent the first four days backpacking in the San Isabel National Forest and learning fundamental outdoor living skills like navigation, group management, backcountry cooking, knot-tying, and more. The "classroom" then moved to the frontcountry where each student completed a wilderness first aid and CPR certification through Desert Mountain Medicine. The final two days were spent on the Arkansas River with Rocky Mountain Outdoor Center guides learning basic whitewater

and swiftwater rescue skills.

Rob Simpson, associate dean of academics and student affairs at CMC Salida, said the program represented "an incredible opportunity to get some exposure to fields of interest."

## CMC Leadville courses

The heavy equipment operations and Colorado history courses ran in June and were based at CMC's Leadville campus. Students enrolled in the two courses stayed at

the Leadville campus's residential hall and experienced a slice of college life.

The heavy equipment operations course taught students about bulldozers, backhoes, utility tractors, mini excavators and skid steers. Students also completed real-time projects that supported the Leadville campus and community.

The Colorado history class was part of the curriculum for future teachers as well as a general transfer course for students pursuing liberal arts careers. The class focused on how the major themes of Colorado history played out in the upper Arkansas River Valley. Students also traveled to Denver to see significant sites.

CMC will run some type of similar program again in the summer of 2024 with funding available through the Rural Coaction Grant. Students interested in participating in one of these courses this coming summer can contact Keri Vignale, concurrent enrollment coordinator, at



## CMC Salida Internship Program Opens Career Options to Salida Students

Salida High School students are finding all sorts of possible career options in Colorado Mountain College's business internship program. Now in its second year, the program allows students to investigate a career pathway by jumping in to see what it feels like to work in whatever career field they find interesting.

Over 100 local businesses are now providing internship opportunities for high school students. Next semester, 40 Salida High School and Horizon Exploratory Academy students have signed up for the program.

Salida High School student Cooper Hodge has been involved in the internship program for the past three semesters. Cooper already knew that he wanted to pursue a filmmaking internship; he had attended a film camp two summers ago, then teamed

up with local filmmakers Dave Curtis, Ken Brandon, and Rob Dubin to learn the craft more in depth.

After this experience, and with encouragement from these professional filmmakers, Cooper signed up for an internship with another local filmmaker, Sarah Hamilton. The assignment: Make a short documentary



about Colorado Mountain College's internship program, which can be found using this QR code.

Cooper has signed up for another semester of CMC's internship program where he is working on several independent film projects under the guidance of local filmmakers. He will use these films for his film school applications



as well as his portfolio as he pursues his career in filmmaking. With the experiences Cooper is gaining, he'll be that much further along with his film career after graduation.

## Upgraded Turf Sees Daily Use and Community Appreciation

Spartan Stadium received an upgrade last summer with the installation of new synthetic grass turf and a new safety pad underneath. The football teams enjoyed the improved footing this season, but use of the field goes far beyond football. The field is used by school PE programs, other sports teams for training, games, and camps, marching band performances, school field days and large group activities, and is the backdrop to SHS graduation and other community activities.

The original dirt work was done well and there was no need to mitigate any deterioration under



the turf, which saved an additional expense. The new safety pad will last for decades and adds a protective cushion to help minimize chances for injury. The previous turf had served the district for 11 years, with use extended well beyond the 8 years of the original warranty. The new top layer of synthetic grass is expected to last 8-12 years, with suggested routine

maintenance to maximize its years of use. The district did attempt to reuse the old synthetic turf at Holman Fields, but it was too deteriorated to be safely installed.

Inflation in recent years has hit the district in a number of ways, and the increased cost to replace the turf came with sticker shock. The board considered this carefully before approving the purchase, and discussed other expenditures in the coming years, including eventual replacement of the track surface. Because of the trend, they increased the amount set aside for these types of projects to be better prepared in the future.



**Salida Schools**  
**District R-32-J**  
627 Oak Street  
Salida, CO 81201  
www.salidaschools.com

## Calendar Links to Your Favorite School Activities



**Salida Early  
Childhood  
Center**



**Longfellow  
Elementary  
School**



**Salida  
Middle  
School**



**Salida  
High  
School**



**The Crest  
Academy**



**Horizons  
Exploratory  
Academy**



**Salida School  
District and  
School Board**



### **CMC's Annual Career Day Gives Juniors Work-Based Learning Experiences**

On December 12th Colorado Mountain College's Salida campus hosted their annual Career Day for students from Salida High School and Horizons Exploratory Academy. Career Day is a work-based learning experience that combines local business professionals with local high school juniors. It is comprised of three components: one-on-one resume reviews, one-on-one mock interviews, and interactions with a professional panel.

At this year's Career Day, students rotated through each experiential station over the course of several hours and worked with local volunteer business professionals. This serves as a way for students to learn about professionalism and allows students to guide conversations with professionals from fields they may want to go into. Career Day is also part of their capstone project required to graduate from high school.

This was the fourth Career Day hosted by CMC. Currently, over 70 volunteers from various professions sign up every year to help. Thank you to all of the community partners that help make this event happen for our Salida Schools' students!