

# SALIDA SCHOOL DISTRICT R-32-J

BOARD OF EDUCATION

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## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (updated 3/2/20)** **What does this program change look like for students?**

### **Process Timeline**

**Step 1 Analyse current programming and identify areas of improvement. (February)**

**Step 2 Collaboration with staff to develop new programming(February/March)**

**Step 3 New programming options shared with the community and input solicited (March/April)**

**Step 4 Board decides votes on next steps (April/May), including how to fund the programs we want.**

### **OVERVIEW**

Salida School District is currently a District of Distinction, and we expect the same excellence rating next year. Thus, the district will have only missed the highest rating from the state one time in a decade. The state just released college remediation rates of all districts in the state, and Salida has the second lowest college remediation rate in the state, which means our system prepares students to complete college better than the rest.

Why is Salida a District of Distinction? From a financial perspective, our district has one of the lowest tax rates (14.6 mills) in the state and paid some of the lowest costs for our new schools. The district has some of the healthiest cash reserves in the state (30+%). The district has a model negotiation team. The district has a model for compensation strategies. The district offers one of the best insurance packages available for staff. We are a model on which many other districts are building their systems. From a program perspective, the district has created a framework for trade programs, including developing affordable housing for staff. Ten years ago, the district had one AP course; now, the district offers 73+ college credit hours between AP and concurrent courses. An associate's degree requires 60 credit hours. The district has one of the highest success rates in attaining Boettcher Scholars. And, we continually score at the highest levels on state accountability measures. We are one of the most successful districts in the state.

But even with our successes in the 21st century economy, we need to do more for our students as our world is very different than a decade ago. If our children only have a high school diploma, in most cases, the only jobs available are minimum wage and would require government programs or parental assistance to make a sustainable living wage. To avoid poverty our students will need some credentials beyond a diploma.

The latest data shows 55% of our graduates pursue a post-secondary education. On average only 40% of graduates attain a post-secondary degree, which is average for the country. The average student debt load is over \$30,000, and many have the debt without the degree. We are doing so well in so many areas, but we are not sufficiently preparing students for our rapidly changing world and the evolving nature of the workforce in the 21st century. That is why we need to consider changing our graduation requirements. We do not have control over many of the barriers, but what we do have control over we need to consider. This reality is what the board of education is trying to address.

The board of education is asking these questions:

- What do our students need to better prepare them for the modern American community?
- How can we increase student access to post-high school certifications?
- How can we increase our graduates' success beyond high school?
- What are the barriers?

One of the barriers is money. We cannot afford the successful programs we are running that do not prepare the majority of our students. This is because the state financial system is broken. This year the state of Colorado sent our district a 1.7 million dollar IOU, known as the budget stabilization factor, or negative factor. This year our district overcame an additional 1.7 million dollar deficit. The State cannot afford our successful programs. In addition, the State's systemic deficit will require an increase in local property tax with no predicted change in our funding in Salida. We have done well in preparing for this economic reality by developing cash reserves. This is the time to use those reserves.

What program should we spend the reserves on? Should we spend cash to support programs that do not match with current realities, or should we spend them to develop a new program that might better prepare our children and set the district up for long-term financial stability?

The first question to answer is, "What program do we want?" Then we need to ask, "How do we afford that program?"

The board is asking these program questions. The following FAQ answers some of the technical questions stakeholders have asked. The biggest question we want stakeholders to consider is "What program would best prepare my child to live an independent life?"

### **Big Picture Questions**

- **Will there be more opportunities to ask questions? How will parents have a say in the process?**
  - Additional community meetings will start mid-March. Constructive input and questions are encouraged throughout the process. Emails and phone calls should be directed to Superintendent Blackburn ([dblackburn@salidaschools.org](mailto:dblackburn@salidaschools.org)) An initial programming recommendation is expected at the March Board meeting (March 9th) with the final recommendation in April or May.
- **Why are you pushing through these changes so rapidly? Why can't we slow down and do more research and get more feedback?**
  - COVID has created funding shortfalls for virtually every American public school, rather than start cutting programs, the district is exploring creative ways to leverage partnerships (ie Colorado Mountain College) in order to stretch available resources.
  - Recent national events highlight the need to reexamine how students are educated to better understand the complex issue facing our nation.
  - Less-than-preferred post-high school success rate of our graduates.
  - The need to maintain consistent in-person learning amidst the current atmosphere of quarantines has caused the district to reexamine high school programming. We learned it is imperative to have kids in person.

- **We made it through this year financially, why can't we make it through next year?**
  - COVID relief grants and cash reserves are making up for the funding shortfalls this year. This is not a sustainable way to balance the budget for 2021 and forward. Next year, and for the foreseeable future, state and federal funding to schools will be insufficient.
  
- **What is the current high school capacity? Is there a strong need space-wise to separate the freshmen?**
  - Prior to COVID, the high school was reaching capacity. Within 1-3 years, we anticipate being at maximum capacity as the community continues to grow and students return to in-classroom learning. We must be creative in how we use our facilities and where we house programs. Preparing to separate freshmen in order to free up classroom space at the high school is an option to consider. Do we change now proactively or wait and react?
  
- **What is the overall impact on teachers? Are there positions being cut to make up for the shortfall?**
  - This process has started early to ensure that teachers are involved and have time to make adjustments. The district is offering early retirement buy-out[s] to qualified teachers (using cash reserves) which create opportunities for the district to reduce costs but not lay-off staff. Another idea being explored is that some teachers' salary could be financially supported by CMC by teaching more concurrent enrollment classes.
  - The school district secured a large grant to provide tuition assistance to any teacher who is interested in teaching CMC courses, but does not yet meet the credentialing criteria to be CMC faculty.
  - The school board voted to attempt this option because it preserves the most jobs for our teachers.
  
- **Have any other schools tried this model?**
  - Yes. See Freshman Academy Policy Brief for Freshman Academy.
  - CMC successfully runs concurrent enrollment programs within local high schools at many of its campuses.
  - No districts in the state have attempted to address all of the elements necessary to support systemic change.
  
- **How will IEP students be supported?**
  - This new structure allows for greater support of IEP goals. The students will have support from the existing special education teachers. Most importantly, students will benefit from greater flexibility as they will not be required to take college prep classes unless specifically outlined in their IEP.

- **Why is there such an emphasis on social studies, I thought STEM classes were the most important?**
  - The community has consistently held critical thinking as a dominant value for our graduates. We need to explicitly teach how to evaluate multiple perspectives within the current societal times, requiring opinions from all sides of an idea to be discussed. We must ensure both sides are present, rather than avoiding all sides. Then we need to explicitly teach students how to listen to varied views and express their ideas in dialogue.
  - STEM classes are vital to develop inductive and deductive reasoning skills and necessary for college preparation. STEM programming will continue to be offered and even expanded through a partnership with CMC.
  - STEM courses have the greatest job potential, and thus will continue to be supported, but with a greater career emphasis.
  
- **What will the Salida Online Program look like for next school year?**
  - Option 1 currently being discussed is to cancel all online programming, returning to what was offered (or not offered) in 2019.
  - Option 2 currently being discussed is to embed a small program within the traditional schools.

### Finance

- **If this rapid change is because of a fiscal exigency, it seems this plan would be more expensive. Will these changes incur more expenses?**
  - This change will utilize existing staff and district buildings. No new hires are expected. Any new positions will first be filled by current teachers. There will be shifts in how the money is allocated to support programming. The district anticipates some one-time expenses to implement changes and federal COVID monies, grants and some cash reserves can be used to cover these one-time expenses to balance the budget. In other words, some one-time investments will need to be made to save money in the future to support the programming we want.

### Freshman Academy

- **For the Freshman Academy I need more details, what is the actual plan?**
  - To benefit the most from concurrent CMC courses--college preparatory and CTE, we need to have our freshman meet math and English proficiency. We contend the best way to reach that proficiency is through a ninth grade academy.
  - All incoming freshmen would be placed in a year-long dedicated learning community. Students would take math, history, science and English; and electives with a specific emphasis on academic, social and emotional development. See attached policy brief for an in depth description and potential benefits.
  - Part of the curriculum would focus on career/college readiness.
  - Freshmen will continue to interact with upper-classmen through electives and activity times.

- **What electives will be offered to the freshmen? (Art, Band, etc)**
  - We are still waiting to hear staff recommendations on this topic. Freshmen will still be able to choose from some of the high school electives and pursue their passions through activities.
  
- **Why change freshman programming?**
  - Transitioning to high school can be a difficult and exciting time. Studies show that the ninth grade year is also a pivotal year that can determine success and engagement level in future grades and beyond. It is the mission of the district to help all students succeed. It is also our commitment to evolve as research points to new ways to help kids thrive. See policy brief for more details.
  
- **Why consider separating the freshmen in a different building?**
  - No concrete decisions have been made on this issue. Capacity at the high school is one concern. In addition, keeping instruction in a dedicated space fosters the educational and social growth of the freshmen. Separation in space allows for the development of a healthy and independent culture. Freshmen will still have a chance to interact with upperclassmen through electives and activities regardless of the venue chosen. The freshman teacher committee will make the recommendation on location.
  
- **I am concerned about the freshmen being segregated and missing the socialization of being in the high school. Is there research that shows this benefits my child?**
  - Freshmen are currently segregated via being enrolled in primarily freshmen courses. The primary interaction freshmen have with upperclassmen is during passing periods, lunch, electives, and activities.
  - Research shows that freshmen benefit socially through a year of special instruction. Socialization in high school often brings more stress than joy. Students involved in a Freshman Academy will benefit socially in the bigger picture. See the Freshman Brief for more details and citations.
  
- **What happens if a student is not at the proficiency levels after 9th grade?**
  - Studies show that achievement and proficiency levels increase in a Freshman Academy (See Freshman Policy Brief). But for those students that do not meet the criteria, the district will offer a course load that directly supports the learner's needs.
  
- **How can a freshman know what career path they want to follow? I don't want my kid locked into an educational "track."**
  - By allowing students to explore ideas and determine a path that works for them, they will "own" their education, which, in turn, motivates them to succeed. This freshmen programming allows students space to learn who they are and grow with and into their passions rather than forcing them down a path that is irrelevant to them (*Recommended reading: The Element by Ken Robinson, Ph.D.*). Currently the graduation requirements assume that every student will be on a path to a four-year college. These program changes will open options for students, not restrict them.

- We know that many freshmen will change their mind about the type of career path they wish to pursue as they mature into upperclassmen, and for these students, there will be multiple opportunities during their HS career to make these changes. This saves the student (and parents) money in the long-run.
- **Who are the teachers involved in the Freshman Academy and how are they hired?**
  - If the Freshman Academy is recommended by SHS staff, postings for the principal and teachers will be posted internally only, positions are not filled at present. The school board can officially approve hires in May.
- **If budget is concerned, why spend the money on a new principal that only oversees one grade?**
  - The principal position is an internal hire and will only incur approximately \$7000 additional. The Colorado Department of Education requires a principal for each separate building. Spending this money to create SFA allows for other money saving measures at the high school.

### **CMC Concurrent Enrollment**

- **How will CMC support and involve current Salida High School teachers? Will SHS teachers be able to teach the CMC courses? What sort of qualification do our teachers need to be CMC instructors?**
  - CMC and SHS administration are currently collaborating on the details. Teachers need a masters degree to be able to teach for CMC and there are many teachers who are already qualified to teach CMC classes. CMC is planning on hiring both full-time faculty and having some shared staff (as school district employees, and CMC will “pay” into their salary, or vice versa). Two new administrative positions will also be created within CMC to help facilitate the relationship between the high school and college, including a dedicated concurrent enrollment counselor.
- **Is there a charge for students to take CMC classes?**
  - No, there is no charge for students doing concurrent enrollment classes during the school year.
- **Will a college track and a trade track be offered, and will these paths be separated in the school?**
  - The different “tracks” will be provided by CMC. Location of those classes are still to be determined - there will naturally be some separation due to the class-style (welding won't be in the same room as calculus, for example). Core social studies curriculum, electives, and daytime activity-hour will continue to keep students in mixed classes to prevent isolation and “pathway cliques.”
  - Students will have opportunities during their HS career to switch tracks if they so desire.

- **Will the CMC credits transfer to other colleges/universities?**
  - CMC credits are guaranteed transferable to any public Colorado higher education institution (CSU, CU, Fort Lewis, Western State, etc), and often accepted by out of state universities. Even if courses are not transferable, universities look positively on college courses taken in high school during the application process.
  
- **Will students still have a GPA and credit hours for college applications? What about sport eligibility?**
  - Students will have GPAs and transcripts will reflect credit hours for all college applications. All students with full-time schedules, which includes concurrent enrollment courses, will be eligible for sports.
  
- **Many kids don't know what they want to do with their life after high school - why make them choose now? Why not let kids be kids?**
  - Colorado standards require students to consider careers in 8th grade; this requirement has driven Salida School District to create the college-prep-curriculum we currently have for all students. The benefit of partnering with CMC is that it allows students to explore options and interests on multiple pathways since we know education is not "one-size fits-all." It will give students a channel to sample and discover what they may want to do without any additional cost to the student. CMC classes will help prepare students for the "real world" and give them a leg up in many areas of life, whether college is in their future or not. Jobs in Colorado that only require a high school diploma often only pay poverty level wages; our kids deserve more, especially if they want to stay in Salida.

## Activities

- **How does an activity hours work? Why is this important to student success?**
  - The idea is to leave an hour at the end of the day for students to be involved in a club/activity. Students who have to work after school or are unable to get a ride home outside of bus transportation are often unable to be involved in sports or other extracurricular activities. Studies show that students involved in extracurricular activities have better social/emotional health and academic success. A designated activity hour will be a step toward bringing equity to the extracurricular issue.
  
- **How will club sports be handled, versus CHSSA sports?**
  - CHSSA sports will not change. With the proposed activity hour during school hours, there will be more options for students to participate in activities. The activity hour could also be used as a study hall for students who have a heavy extracurricular schedule. The details of this time are currently being worked through with staff and will be forthcoming.

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- **Will extracurricular activities and sports still be funded?**
  - YES. The intent of these changes are to increase access to activities.