



D48 UPDATE

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE COMMUNITY OF SALT CREEK SCHOOL DISTRICT 48 • SPRING 2026

Teaching Tomorrow's Leaders

MORE EXCITING CHANGE COMING TO D48

PHASE TWO PROJECTS WILL IMPROVE AND MODERNIZE LEARNING SPACES

The new Albright Middle School gym is nearing completion, and now the District is preparing to tackle phase two of its Safe Schools | Secure Futures project – upgrading and modernizing classrooms and common areas in all three schools.

The phase one projects primarily addressed critical safety, security and accessibility issues, while the phase two work will aim to enhance learning environments and the educational experience for students. This means upgrading flooring, counters, lighting, paint and more – all of which will take place over the summer. The work also includes playground resurfacing at Swartz, gym improvements at Swartz and Salt Creek, and a library renovation at Salt Creek.

While the District is making plans to launch these new projects at the end of this school year, construction of the

Albright gym is in full swing this spring. The steel beams were recently placed, crews are working on the roof and the interior, and the plan is to unveil the new gym in time for the start of next school year. The gym will be the last phase one project to be completed.

Because phase one bids came in under budget, the District is able to move forward with the phase two plans to improve instructional spaces. "We are carefully and strategically prioritizing portions of our funding for further facility maintenance and educational enhancements," says Dr. Amy Zaher, superintendent. "We're grateful to have the ability to do this and proud of our history of practicing sound financial management."

The successful referendum in fall 2024 enabled the District to sell bonds in the amount of \$48 million and use the

funds to make high-priority repairs and renovations. The initial work totaled \$44 million. The District was able to apply the extra \$4 million to the next round of facility needs that were not part of phase one. The District also moved \$7 million from the education fund to cover these projects, while leaving enough to ensure there are sufficient reserves for emergencies such as delayed tax payments or urgent repairs.

"This has been an exciting time of change in our schools, as we make essential updates that help us better serve students and meet the community's needs today and well into the future," Zaher says.

See P. 5 for a list of the projects and the construction timeline. Find regular updates on the Safe Schools | Secure Futures page at www.saltcreek48.org.

WHEN FUN AND LEARNING COLLIDE

Kindergarten students became scientists, builders, artists and explorers during a January field trip to the DuPage Children's Museum. D48 students are learning and growing every day, both in and out of their classrooms – see more examples inside.



ADMINISTRATION

Dr. Amy M. Zaher
Superintendent of Schools

Dr. Chris Martelli
Director of Curriculum & Instruction

Ms. Julie Jilek, CSBO
Director of Operations & Business Services/District Treasurer

Dr. Emily Burnett
Director of Student Services & Human Resources

BOARD OF EDUCATION

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MISSION

The Salt Creek School District 48 community promotes the rigorous development of all our students and inspires them to learn, grow, lead and succeed in a global society.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Follow D48 on Facebook, Instagram and X.



HELLO FROM DR. ZAHER

It's hard to believe we're in the home stretch of another successful school year. It has been a busy one and has flown by! There are exciting projects and changes happening in District 48, and I'm pleased to share many of them with you in this newsletter. Thank you for staying up to date – community support and involvement are vital to our success!

Students and staff have made good use of the remodeled spaces we unveiled in August. We're grateful the successful referendum enabled us to make these upgrades last summer. Now, as you'll read in this newsletter, we're getting closer to unveiling the new Albright gym and preparing for phase two improvements in the schools. We can fund this additional work while also budgeting for future needs. We are committed to being responsible stewards of D48 resources.

Working in partnership with Nicholas & Associates, we are updating key spaces and enhancing the exceptional educational



Dr. Amy Zaher congratulates a student on her success.

opportunities we provide – and we're accomplishing this by the start of next school year! This work helps us make progress on the goals of our Strategic Plan, particularly those related to Academic Excellence and Sustainable Finances and Facilities. In addition, the projects are prioritized in the Master Facility Plan, which is a long-term roadmap that plans for our infrastructure maintenance and improvements.

I thank everyone who has prepared for the building work that lies ahead, especially teachers and staff who will move out of their classrooms once again this summer. I know it's a big job, but I believe it will be worth it. I also want to recognize the staff, students and families for their flexibility when we pivoted to online learning this winter. The District was well prepared, and school continued in spite of extreme weather. Now that spring has arrived, it's great to see students taking advantage of recess, outdoor learning and sports.

I am proud of the learning, connection and growth that has taken place in every classroom this year. I hope students and families enjoy these exciting final weeks of school. Thank you, as always, for your partnership and support!

Dr. Amy M. Zaher
Superintendent of Salt Creek District 48



Dr. Zaher gathered with members of her team (Hunter Macek, Kelly Caffero and Roxanne Beausoleil) and Steve Hacker of Nicholas & Associates this winter to celebrate the placement of the first steel ceiling beam in the new Albright gym.

MIDDLE SCHOOLERS TAKE TO THE SLOPES

Albright students flocked to Wilmot Mountain in Wisconsin for the school's annual daylong ski trip, a popular outing each February.





RECOGNIZING STAFF WHO GO ABOVE AND BEYOND FOR THE SCHOOLS AND THEIR STUDENTS

District 48's recognition program highlights staff members who make a difference for students – in ways large and small. Dr. Amy Zaher, superintendent, named the program the Stronger Than Ever Awards, building on the districtwide theme for this school year (Stronger Than Ever – With a New Foundation, Same Heart and a Bigger Purpose).

Students, families, community members and fellow staff can submit nominations for any staff member they feel is deserving of a shoutout. Those who are nominated receive a certificate – with Zaher making a surprise delivery in front of students.

Stronger Than Ever Awards are given continuously throughout the school year, and nominations are accepted at this link: <https://bit.ly/3NivNhr>.

"We have so many caring, talented teachers, staff and administrators who make students and the entire district stronger and better," Zaher says. "It's fitting that we would give our community a chance to call out the great work that is happening in the schools every day."

The photos on this page are of just a few of the award winners this winter and spring, with some of the kind words from their nominations.



Danielle Holden, paraprofessional, Salt Creek: "She consistently shares the many amazing moments that happen throughout the day – highlighting our children's successes, growth and kindness. Hearing these stories and seeing how much she values our kids means the world to us. Her dedication,

compassion and commitment make a lasting impact on both students and staff." (Nominated by parent/staffer Jess Lindeen and parent Dan Lindeen.)



Stephen Babiarz, band/music teacher, Salt Creek, Swartz and Albright: "Our district is small compared to most, yet our band program consistently punches well above its weight class. This is a direct result of Mr. Babiarz's experience, skill and unwavering commitment to his students. He has built a program that doesn't just teach music, it inspires young musicians and instills a love of music in them. And they have fun while doing it...This past weekend was the band solo competition at Jefferson Middle School. I sat in on my daughter's and her friend's solos. They both blew away the judge, who was a high school band director. While the girls definitely deserve the credit for working hard, I don't think they would have been in that position were it not for Mr. Babiarz. The judge's reaction to the girls' ability in sixth grade speaks volumes about the type of program he has built here." (Nominated by parent Adam Dickens.)



Ann Noll, fourth grade teacher, Swartz: "She meets every student right where they are – academically, emotionally and socially – making each one feel seen, supported and important. What means the most to me as a mom is how she models and teaches kindness every single day. She shows her students how to include others, choose empathy and treat people with respect. Her impact goes far beyond academics, and I'm so grateful for the lasting difference she makes in her students' lives." (Nominated by parent Brittany Sebesta.)



Gianna Grippo, SPED teacher, Swartz: "Miss Grippo helps me with Reading and Math. She makes it fun!" (Nominated by student Redzep J.)





EXPLORING TIMELY TOPICS AND TOOLS TO HELP PARENTS SUPPORT KIDS

The D48 community came together this year to explore topics related to raising, supporting and teaching children in today's complex world. The Stronger Together parent education program featured videos of renowned authors presenting research-based information and practical strategies designed to empower and strengthen families. Following the videos, D48 staff facilitated conversation around the timely topics.

Three sessions explored "Organizational Skills for School Success," "Managing Emotions So They Don't Manage You" and "Raising Terrific Kids in Terrifying Times: The Strengths to Survive and Thrive." The videos featured were part of programming from GPS Parent Series, a nonprofit that provides free content to support positive youth development. The sessions, which ran from December to April, were open

to all D48 parents and guardians, and free childcare was offered to make the program accessible to all.

"These sessions spark thoughtful conversation and give families tools they can use immediately," says Dr. Amy Zaher, superintendent. "This is so powerful, because we know that when adults lead with emotional steadiness, kids follow."

The Stronger Together sessions come on the heels of last year's Community Book Study, a popular series that explored navigating today's high-tech world and supporting young people so they can flourish. Zaher says the District plans to continue offering parents and guardians opportunities to have "conversations that connect."

"We want to provide meaningful support and tools, as well as strengthen the partnership between home and school."



DANCING THE NIGHT AWAY AT FTC'S ENCHANTED EVENING

The D48 FTC (Families, Teachers and Children) held its annual Enchanted Evening dance on Feb. 13 at Swartz. Students of all ages brought their favorite grownups and enjoyed a DJ and dancing, snacks, a selfie station and a raffle that raised funds for FTC's events and programs that support and enhance learning in the District.



GO VIKINGS! ALBRIGHT ATHLETES GIVE THEIR ALL

Albright cheerleading and boys basketball have wrapped up after a great winter season. The athletes and fans have now turned their attention to the spring sports – girls basketball, boys volleyball and cross country. They are cheering for Viking victories all around.





DISTRICT ADDS ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT, STREAMLINES ADMINISTRATIVE TEAM

Dr. Emily Burnett, director of student services and human resources, has been promoted to the newly created position of assistant superintendent. The change is part of the effort to streamline administrative functions and create a collaborative and cost-effective organizational structure. Burnett will add responsibility for curriculum and instruction, along with providing other leadership support to Dr. Amy Zaher, superintendent.

Chris Martelli, current director of curriculum and instruction, is leaving the District to become the next superintendent of Alsip District 126. He will spend next year serving as assistant superintendent and will step into the leadership role for the 2027–28 school year. “This is a well-deserved opportunity for Chris. We’re deeply grateful for the leadership, expertise and heart he has brought to our District,” Zaher says.

She adds that Burnett’s “knowledge,

steady leadership and commitment to teaching and learning make her exceptionally well-prepared” for her new role. “Strong organizations grow great leaders, and we are fortunate to have one ready to step forward.”

Burnett, who has been with the District since 2023, says: “It has been a privilege to work alongside such dedicated staff, supportive families and an engaged community, and I am proud to continue that work in an expanded capacity.”

In other administrative changes, with phase one construction complete, the facilities manager position will be rolled into other functions. Zaher says the District thanks Andy Brown for his contributions. She says planning for maintenance and upgrades remains a top priority. In addition, the District is adding a director of technology. The role is not an additional expense, as funds from technology outsourcing will be used. Zaher says bringing this responsibility

in house will provide more consistent and proactive support and facilitate the development of a long-term technology plan.



Dr. Emily Burnett

The administrative changes, which go into effect in July, enable the District to better align the systems that support students and staff, according to Burnett. “By streamlining leadership functions, we can ensure strong coordination, clear communication and efficient decision making across the District.”

Zaher says the changes are the result of thoughtful planning and will position the District for long-term stability and growth. “I have tremendous confidence in our team’s ability to work collaboratively, as we use our combined strengths and talents to build on the strong foundation already in place.”



FACILITIES SPOTLIGHT

ADDITIONAL BUILDING WORK TO FOCUS ON CLASSROOMS AND COMMON AREAS

Phase two of Safe Schools | Secure Futures includes these upgrades and renovations that significantly enhance learning environments:

Albright Middle School – Classrooms (flooring, casework/countertops in some rooms, painting); cafeteria (flooring, painting, lunchroom counter flow); kitchen renovation; level soccer field

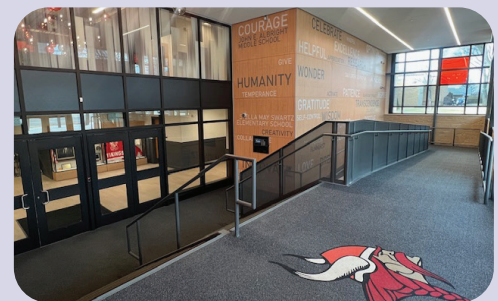
Stella May Swartz – Classrooms (flooring, casework/countertops, painting); corridors (ADA alcoves, flooring, ceiling, lighting, painting); playground (resurfacing and accessibility, equipment remains the same); gym (flooring, wall pads, painting, acoustical panels)

Salt Creek Primary – Classrooms (flooring, casework/countertops, painting); corridors (ADA alcoves,

flooring, ceiling, lighting, painting); library renovation; structural improvements (slabjacking in some areas); gym (repainting floors, painting walls, acoustical panels, new ceiling)

CONSTRUCTION TIMELINE

- **Bidding for phase 2 projects:** Completed January 2026
- **Phase 2 work to begin:** Last day of school, June 4
- **Phase 2 work to be completed:** By first day of 2026-27 school year, Aug. 25
- **New Albright gym completed (phase 1):** By Aug. 25



Students and staff have benefited from the building enhancements that were unveiled prior to the start of the school year, like the new Albright vestibule and entrance, which is more modern, secure and accessible. The new Albright gym is still under construction and is expected to be completed over the summer.



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SCHOOLS

Albright Middle School
Grades 6-8

Mrs. Heidi Hummel
Principal

Mr. Steven Hanus
Districtwide Asst. Principal

Stella May Swartz School
Grades 3-5

Dr. Karen Marino
Principal

Salt Creek Primary School
Pre-K-Grade 2

Mrs. Lauren Scanlan
Principal

WELCOME, FUTURE VIKINGS!

Children who will become Vikings next year attended Kindergarten Signing Day at Salt Creek Primary School on March 13. They brought their proud families as they “committed to kindergarten” for the 2026-27 year, toured the school, met teachers and Victor the Viking, and got excited for their journey as D48 students.

The family of any child who lives in D48 boundaries and will be five by Sept. 1, 2026, can now register for kindergarten. Districtwide registration for next school year is also open. Links and instructions at www.SaltCreek48.org/page/registration.

IN THIS ISSUE

- ✓ **Upgrading Learning Environments:** Schools prepare for another summer of change, with phase two construction about to kick off.
- ✓ **Streamlining the Admin. Team:** New leadership structure to ensure efficiency and collaboration.
- ✓ **Learning Outside the Classroom:** From museum outings to ski trips to sports, students embrace opportunities for discovery and growth.
- ✓ **And more!**

