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NEWS

SK faces budget woes, superintendent contract extended

By Elisha Meyer Port Orchard Independent • August 5, 2023 1:30 am



Enrollment and overall attendance at South Kitsap's schools could be getting worse before it gets better.

Such supporting data was presented at the Aug. 2 preliminary public hearing for the South Kitsap School District's 2023-24 annual budget. The budget is set at nearly \$182 million, including just under \$176 million for the general fund, \$3.7 million for capital projects, \$1 million for transportation, \$826,000 for associated student body and \$355,000 for debt.

Assistant superintendent Monica Hunsaker's presentation comes almost three months after the district approved what it called a reduced education program, proposing \$4.5 million in cuts for the upcoming school year. District leadership cited the evaporation of its ESSER funds linked to COVID, along with decreasing attendance numbers, a primary driver of state funding.

The district states it has stopped some of the bleeding, though the proposed budget remains \$4 million less than the \$186 million budget for 2022-23. The board is set to vote on the newest budget Aug. 16.

Of the data points the district has expressed concerns about, falling attendance and enrollment numbers appear to take the cake. YTD totals for SKSD enrollment, including Running Start, were 8,972, over 100 below the budgeted amount at 9,080.

While the district has budgeted for 8,999 students this year, the district's multi-year forecast has enrollment decreasing by an estimated 72 students in 2024-25 before it expects an increase back into the 9,000s.

"As school staff come back, that's really where we're going to see better updates," Hunsaker said. "My hope is it's higher."

The projections have left a sour taste in the mouth of some community members who believe the district should be

concerned about the district’s future. Dave Kimble went as far as to call the budget a trainwreck, citing an apparent dependency on the tentative bond’s passing this November.

“The fact of the matter is that pushing this bond forward on the budget that you’ve got and depending on that, if it fails, what’s the next move?” he asked.

At the same meeting, the school board approved the contract extension of superintendent Tim Winter for one year through the summer of 2026. The extension was passed 4-1, with Jeff Daily being the opposition. He stated that while the board’s standards may have been met, it’s the community’s standards that are often overlooked.

“You might work for us, but they’re the people that matter,” he said. “You have to put a little thought into it too rather than just going down a mechanical checklist.”

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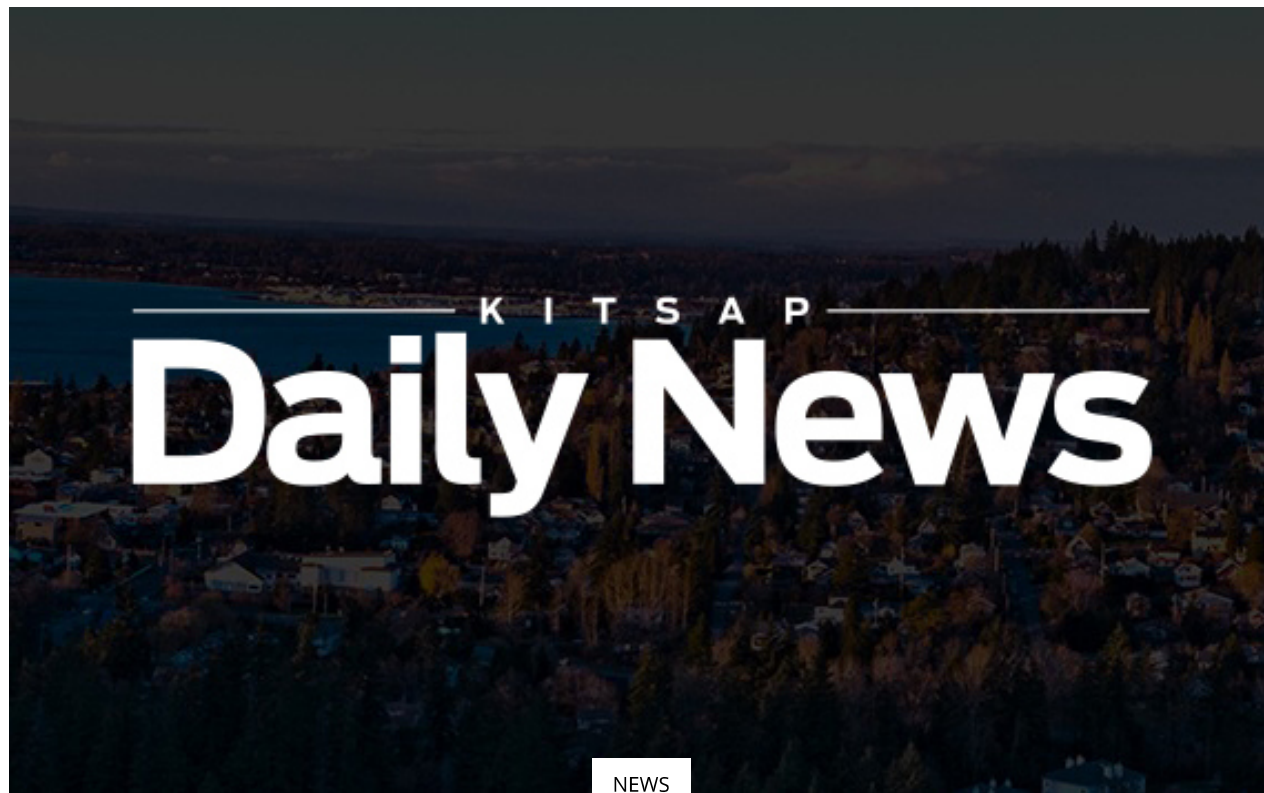
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