

## NEWS

### School district bond tops important South Kitsap elections

By Elisha Meyer Port Orchard Independent • October 4, 2023 1:30 am



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Elisha Meyer/Kitsap News Group Truck beds full of Support SK Schools signs signaled the campaign kickoff in support of the newest school district bond.

**The South Kitsap School District is trying to erase 30-plus years of disappointments, going to the voters in the form of a \$271 million bond.**

**Voters are expected to receive their ballots for the Nov. 7 general election by Oct. 20.**

**If passed, SKSD would tax property owners approximately \$1.08 per \$1,000 valuation for over 21 years. The owner of a home valued at \$500,000 would pay about \$540 annually, or \$45 a month. Since a bond has not passed in so long it would be a new tax. However,**

**because of changes in other taxes in the district, the overall property tax would be about the same as 2022—\$2.86 per \$1,000 valuation.**

**Getting this newest measure approved is an incredible challenge that Gerry Austin with the South Kitsap School Supporters said he knows all too well.**

**“With the track record that we have in South Kitsap, nothing is a guarantee. Our district is very diverse, and that’s what makes our district and our community very unique, but these are hard to do,” Austin said of the group’s campaign, which began Sept. 27.**

**The campaign against the measure began well before primary ballots reached voters’ hands in July, a testament to the tough crowd the district has faced since its last successful bond measure in 1988. Attempts at further measures have failed to reach the supermajority threshold since many of them were geared toward adding a second high school.**

**This year the campaign hopes to break through with more support with a new bond approach that encompasses the entirety of the district with a centered focus on some of its oldest facilities, many of which still contain portable classrooms purchased from Seattle schools.**

**This measure looks to fund the reconstruction and remodeling of five different school sites: South Colby and Olalla Elementary, Cedar Heights Middle School, a move to combine the sites for Explorer Academy and Discovery High School, and the beginning of renovations to South Kitsap High School.**

**Remaining funds would then be disbursed to the district’s remaining sites.**

**“I’m confident that this plan is the best plan for the district,” Austin said.**

**The change in strategy does not mean the fight from critics will be any less. And reaching the 60% supermajority to pass any school bonds in the state is hard for many districts.**

**Additionally, a new challenge presented itself this year. One of the district’s own school board directors is spearheading the campaign against the bond. Director Jeff Daily, whose term will conclude at year’s end after he decided not to run for reelection, has continued to question the need for such a big bond while the district struggles to educate its students.**

**Critics have also posed concerns of past projects finishing well over budget. “The real plan is just give us your money, and we’ll figure it out. Costly design issues and permit delays will arise,” Daily claims.**

**Austin accused Daily of sock-puppeting his way through his 2019 election to the board. Ironically, however, he also finds himself thanking Daily for bringing attention to the bond.**

**“He’s brought a lot of awareness to the issue,” Austin said. “A lot of people in town don’t follow what the school board’s doing and the resolutions, but they see his signs popping up, and they reach out to us.”**