



South Kitsap School District Superintendent Tim Winter is implementing his "Destination TOP 5" plan to reset and re-energize the district's goals so it can become an elite educational system in Washington state. (Bob Smith | Kitsap Daily News)

SOUTH KITSAP SCHOOL DISTRICT

Superintendent marks his seventh month at SKSD

Winter sees an 'urgency' in implementing new Destination TOP 5 priority plan

By Bob Smith

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PORT ORCHARD — Tim Winter, a 30-year education veteran who has taught and administered in four districts during his career, is completing

just his seventh month as superintendent of South Kitsap School District.

The former superintendent of Clarkston School District in eastern Washington and longtime educator at Peninsula High School surely recognized the challenges he would face at South Kitsap while doing his research prior to applying to replace the retiring Karst Brandsma.

The South Kitsap district has had sketchy community support over the past decade, particularly when it has come to requesting capital funds from taxpayers to modernize its school buildings. Twice last year, voters denied the school district's request for money to build a second high school. Voters were more generous when they approved levy dollars to do minor facility refurbishments and implement an updated security system, as well as pay for an infusion of new technology components.

Some have laid blame for the bond measures' failures to communication shortcomings by the school district's administration with the community. Regardless of who might be to blame for the ballot-box failures, the new superintendent said he's optimistic about the school district's future success.

His earlier research unveiled a number of sturdy pillars supporting South Kitsap's mission to educate the area's young people. One pillar has to do with its quality staff, Winter said.

"I'm very impressed with the people," the superintendent said. "I think we've got great people working in this district. And I love being in the community. That's a positive thing. We are ready in this district to really make a push to do great things."

That push is being led by a comprehensive strategic plan called "Destination TOP 5," which Winter said he hopes will lead South Kitsap into the rarified company of Washington state's top-performing school districts.

"Our students and our staff deserve to be part of the very best that we can offer," he said. "We're aiming with high expectations. It's kind of an audacious goal, but it's reachable. There are 295 districts in the state. We'll strive to be the very best and be able to compare ourselves to those who are labeled the best."

The priority plan, he said, has been built and refined using feedback gathered since 2013 through traditional meetings and an online survey platform called Thought Exchange. Winter said the results show common themes and shared priorities "and give a sense for what is most important to our students, staff, family and community."

The plan is separated into five subject groups: academic excellence; student and staff wellness; safety and security; stewardship; and community partnerships.

There's an urgency about improving the district's academic achievements,

particularly at the high school level. Winter said a high priority is being placed on providing quality instruction in the classroom, professional development for teachers and improving test scores and graduation rates. The plan, he said, emphasizes on-time, on-track graduation for ninth-graders and growth rates that all students are making year-to-year.

Winter admitted that the school district test results need to improve.

“They are not where we want them to be,” he said. “In some places they’re good and other places, they’re not. So, we need to work toward that. The urgency comes in making that happen. It comes from not wanting to wait. We want to start making those changes right away, not three years from today.

“There are things we can do quickly and there are things that are going to take some time. But I don’t think we can wait any longer to create this system that our community can be proud of and our students and staff want to be part of.”

A component to the plan that focuses on wellness was added, he said, because teachers, staff and students alike need to be healthy in order to fully instruct and absorb a comprehensive litany of educational information.

“Social and emotional learning is a big thing in education right now. Part of that is taking care of ourselves,” he said. “We believe that healthy teachers are going to be very good for students and healthy students are going to be successful. The social and emotional piece has a great impact on academics, so we are really investing in that right now.”

Safety and security have become an issue in education circles nationwide, Winter said, and access control and security systems upgrades are nearly completed in district schools following approval of a levy last year.

The final component of the priority plan — community engagement — perhaps holds the highest profile of all the elements.

A key subset of that element is community trust.

“How do you build trust? We have to engage with the community and show them we really want to be that hub of the community,” Winter said. “We want to be the place where you can gather in our buildings and connect with the schools.”

The school district superintendent said a communion of trust is essential not only to develop a quality educational system but to set the stage for requests from district taxpayers in the future to fund badly needed facility upgrades.

“When we go out and ask our community members for money through tax dollars, they have to trust that it’s the right thing and it will serve this community for a lot of years,” Winter said. “I think we have a responsibility to make sure that we’re listening to what the community

and the stakeholders are saying what they need.

“I don’t think we’ve quite hit that yet. We’ve got about half the people who have said ‘yes’ on the second high school and about half who have said ‘no.’ But there are facilities in this district that need to be taken care of beyond just the high school.”

Winter said the district continues to have discussions about its facilities needs.

“We haven’t made any definitive plans or really have had serious conversations about it, but we’re going to need to in the near future. We need to find out what the bottom line is for what our community is willing to accept. What our community should accept — and expect — is a really quality education. And to provide the best education, we have to have some quality facilities.”

Winter said each school district department and school building staff has been asked to provide a near-term and long-term work plan detailing what will be needed to bring each component up to current standards and what the costs would be. Armed with that information, he said the district will weigh whether there’s a need to repair or replace each element.

The superintendent said the work plans will contain checkpoints at years one, three and five to provide the district a grouping of plan milestones.



Tim Winter (left) said he did plenty of research about South Kitsap School District and its community before applying to replace retiring Karst Brandsma as superintendent. (Bob Smith | Kitsap Daily News)