

SOUTH KITSAP

Staff positions on the chopping block as SKSD looks to balance budget

47 teachers could be cut if reduction plan is approved

By Bob Smith

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PORT ORCHARD — A collision of declining student enrollment, teacher salary increases and a reworked state funding formula for education by the state Legislature has prompted South Kitsap School District Superintendent Karst Brandsma to propose drastic measures to cut South Kitsap School District's in the next school year.

Brandsma presented his preliminary plan to the district's board of directors at their meeting on May 1. He said that projected expenses for the fiscal year 2019-2020 could exceed revenues by as much as \$9.4 million as a result of costs that would be unreimbursed by state or federal funding.

Most striking among the proposed budget cuts would be a reduction of 47 staff positions at the school district — 28 of those would likely be eliminated through retirements and resignations, with the other 19, all full-time positions, through layoffs. The superintendent said the staff reductions would include some administrative and support staff, as well as teachers.

In his presentation to the board of directors, Brandsma said a reduction in employees is inevitable, considering that 85 percent of the school district's fiscal year 2018-2019 budget of \$148.2 million goes to staff salary.

Brandsma said is expected those staffing reductions would save the school district \$2.92 million. Other budget reductions would include revising administrative ranks for a projected savings of \$1.2 million and cutting

classified staff, expected to trim another \$1 million. To cover the remainder of the budget gap, Brandsma said the district intends to use \$2 million from its reserve fund and make cuts in supplies and other operating expenses.

He said a preliminary estimate for fiscal year 2019-2020 indicates that district expenses could exceed revenues by as much as \$9.4 million, costs that are projected to include costs unreimbursed by state or federal funding. He attributed a number of factors as creating the financial shortage: the defeat of the district's \$10.8 million educational program and operations levy; underfunding from the state to cover South Kitsap's actual cost of special education and transportation (approximately \$3 million); and projected student enrollment that is trending downward.

An anticipated decline in the number of high school students has prompted administrators to adjust the district's headcount to 9,544 students, including life-skills students.

But members of the South Kitsap Education Association voiced their displeasure at the meeting, saying they were upset not only with the announced cutbacks but also because they had received the news just prior to the board's meeting. By state law, South Kitsap School District has until May 15 to notify certificated staff members if their contract is not to be renewed.

Also impacting the district's budget are increased costs of \$750,000 because of the School Employee Benefit Board law, which takes effect Jan. 1, 2020. District employees may waive coverage, but the school district must still pay the full employer contribution to the Washington Healthcare Authority program, which is not run by the district.

The state Legislature recently enacted legislation to implement a local school levy lift above the existing \$1.50 per \$1,000 of assessed property value to \$2.50 per thousand, or \$2,500 per student, whichever is less. The levy lift provision will take effect next year. The levy lift increase is mitigated by the state's McCleary funding decision by legislators primarily to provide salary increases for teaching staff. The new formula has resulted in a reduction of local property taxes in favor of increased

state education funding.

But, according to the school district, this levy “swap” means that about \$25 million of levy funding has been cut to \$10.8 million, or a \$14 million reduction by 2020. Levy money typically covers the gap between state and federal funding, and a district’s actual operational costs. South Kitsap’s current levy, approved in 2017, expires in December 2021.

Educational Program Replacement levies provide funding for most of the district’s daily operations that the state doesn’t pay for, such as libraries, special education, teacher and staff salaries, transportation, arts, drama and music programs, athletics, and smaller class sizes.

The school district’s board of directors will vote on the superintendent’s plan at their next meeting at 7 p.m., on Wednesday, May 8, at Marcus Whitman Middle School, 1887 Madrona Dr. SE.



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