



Students protest overcrowding at South Kitsap High School Sept. 15 at a pep rally. Their signs proclaim "Protect us in our halls," "Personal space, personal safety," "Double the high school, double the pride" and more. SKHS student Rhiannan Elizabeth / Courtesy

SKHS students protest overcrowding

- [Michelle Beahm](#)
- Thu Sep 21st, 2017 11:30am
- [News](#)

-
-
-
-
-
-
-

PORT ORCHARD —There are 2,811 students enrolled at South Kitsap High School, and students aren't tolerating the cramped spaces well anymore.

They protested on Sept. 15, holding signs proclaiming "We deserve better," an indictment on their overcrowded hallways.

"I'm literally being shoved in the hallways by impatient students," student Mae Martinez wrote on the "We the People of SKHS" Facebook group page. "Trust me, being shoved while wearing 5-inch heels on the stairs is terrifying."

Martinez added, though, that she's "learning to get used to it. We all will."

Zach McMoore wrote in that group, "Am I the only one that is kinda meh about the whole situation? South has always been a crowded mess.

"My only complaint is buses," he went on. "I had to sit on the floor. Other than that, it's not really that bad, (to be honest)."

On the group page, Savvy DeLong addressed the criticism some adults have sent to the students for complaining too much.

"I saw a comment saying, 'It was just as crowded when I went there — stop complaining.' I understand if people want us to stop 'complaining,' but we won't," DeLong said. "If they have an issue with it, they can leave the group that was made (for) us to talk about our experiences at South. I also understand when adults say it was just as crowded when they went there. Great! Now we have something in common, and we can relate to each other in that way.

"Everyone has their own levels of what's acceptable and what's not acceptable, and the overcrowding at South Kitsap is not acceptable!"

The fact of the matter is, the current high school building was not built with the intention of housing 2,811 students. Even if 400 leave campus daily for Running Start, work-based learning experiences, Navy Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps and classes at the

West Sound Skill Center, according to South Kitsap School District's communications and public information officer Amy Miller, there's no denying the school is packed beyond full.

"The start of every school year brings challenges for students in navigating hallways and adjusting to new schedules," Miller said. "This year is slightly different because all of our freshmen and two-thirds of our sophomores are new to South Kitsap High School. They are navigating the hallways and finding their classes for the first time."

Miller said the high school currently has 10 portable classrooms. Three more double-room portables, and one restroom facility, are on order, which will add six additional classrooms. Miller said they should be on campus near the end of October.

"While the school is crowded in the common areas like hallways, cafeteria and gymnasiums, our class sizes are quite reasonable," Miller added.

She said core class ratios of students to teachers is 31:1. Some career and technical education courses like wood shop are 24:1 for safety reasons, and there is no maximum level set for band and choir classes.

"We have heard concerns voiced by parents, especially in response to social media activities by students," Miller said. "Principal (Diane) Fox and other administrators have addressed specific concerns individually. Parents have been understanding and patient as students get acquainted with the school and their schedules. We work continually with South Kitsap Fire & Rescue to ensure that students are safe in our buildings."

In a letter sent to district families from Superintendent Karst Brandsma and School Board President Greg Wall, they stated that a recent fire drill resulted in fast, safe exits from the building. The average exit time was stated as 3 minutes and 10 seconds, down from more than 6 minutes last year from the first two weeks of school.

"Yes, South Kitsap High School is crowded," Miller said. "All our schools are crowded and our community is growing at a rapid pace. Students in South Kitsap schools have access to a wide variety of opportunities they wouldn't have in other districts, including more than 90 career and technical education options and numerous extra-curricular choices. There is quite literally something to engage every student."

What can be done?

The obvious solution to solving overcrowding issues in the high school is, build another high school.

Well, that's easier said than done, because while the South Kitsap community is very supportive of levy measures, what the district needs to have approved to build a new school is a bond.

“Remember, bonds are for building and levies are for learning,” Miller said. “Our school board ran a bond in February 2016, April 2016 and February 2017. Each attempt failed to reach the super-majority approval needed to pass. Our community has not approved a bond in more than 30 years.”

Miller added, “The board and superintendent have not made a decision about running a future capital measure,” including a potential future bond.

So what else can be done?

Well, additional portable classrooms help with class sizes and perhaps will alleviate some hallway crowding as well. Other than that, there are a couple ideas floated by community members.

Tom Donnelly wrote a letter to the Port Orchard Independent addressing these concerns.

“It is time for the School Board to propose solutions,” Donnelly wrote. “Two come to mind. One, move the ninth graders back to the middle school and sixth graders back to elementary.”

This is the first year all ninth graders have been at SKHS; last year, the ninth graders from Cedar Heights Middle School moved up as a sort of test run.

“The reason they moved up the ninth graders is because ninth graders tend to not care about their grades and they don’t realize their GPA mattered while at the junior high,” Devin Kobayashi, SKHS Associated Student Body president, wrote on the “We the People of SKHS” Facebook page. “Also, the ninth graders just weren’t included as much as they should have been, being ... at the junior highs.

“We also were one of the last districts in the state to move from junior highs to middle schools, and although it may be a little intimidating ... we are making it work, even if we don’t have the portables yet, it’s still working.”

Donnelly’s second suggestion was having split sessions: some students will be taught in a morning session, and some in an afternoon.

In a post originally shared by Kathleen Foster Brown on Facebook, this potential solution was addressed as well.

“Break up the schedules,” the post states. “Have upperclassmen arrive in the morning and leave by 12:30 p.m.; lowerclassmen can arrive by 11:30 a.m. and end at 4 p.m. The overcrowding issue would be resolved, at least for this year. After speaking with a friend, this is a solution SK used in the 1980s when they were waiting for the new high school to be built, and it worked for their overcrowding issue.”

Brown’s post mentions the rising property taxes in relation to the levies as well.

“I know many of you are angry that the bond did not pass,” the post states. “However, the levy alone will increase property taxes \$3.73 for every \$1,000 in assessed property value for the next four years ... Had the bond passed it would have been an additional \$50 annually for the next 21 years. I can’t afford this and I doubt many of you in our community could either, especially those on fixed incomes.

“There has to be more answers to fixing these problems other than using the same old ones that obviously do not work. Taxing us out of our homes is not the solution. For years, we have passed levies ... and raised taxes only to find ourselves in the same situation. Our schools in disrepair, overcrowding issues, not enough money for staff or teachers, outdated technology and crappy school lunches, and yet our only resolution is to raise more taxes.

“I am angered by our school district, (which) has put us in a ransom-like situation. ‘Pass the bond or your children will suffer.’ Our district has known for years that there was an issue, but due to careless spending and unaccountability, we find ourselves in this mess.”

(If you would like your thoughts heard on this issue, write a letter to Port Orchard Independent editor Bob Smith at rsmith@soundpublishing.com. Public comments are also heard at every school board meeting. The South Kitsap School Board meets at 6 p.m. the first and third Wednesday of each month, except on holidays, at the district office, 2689 Hoover Ave. SE, Port Orchard, and at SKSD schools.

Michelle Beahm is online editor for Kitsap News Group. She can be reached at mbeahm@soundpublishing.com.



An overhead view of students between classes at South Kitsap High School, showcasing the crowded passing periods. SKHS student Rhiannon Elizabeth / Courtesy



Students protest the overcrowding at South Kitsap High School at a pep rally Sept. 15. The rallying cry was, "We deserve better." SKHS student Adrienne Dale / Courtesy

-
-
-
-
-

•
•

