

Notes of February 19th South Kitsap School District Board Meeting

By Roger Gay

The [South Kitsap School District](#) (SKSD) held this meeting at East Port Orchard Elementary, which is literally 100 feet from their normal meeting space in the administrative building. It was nice in that this meeting was around two hours shorter than the last meeting. The other big thing is SKSD put the meeting on Facebook Live. If you go to Facebook, click the tv screen on the bottom with the triangle in it. Go to the Search function on the page and type in South Kitsap School District and the Facebook video for the 2/19/2020 meeting should be visible. It is almost 2 hours long but it is very interesting. For the Policy Governance Policies on the SKSD web site go to the District dropdown, then School Board and on the right is Policy Governance Policies.

The first discussions in the Work Study was the continuing discussion on the Ends Policies. It seems the Directors are tweaking the Ends and other things to better align with how they do business now. I think this is part of them going from one form of governance to a hybrid form. It is Policy vs Coherence styles of Governance and it seems the Directors are picking and choosing what parts to follow between the two styles. Many of the issues deal with how to monitor changes or improvements. How do you determine if a student is working within their grade level in Social Studies or in band as a trombone player? Math is probably much easier to determine the grade level a student is actually functioning in. The need for the data or metrics is based on how the board grades the superintendent in his work accomplishments.

One interesting comment dealt with college exams like SAT's. It seems the school district really pushes the tests to the students and one Director mentioned requiring the SAT as a graduation requirement. That brought a response in that if the district require the SAT then the district would have to pay for the SAT. It could cost \$100.00 or more per student for just the SAT testing if it was required time for graduation. It seemed some on the board were ok paying for SAT's as it is a part of an academic excellence goal. One Director said the average score should be the state average or above but another Director said statistically 50% will be below average anyway. One Director made a statement

regarding process's the board was following. Basically "the process is the process until it is no longer the process". There was some discussion on being fluent in English as a requirement but it will probably be modified to being conversant in English. For some students English is their second language and some on the board seemed to think those who are English speaking are somehow less able to function in a world based society.

The first Public Comment time had one person speaking. A resident who happened to be elderly was not happy with the large school property tax increase while on her fixed income budget. I did not see a lot of sympathy from the board, but then I think a majority of the anger needs to be directed to Olympia. I like that the school board had two public comment chances on the agenda and I hope that continues.

The biggest presentation was from Dr. Thompson, the Executive Director of Instructional Support. This individual seemed very happy in the world of statistics and data. Even one of the Directors was very happy with the presented information. The very interesting part was the graphs and charts used as part of the presentation. Basically it showed Math as a sticking point, with the various district schools placing on one side or the other of median line. This is all part of the Smarter Balanced Achievement data. If you look at a series of graphs it shows in the 2016-2019 school years that the Math scores went down. In 2016 it was 51.2% for a 5th grade students. Following the students in 2017 in 6th grade it was 44.4% and in 7th grade it was 46.7%. What the data seems to show is students seem to have math issues when moving from elementary to junior high school when it comes to math. The idea is looking at the data can give the district a heads up and possibly lead to a solution to the issue.

I did comment at the second Public Comment time that the list of data points used seemed to not include the teachers. It seemed more to concentrate on the students and what they are doing. When I went to school over a half century ago I seem to remember many times what made a class good or bad was the teacher. Discipline, attendance, grades reading scores and many things can add to the mix of whether a student will graduate or not. I think one of the biggest issues holding students back many times are the teachers. The methods used to teach a subject, the interactions with the students and how involved the teachers are with their class and the subject matter is very important and seems to have been left out of the conversation. Excellent, good, mediocre and bad teachers have a huge affect on students as they move through the various grade levels.

Student involvement, student absences, test scores and many other things can probably be directly related to the teacher/instructor and how they deliver the education. If that is not part of the conversation then I think any program, any solution or any changes directed at the students will either fail or not deliver expected results. Of course the students do not have a union to protect them, only their parents, which is a whole separate story of involvement.

It was interesting that the data did not include each schools internal data and assessments which had been included in the past. It seems a change in Superintendents in the past removed that data. Hopefully the district can use the data to actually create solutions and not just attempt to find ways to ask for more funding for district programs. The district has thousands of students and hundreds of teachers and staff and no one solution will fit everyone. It will be interesting to see where this goes in the future. There was a discussion on warrants and payroll. It seems there was some questions as to the timing of issuing checks and the approval of the SKSD Board of Directors being given. There is a RCW that covers the timing and I am not sure the discussions really brought a solution or conclusion to the conversation. Basically is it legal to issue checks before Board Directors auditing and approval?

One Director asked about the issue of lead in the water at some of the schools. It was said that Burley Glenwood water piping needs replaced. It seems the contaminated equipment is out of service and bottled water is available but until the piping is replaced it will continue to be an issue. I do not think this particular issue was part of the capital levy request so I expect this issue to be another future priority. It was said that the priority list for the capital levy was very large and many things were left off of the project list. It is interesting that \$4,000,000 or more is considered a priority project for the swimming pool while replacing piping with lead contamination is a much lower priority. I guess bottled water is cheaper over the years than new piping and the swimming pool is much more important to some people. You have to admit the justification for some of the decisions on priorities should make for some interesting conversations at some point.

Another discussion was one Director bringing up “hurt feelings”. This particular Board of Directors has had 2 new members this year and it seems at times like mixing oil and water. On one side you have a Director that has some knowledge of the district and its

operations, but is new in the position of Director. On the other hand you have numerous staff who are used to operating in a particular way for years. I have attended many school board meetings and I have to say they have usually been the most uninformative and unproductive meetings I attend, and I attend a lot of meetings throughout the year. A public meeting is just that, a time a board connects with the public. It should be informative, instructive and educational for anyone attending. I like the fact the district is using Facebook Live to further connect with the community. Many meetings I attend are available on [Bremerton Kitsap Access Television](#) (BKAT) so the public can view the meeting on their own time and send comments to the elected involved. This meeting and this particular subject of “hurt feelings” was interesting. I would expect this at an elementary school when students do not get along during recess. I sense the district staff and some of the board directors do not see an issue in how they interact with the general public or each other. It does not take long to realize that doing business the same way for decades may be an issue. Especially when the relationship between the school district and the taxpayers/voters has been very volatile over the years. One of the things mentioned during the “hurt feelings” presentation was the potential need to hire staff for the school board, a Board Administrative Clerk and a Board Internal Auditor. I do not think that went over very well. The body language and facial expressions of those at the tables in front of the audience were very informative to say the least. I wonder how long the Facebook Live broadcasts will last? One person watching the broadcast mentioned to me later that they detected an under current and that this group would not party well together. If one person can pick up that much from parts of the Facebook Live feed then I wonder how the limited audience present actually felt? Will the SKSD Board of Directors continue with Facebook Live or even use BKAT? One suggestion to one Director in particular, stop saying ok, ok, ok, ok after every sentence or statement, it is a little distracting as I lost count after the first 50 or so.

It was interesting how one Director brought back a few slides to show questions or issues he had and there seemed to be some direct push back from other board members. I expect the next meeting to have a few resolutions introduced or motions made to force a discussion on some topics. One Director did bring up an issue, the costs of sending staff to various retreats or educational meetings. It seems what was questioned was why an individual being sent to Virginia had costs much higher than expected. In this case it was a \$2,365.01 for airfare, hotel and per diem for a meeting 12-15 July. This Special

Education Legislative Summit is to have attendees use conference calls, email and other methods to prepare to meet with legislators with talking points on the need to maintain or increase funding for special needs programs. Basically to me it seems district taxpayers are sending a SKSD staff member to Washington D.C. to lobby our elected officials. The organization running this summit is the [Council for Exceptional Children](#) which is a professional association of educators who have an emphasis on children with “exceptionalities”. I did hear one person mention that they thought that \$500,000 has been spent for travel for less than 35 staff members in the last year. I do not know if that is correct or accurate, but at some point the Board of Directors needs to have a public discussion on SKSD staff travel expenses. I have to admit, spending over \$2,000 to basically act as a lobbyist may not be the best path to follow, at least in the view of one taxpayer.

There was what they call a “First Reading” of the Instructional Materials Committee Meeting Minutes. Basically this is approving the choices made for books and other instructional materials for the students. The issue is one Director objected to one of the materials, the film version of Macbeth. It is rated R and is for the 12 grade students. The movie includes violence and a sexually suggestive scene, but has no nudity. Really? Object that a senior is watching a Macbeth movie? I read Macbeth in 5th grade. The movie does not really bring out what the words do and to say 12th graders should not see this movie is not one of the best decisions. At least at a minimum students can see the difference between a written document and the interpretation in film and discuss the differences. I found it interesting that this particular item had objections from the Board of Directors. Since this is a first reading with no vote it will be interesting to see how this pans out in the next few meetings. It may be the movie will be pulled from the first reading list and not included due to objections from one board director.

At this point the Board went back to a previous Agenda Item, 4.01, and decided it needed to be voted on and not just acknowledged. It was interesting that at this meeting one of the newest Directors seemed to not verbally vote when a voice vote was called. I may have missed it and he may have spoken quietly, but from where I was sitting I did not hear a definite yes or no on a number of the votes that were called out. The Chairperson seemed to not really be listening to who actually voted, just more taking a count of yes vs. no voices to pass or fail a vote.

Some things I took away from this meeting include the need in the future for these meetings to be recorded and the video available to the public easily, live and soon after the meeting. Using Facebook Live is a good start, but when my property taxes increase by almost \$500 in 2020 and between the state and the local school taxes making up 45% of my total property tax bill I expect much more from the school district. I understand that costs can rise when from when projects are initially looked at and a decision is made to continue on, but for the science lab to have a \$500,000 cost overrun? The grant funding is not sufficient and the district will take \$500,000+ from their “savings” to pay for the unanticipated costs. To have stored equipment from the labs damaged and now a newspaper article saying the Capital Levy that was approved by taxpayers will not be enough funding is bordering on the absurd. To hear from the Board of Directors that priorities for the Capital Levy did not include the issues with lead in the drinking water in a number of schools and that bottled water is sufficient of a solution at this point because there were other priorities. If the science labs shows a cost overrun of \$500,000 what the heck will the estimated \$4,560,000 cost of fixing the pool have as its cost overrun? I know what will happen. The Capital Levy will not be sufficient to cover all the projects envisioned by the school district when they went to the voters. The South Kitsap School District will give the districts taxpayers and voters their reasoning for the discrepancy, pat themselves on the back for doing a good fiscal job and then in 2022 start the process again asking for millions of dollars to “fix” everything they did not fix with the last \$25,000,000. It seems that rings a familiar bell for taxpayers. Promised the moon before the vote and given less after the vote. Remember the school board has done that before. Once they have the passing votes they can use the funds in any way they want. The Capital Levy had 3 funding categories, Technology, Safety & Security and Improvements each with an estimated amount for that category. There was a Contingencies, Planning and Design at 10% or \$337,000 for Instructional Support & Technology . There was a Contingencies, Permitting, Engineering and Cost Overruns amount set at 15% or \$264,825 for Safety & Security and there was a set amount of \$2,436,553 for Facility Planning, Permits, Architecture & Engineering Fees for Capital Improvements. No Cost overruns set aside for the Capital improvements so the SKSD Board must have been confident of the numbers at some point. All of this information is available on the SKSD web site, you just have to dig through the masses of information to find what you are interested in.

As taxpayers did you understand when you were voting for the SKSD Capital Levy how

the money was to be distributed over the 4 years of the levy? Did the school board explain to you how having a large capital improvement need for the swimming pool would literally take almost a full year of the 4 years of the capital levy revenue? Did you as a taxpayer feel the district communicated with you effectively as to the districts plans for the \$24,000,000 in revenue? Do you think the school board needs to continue to video, Facebook Live or BKAT record the meetings? Let your elected SKSD Board Directors know what you think. What are your priorities for the district and the children? Watch the Facebook Live video, it is 2 hours long, but I think watching it is very informative and taxpayers need to see their elected officials in action. Listen to the conversations and watch the body language. Only the Directors and the Superintendent are shown on the video, but there are 3 SKSD staff just off to the side. Watch and then ask questions of the Superintendent and the school board. Get involved and get informed.