

# Notes By Roger Gay of March 5th South Kitsap School District Board Meeting

## South Kitsap School District

The [South Kitsap School District \(SKSD\)](#) meeting was the second meeting to be broadcast of Facebook. They had a better setup for the broadcast but the sound is still an ongoing issue for many watching. At one point there were 35 people tuned in to the broadcast.

This meeting started at 1700 with a work study session that continued the discussions and work on the governance policy the board operates by. You can find all of the various documents by going to the SKSD website and clicking on the dropdown menu “District” and then on “School Board”. That takes you to a page that on the left hand side has a number of times, click on the “Policy Governance Policies” and you get the Ends Policies, Executive Limitations Policies, Governance Process Policies and finally the Board/Superintendent Relations Policies, which seemed to be the main focus of this work study. It is interesting that the SKSD School Board is taking on the process of updating or changing their governance policies. My question is why. Does the average taxpayer or voter know what all of this is and why is the board taking the time to go over each policy? With the hour work study before the meetings and a potential 3 hour work study later this spring, how well is the SKSD Board communicating with their constituents as to the reason for this particular project? What is the expected outcome or goals of this project? It must not be very apparent to the public as I know of at least one person who thought they had missed a meeting or had arrived late when they found the doors closed. I think the 1 hour work study before the regular meeting will continue for a while, but I recommend those interested in attending find the SKSD agenda and look in the beginning for the part that has the work study listed.

There were around 18 people at the meeting, which is good. Even better is that some spoke during the public comments periods that were scheduled. At the first public comment point one person spoke wanting to know the Covid19 plan for the school district and a few other speakers were not happy with the costs of travel for staff for training or events out of the area. I did ask a question on a particular trip that would be approved on the District Consent Agenda. This was a trip from 23-26 April for the Athletic Medicine students, instructors and chaperones to attend an event in Spokane. The one thing that stood out to me was the cost for a charter bus for the group that came in at \$5,000. The total for the trip was estimated at \$14,470. Reading the paperwork it says CTE will cover registration, transportation, lodging and meal reimbursement costs for chaperones and

the bus driver. SK Latte and the ASB Medicine funds will cover the remaining costs. Normally this is just a District Consent Agenda item and the whole thing is voted on at one time. There is seldom any discussion or questions by the SKSD Board of Directors on things like this. So of course, I asked a question.

As a taxpayer who may have read that request for trip funding the first thing that may come to mind is why a charter? Doesn't the district have school buses for road trips for sports and band? This would have been a prime time for a Director to ask the question and have the superintendent or the transportation director give an answer. Better yet would have been for a School Board Director to ask the question earlier before the meeting and comment during the meeting that he or she had the question and received the answer. That could have lead into a conversation on the condition of the buses overall and the potential need for replacements and spare buses. It could also show how the district is cognizant of costs and does look for the best way to get the biggest bang for the buck. It could have lead into a short explanation as to where the funds for the trip are actually coming from. That is informing and educating the public, especially when it is on video, live and/or recorded, for the public to view at any time. How many taxpayers would think they are paying for a charter bus for an organization that has many, many buses? For years SKSD has been trying to connect to the public and the taxpayers, yet I think they can't see the forest for the trees. Or they at times seem to have their heads buried in a knothole. I look at meetings as an opportunity for the board members to connect with the constituents and inform and educate those same constituents. This is not just the SKSD Board members, but every elected who sits on a board or committee should use that position to educate and inform the public. Otherwise to the voters and taxpayers you operate in a fog.

During the Board Discussions the issue of having union negotiations open to the public was brought up. Overall it seemed many on the board were in favor of opening union negotiations to public scrutiny. I like that idea very much. One Director seemed very much against the idea and mentioned the need to develop trust between the union and the school district negotiators. I found it interesting in that this Director did not bring up taxpayers or voters and the need to gain their trust also. Considering that Directors background I am not surprised at the lack of support in making union negotiations more open and transparent. I think the trust needs to be built between all three entities and not just two as has been the method in the past. It was suggested that starting this soon would be an issue as there are at least two negotiations going on now so it is expected that it will start in the 2020-2021 school year. I wonder what the unions will do in the intervening time to interfere in this particular process of opening up negotiations to a much higher level of public scrutiny? If a contract is soon signed for 2 or 3 years does that negate the publics involvement even longer? I think the SKSD Board of Directors needs to lock this down now and put the unions and the public on notice as to what is coming.

One Director had a few questions for the board and the superintendent. What is their current

focus? What are you focused on? Where are we going? What are we doing? How do we get there? It seems facility's and capital improvements were big for most of the Directors. One had no comment while another Director was not sure of priorities set by the previous superintendent. Two did mention student achievement and academics as a priority focus.

It was discussed that the district is using the one large mist sprayer to treat all of the schools with a disinfectant on a schedule around every week. In the local focus on Covid19 this is a good thing to know.

Another discussion came up on Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) classes and the effectiveness and usefulness of the tests. I remember when SKSD was all excited about the IB program when it started and now I hear they will probably be ending that and concentrating on the AP program. For the AP program there are 38 courses on 7 subjects and SKSD has 20 of the 38 classes. The scores seem to be middle of the road overall and the number of students taking the AP exams is low. It seems it costs around \$90.00 per test and that can be difficult for some students to come up with the funds for multiple tests. It was mentioned in a previous discussion that the district seems to have an excess in funds, basically more in reserves than technically needed and one Director commented that those should be directed towards students needs. It was said that could be looked at later in the year when the funding issues and needs stabilize. When the cost of the AP tests was brought up another Director mentioned that it could be a good place to use those excess funds. That did seem to garner support from some of the Directors. It does sound like SKSD is phasing out the IB program. I find that interesting in that the support from school supporters and even elected officials was strong for the IB program, yet the results did not match the hyperbole.

The testing of water for lead at the schools is still ongoing. It seems after 5 years or so a plan for the water infrastructure at Burley Glenwood will be started soon. I know some taxpayers are wondering about how priorities are chosen when faced with health issues like lead in the water and the need to buy bottled water for years versus things like an updated pool or better air conditioning in a building or trailer.

The last item up was the second public comment period. One person was happy about the lead testing and wanted more transparency. Another discussed the issues with bullying at the school district. Not just in the classrooms but with staff bullying and restricting parents and others involved in the schools. Another was not happy with the ongoing increase in teacher salaries and the corresponding lower test scores. Another commented on the issues regarding a certain teacher and the pictures that had come out on social media.

It was mentioned before the board went into an executive session that is seemed more of the

public was not only attending the school board meetings but they were asking questions, commenting and taking advantage of the two public comment periods. I also think that is a good thing.