

South Kitsap's capital levy may not fully cover all projects

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A student dives into the South Kitsap pool in this file photo. Improvements to the pool are among the items that will be funded by a capital levy passed by voters in 2018. (Photo: Larry Steagall)

SOUTH KITSAP — South Kitsap School District's \$21.7 million capital levy that passed in 2018 may not be enough to fully fund all projects planned.

"Some projects have inadequate budgets for the envisioned scope," according to a report presented at a school board meeting earlier this month by Brent Palmason, capital projects coordinator.

The [four-year capital levy proposal](https://www.kitsapsun.com/story/news/local/2018/11/06/south-kitsap-schools-capital-levy-passes-bond-fails/1909165002/) ([/story/news/local/2018/11/06/south-kitsap-schools-capital-levy-passes-bond-fails/1909165002/](https://www.kitsapsun.com/story/news/local/2018/11/06/south-kitsap-schools-capital-levy-passes-bond-fails/1909165002/)) approved by voters calls for \$3.7 million in technology upgrades, \$2 million for safety and security and \$18.95 million for renovation projects across the district.

The district will received \$3 million in state construction assistance for a major upgrade of the pool at South Kitsap High School, bringing the total available capital funds to \$24.7 million.

Palmason's presentation indicated projected cost estimates may be lower than actual costs for some projects.

"Construction costs have escalated since the estimates were developed two years ago," said district spokeswoman Amy Miller.

The levy was South Kitsap's first capital measure to pass in 30 years. A bond for a second high school floated alongside the capital levy in 2018 failed.

The district received its first round of capital levy funds in April 2019. Property owners in 2019 paid 62 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value on the capital levy. The rate in 2020 is 59 cents per \$1,000.

The district's capital levy project list includes more than \$2 million to meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Roof repairs, parking lot improvements and upgrades to HVAC, electrical and heat systems account for many of the projects on the list.

The district will spend nearly \$1 million to shore up roofs and walls of 40 portable classrooms and \$1.1 million to acquire property "for school use," among other projects.

Some capital levy projects completed in 2019 came in under budget, Miller said. The net shortfall will depend on how much over (or under) future projects come in.

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"The full costs of the projects are not fully known until the competitive bidding process is completed for each," Miller said.

That was the case with a non-levy project at South Kitsap High School to revamp nine science classrooms, which created flexible learning spaces, met accessibility requirements and replaced aging safety equipment such as eyewash stations. The district's 2018 preliminary construction estimates were in line with a \$1.2 million STEM grant awarded by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, but the cost during the recent bidding process came in at \$1.7 million.

The school board on Feb. 5 awarded the contract to Christensen Inc., and the board approved spending \$530,000 out of the district's savings to make up the difference. The district has completed demolition needed to begin the renovation.

"We solicited bids and the low bid to complete the project was \$1.7 million," said Superintendent Tim Winter. "We had the choice to do the work in a limited scope at \$1.2 million or complete the project as desired by staff and students. We made the decision to serve all students by adding the additional money in order to complete the project as planned."

New school board member Jeff Daily voted against the resolution. Voting to approve the contract and spend the \$530,000 from reserves were John Berg, also new to the board, Rebecca Diehl, Eric Gattenby and Liz Sebrén.

School board president Gattenby said part of the cost increase was because of unexpected plumbing, HVAC and electrical expenses contractors found upon demolition, costs Gattenby said aren't unusual with aging buildings such as South Kitsap High.

Gattenby said he believes the additional expense is justified because every student in the district will benefit from the science classroom upgrade.

The renovation of South Kitsap High School's pool, at an estimated \$4.5 million, is the largest ticket item on the capital levy project list. The district in 2020 will hire consultants for design and engineering of the pool renovation, with construction expected to start in 2021.

Capital levy work completed in 2019 included installation of secure access systems at the three middle schools and expansion of systems at the high school and elementary schools. The district added interactive projectors at the middle schools and high school. New roofs were completed at John Sedgwick and Marcus Whitman middle schools, and Olalla Elementary's parking lot was expanded and made safer.

Bainbridge Island School District in 2019 asked voters to approve a six-year, \$15 million capital levy [to complete work outlined in a 2016 bond measure](https://www.kitsapsun.com/story/news/local/2019/02/12/bainbridge-island-school-districts-capital-levy-passing/2852891002/) ([/story/news/local/2019/02/12/bainbridge-island-school-districts-capital-levy-passing/2852891002/](https://www.kitsapsun.com/story/news/local/2019/02/12/bainbridge-island-school-districts-capital-levy-passing/2852891002/)). District officials cited rising construction costs as the main reason for the shortfall. The measure passed by a wide margin.

Chris Henry reports on education and community news for the Kitsap Sun. Reach her at (360) 792-9219 or christina.henry@kitsapsun.com. [Support coverage of local news by signing up today for a digital subscription. \(https://subscribe.kitsapsun.com/specialoffer?gps-source=CPNEWS&utm_medium=onsite&utm_source=news&utm_campaign=NEWSROOM&utm_content=ChristinaHenry\)](https://www.kitsapsun.com/story/news/local/2019/02/12/bainbridge-island-school-districts-capital-levy-passing/2852891002/)

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