



## **Notes of February 5, 2020 South Kitsap School District Board Meeting By Roger Gay**

This was the first [South Kitsap School District](#) Board meeting of the year. It started at 1700 with a Work Study session and ended much later. I left at around 2100 when they went into an executive session. This Work Study was a follow-up to the 18 January Policy Governance Work/Training Session.

Policy Governance is a style or system for organizational governance. It basically guides and defines working relationships between an organizations levels of responsibility. At the South Kitsap School District it defines how the SK School Board, the Superintendent and the staff work together. This Work Study session was an effort by the Superintendent to look for clarity in the governance process. He wants more defined parameters. There were a number of books the board members were reading on the subject and there was some discussion on the difference between Policy Governance and Coherence Governance. You can Google and research the terms as there is a world of information on both. Coherence Government tries to focus on the board making policy decisions. It seems many boards that follow Policy Governance seem to dip more into more of the things that are day to day issues and fall away from actual policy decisions. It sounded like the SK School Board uses a mix of both concepts in its way of running things, a hybrid governance. Listening to the conversation it seemed the Superintendent was trying to focus the school board on more policy than the day to day running of the school district. Part of both styles of governance is having a very specifically laid out policy manual. You can read online at the SKSD website what they have now and it seems it will be reviewed in detail this year. There was discussion on whether to review the whole series, only some of the series or follow another path to review the information. The Superintendent basically said that there is 5 board members and if 2 of the 5 are following different paths it is difficult for him and the staff to meet the boards demands. After about 50 minutes it was decided that the three Ends Policies would be the first things up for review and 2 of the board members were tasked with the review and presentation to the rest of the board in the next month. If you go to the [SKSD web site](#) you will find a drop down menu District, click on that and then look for School Board.

On the School Board page on the left you will find Policy Governance Policies. Click on that and you get the Ends Policies, Executive Limitations Policies (EL's), Governance Process Policies (GP's) and the Board/Superintendent Relations Policies (B/SR's). This is what makes the South Kitsap School District operate. The voters elect the 5 School Board members and they run the school district using their various governance policies as a guideline on what to do. I think the Superintendent, who is hired by the school board,

wants to better define the working relationship between the school board, himself and school staff. Remember we had an election last year and two of the school boards present members just joined the school board. The two new members have very different points of view and combined with the 3 incumbents on the school board it should make for some interesting and interactive meetings this year.

Some of the discussion dealt with how the board operates. Does the School Board members need to know why 5 copiers were purchased? Is it enough that the staff and the Superintendent see the need for them or should they be justified to the school board?

What is the line between running the school district, micromanaging and meeting the expectations of the voters who elected the school board member into office? Some say it is accountability. Some may say to trust, but verify. I think this is a path for the Superintendent to focus the school board members on policy level work and not the detailed work of running a school district. In some ways I can see his point but I also look at this as a taxpayer and voter. I think of the elected school board as not only a group who sets policy for the school district but who are also acting as auditors, inspectors, financial protectors of the taxpayers funds and as the five people in the school district who are responsible for what the final results are at the end of each and every school year. Did the students receive a viable and useful education and did each student reach their full potential? Was the school district fiscally conservative and keep within budget? It looks like the 1700 start with a work study session will continue for a few months as this review is wrangled to a conclusion.

For the Work Study there was a few people attending but when it came time for the regular meeting it was almost standing room only. There was a presentation on NIB's. NIB's stands for Nurturing Growth, Inspiring Achievement and Building Community and students are chosen for their work in the community. This is one of those things that need to be viewed by the voters and taxpayers in South Kitsap. Hearing the students in their own words describe what they are learning and how they are giving to the community was fantastic. It shows some things in the South Kitsap School District are positive and it should not be limited to just the school staff or the few parents who attend the meetings. The negative things many think about SKSD get lots of screen time it seems while the positive things get a paragraph in a handout or quick shot on a page somewhere in the massive school districts web site. It was mentioned later in the meeting that the district is considering going on FaceBook Live to broadcast the school board meetings. I think some serious discussion needs to take place between Bremerton Kitsap Access Television (BKAT) and the SKSD or between the school board/superintendent and the districts audio/visual staff to ensure school board meetings are available to the public not only live, but available in an archive so voters, taxpayers and residents can see what is happening in at least one aspect of the school districts operations. The videos should be easily found on the SKSD web site and not hidden multiple clicks away.

There was a presentation on Wit & Wisdom, a new curriculum item this year. I could not find much on a quick search of the districts web site on this particular item, but the teachers making the presentation were

very enthusiastic about the new curriculum for the students. Their enthusiasm and the stories they told of the students learning from this

were interesting and things like that should resonate with not only the parents, but every voter and taxpayer in the school district. Programs like this need to be fostered and monitored for success to see if it makes a difference throughout the educational pipeline each student is in. Again a video seen by the public of this presentation would be valuable.

Another quick discussion item was the Priority Plan 2020-2025 which is available on the SKSD website. It basically lays out the plan for the school district over the next 5 years. The initial page is what is normally expected of verbiage to justify the document and the path the school district is following in the next 5 years. It says staff will develop and follow action plans to support the priorities. An example is Stewardship which states “Our districtwide be fiscally responsible and use resources effectively and equitably. We will maintain fiscal stability, maximize efficiency of district operations, and align resources to support dynamic teaching and learning.” Quite the written plan. It will be interesting to see if future videos of meetings help support this particular plan by showing examples of how this is being implemented. When you find the web page it does have a link to the full document.

There was some discussion on the budget and that lead into a little on the property tax increase many in South Kitsap School District are seeing in 2020. The Capital Levy approved by voters ends in 2022 so a new Capital Levy will be brought up in late 2021 for a vote in early 2022. The Capital Levy brings in around \$25,000,000 over the 4 year term of the levy. The biggest item on the list of capital improvements is the pool. That is a \$4,500,000 estimated cost that has not even started the design and engineering process yet. Odds are it will be much higher in total costs to bring that facility back to full life. If it really comes in at \$4.5 million or less I will be very surprised. It was interesting in that the School Board defended the property tax increase from \$1.50/1000 to \$2.50/1000. Our fine friends in Olympia changed the maximum a school district could levy because they did not really think out the process nor do the Legislators really have an idea of what issues their actions create. In this case they raised property taxes from the lower level in 2019 to a higher level in 2020. I will give you my property taxes for State General and Local School for the last few years.

| Year | State General | Local School | Total     |
|------|---------------|--------------|-----------|
| 2016 | \$489.44      | \$745.25     | \$1243.69 |
| 2017 | \$491.57      | \$753.62     | \$1245.19 |
| 2018 | \$719.30      | \$764.75     | \$1484.05 |
| 2019 | \$708.34      | \$565.15     | \$1273.49 |
| 2020 | \$854.53      | \$884.95     | \$1739.48 |

Notice the variations in the State General and the Local School over the last 5 years? The increase State General in 2018 due to actions in Olympia by our elected leadership and the drop in 2019 of the Local School again by the actions of our elected leadership in Olympia. This big increase in 2020 is due to those in Olympia correcting some of their actions in 2018 and 2019. It is not the school district, it is the members of the Washington State Legislature, our elected Senators and Representatives who are running this

rollercoaster of property taxes. Actually if I remember correctly the Capital Levy in 2018 had the Local School property tax up to around \$3.60/1000, so the State mandated capped at the new level of \$2.50/1000

is \$1.10/1000 less than it could have been. So if you have issues with the new level of property taxes I would suggest you take it up with the 23rd, 26th and 35th Legislative District Senators and Representatives, it is on their heads.

I mentioned that two new board members were on the school board. One of those members has made some issues known. He would like to see a hiring freeze, a spending freeze, a briefing on the pool issues, security issues, financial issues and the levy funds. He wants pre-K through 3 fully funded and wants to eliminate the reliance on grants. The other member made a motion to create a subcommittee to work on the policy governance issues. This was brought up at the Work Study but it was stated then that the board could not vote an action while in a work study. One of the two new board members is a Robert Rules of Order expert. I will let you guess which one did what. There was a contract to be awarded for improvements to the high school lab rooms. One school board member was not in support of the cost which was over \$500,000 the amount of the grant. The motion passed with one board member voting No. It was done on a roll call vote, each board member voted yes or no when called on by the Chairperson. In most cases the school board votes and it is recorded as either passing or failing. At times it may be listed as 3 yes and 2 no or some combination of that. In a roll call vote it allows the voters and taxpayers to know who voted and how they voted. To me it seemed some on the SKSD School Board were very uncomfortable in voting that way, especially on every vote. I do not know if it is due to having their voting record known to the voters and taxpayers or if it is due to how in the past the concept of not shaking the boat was followed. In the past the idea was the school board would show unity by not having members who disagreed with a vote actually vote against it if the majority approved what was being voted on.

Basically it was to not allow dissent within the 5 school board members be public. Personally I do not vote for someone to be a bobble head when it comes to voting on anything. I do not think a person is elected into office to blindly follow the majority, if there are issues then they should be brought into the light and the issues worked on by communicating, exchanging ideas and philosophies and working to reach a win-win situation. I really look forward to future SKSD Board meetings and the eventual video recording of those meetings so the general public can get more informed on the issues facing the school district and how our elected school board members actually conduct business. Accountability and transparency is important.

Another item on the agenda was dealing with dangerous weapons on school grounds. One board member said the school district rules were more strict than the state regulations on weapons. It was basically stated that the rules come from the Washington State School Directors Association (WSSDA) and meet the needs of the district. It passed but I think two voted against it. The agenda item of live streaming the meetings on FaceBook passed so that may happen in the near future.

There were two Public Comment times and at the first a past school board member was very unhappy with the property taxes increase the school board allowed and thought they could have reduced or eliminated the increase. In the second, a parent was unhappy with

the locker rooms students used by students to change in. Some students wore their PE clothes under their street closets so as to not have to use the facilities. Another asked if union negotiations will be public and was told not at this time. Another asked about the levy issues and I do not think they received much of an answer.

This latest mix of elected board members should be interesting. Personally I think I saw some very pronounced tension between the school board members. Whether this will be good or bad for the district I do not know. I know the Superintendent is looking to better define the responsibilities of the school board and the interactions between him and the school board and the school board and the staff. I do have to say one of the new school board members was much more vocal than the rest. I do not think I have seen a school board member ask so many questions of those presenting or interact with the presenters in the past as much. I like that questions were asked of the staff. It was not just a slide presentation with a bobble head response from the 5 school board members. It seemed to show involvement and understanding of the issues and the potential problems that a taxpayer may have questions on. I think sometimes the concept that the taxpayers are funding the district and need assurances that the school district is on the correct path is lost at the school board level. In South Kitsap there has always seemed to be a disconnect between the taxpayers/voters and those intimately involved in the day to day issues in the school district. Maybe this particular mix of school board members and a new Superintendent will create a new level and of depth of communications with the public that has not been seen before in South Kitsap. I think the old idea of insanity being doing things the same way and expecting different results applies here in South Kitsap. Maybe this is a needed change in doing things the same way.