

Kitsap Sun

NEWS

South Kitsap pauses high school reopening plan

Jeff Graham Kitsap Sun

Published 11:44 a.m. PT Jan. 26, 2021

South Kitsap School District is pumping the brakes on its plan to allow high school students back on campus for in-person education next month.

Superintendent Tim Winter informed school board members Monday that the district is moving forward with its recommendation to welcome back middle schoolers Feb. 8 for two-days-a-week classroom instruction, while high school students will continue with fully-remote learning for now.

South Kitsap returned kindergarten, first- and second-grade students to in-person learning Jan. 11 and did the same for third-, fourth- and five-grade students on Monday.

"I think it's important that we have an opportunity to get comfortable with the students we have in before we just continue to push more students in," Winter said.

Initially, the district aimed at returning both middle school and high school students to campuses on Feb. 8. During a board meeting Jan. 21, Winter spoke about concerns regarding return timelines that emerged after he met with high school and middle school principals.

"We are just trying to work out the finer details," Winter said. "It's not about the safety protocol, it's not about the process. What it really comes down to is the academics. We are trading out five days a week of instruction for two days a week of instruction. I think that is something that is weighing heavy on the hearts of a lot of people."

One primary concern deals with the high number of teachers who will continue to teach remote even after students return to school. That would set up the situation, Winter said, where the district would have to line up supervisors to be physically present in classrooms where teachers were instructing students remotely.

Board president Eric Gattenby said it's sensible for the district to reconsider its options regarding the high school return plan as it adjusts to younger students being back on campuses.

"We have to take the pause," Gattenby said, "to prove we can make this work in this environment."

Winter said the district will be investigating opportunities for some high school students to return "in small groups" under safety guidelines and protocols. Participation opportunities could involve students struggling with remote learning, students enrolled in "hands-on" classes, and students involved in athletics, activities and/or performing arts.

"We do want our students back in our buildings," Winter said, "but we want to go slow to go fast and make sure we are doing this at a high level."