

SOUTH KITSAP

SKSD board to host virtual town hall

Public session is set for Wednesday at 6 p.m.

By Bob Smith

Thursday, January 20, 2022 10:46am | **NEWS**



PORT ORCHARD — South Kitsap School District's board of directors will host a town hall discussion via Zoom at 6 p.m. on Wednesday, Jan. 26.

The public meeting will feature a format different from regular Zoom school board meetings — it will be an open forum for audience members to interact with the

board.

“We hope to engage our community in a thoughtful and respectful discussion where we gather insight about South Kitsap School District,” board President Dr. Jeffrey “Jefe” Wilson said. “Our goal is to hear from a broad range of our community members from students to teachers to parents and voters.”

To join the meeting on Wednesday, do the following:

- Click on this link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83818445941?pwd=bkRadmZiREwyeklGcWxLQm85WmNSQT09>

Meeting ID: 838 1844 5941 Passcode: 316948

Or phone in using one-tap mobile 1-253-215-8782

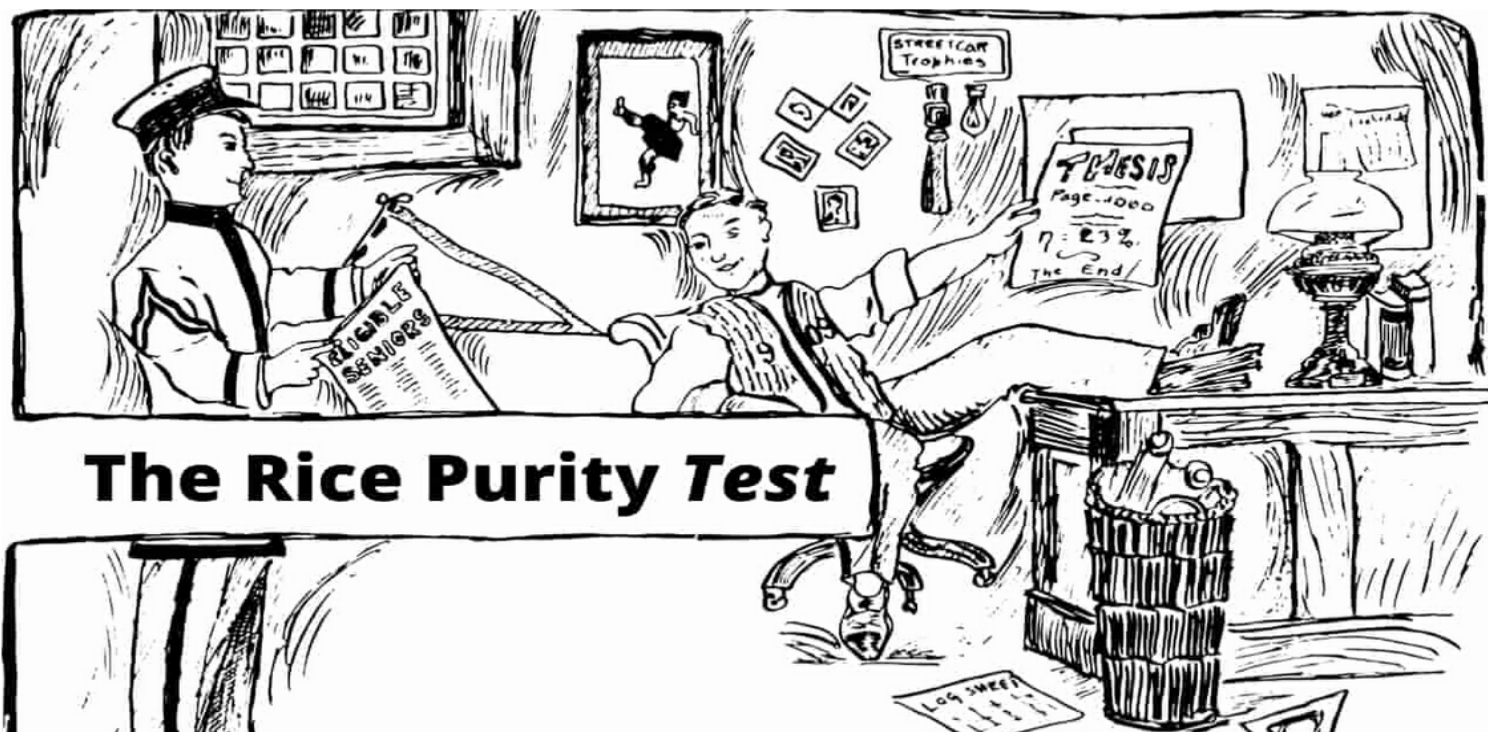
- Attendees will enter the meeting virtual waiting room.

- They should rename themselves so their first and last name is visible. Attendees with full names will then be admitted into the meeting.
- To participate in the discussion, attendees need to use the “raise your hand” feature to participate in the discussion.
- Those with questions will be called on and unmuted.
- Each attendee/board interaction will be limited to 5 minutes to maximize all participant opportunities.

KITSAP Daily News

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Our Very First SKSD Board Town Hall!

"That sure wasn't supposed to be a South Kitsap Citizen Purity Test"

Since the January 28th posting of "A Joint Statement of Civility" on South Kitsap School District's Face Book page, there have been "Over 134 Comments" from our community so far! **Here is a link to some of those community members comments taken from South Kitsap[School District Face Book pages. You must log in to Face Book to view them.**

Joint Statement of Civility and Respect

Jan 28 2022

Joint Statement of Civility and Respect

The South Kitsap School District is the heart of the South Kitsap community. Staff, students, families, and community members collectively determine what we stand for – that is the SK Way.

Each of us hold tremendous power in our daily interactions. The words we choose and the way we treat each other matter. We want our students to treat others with respect, kindness, and dignity and that same expectation should apply to the adults in our community as well. In the district, we believe in focusing on student success by embracing diversity and ensuring mutual respect. These beliefs must stretch beyond the classroom into our homes and into our community.

When we witness or take part in a hurtful exchange, it is easy to brush it off and think that the actions or beliefs of a few do not represent our community as a whole. Instead, we must acknowledge our differences. Our unique backgrounds, viewpoints, and stories are what make us who we are as individuals. They are also what make us who we are as a community. Let us strive to listen, seek to understand, and identify what we have in common.

Regardless of our differences, it is the responsibility of us all to show civility, respect and kindness to each other. Finding common ground may be difficult, but it is essential in order to grow and work together effectively. Only then, can we hope to move forward in a positive way.

Together we are South Kitsap!

Tim Winter, Superintendent

Jeffrey Wilson, Board President

John Richardson, SKEA President

Jacque Meddles, PSE President

Troy Grub, SEIU President

Barbara Pixton, SKAP

And What Would Mahatma Say?

“Many people, especially, ignorant people, want to punish you for speaking the truth, for being correct, for being you.

Never apologize for being correct, or for being years ahead of your time.

If you’re right and you know it, speak your mind. Even if you are a minority of one, the truth is still the truth.”

~Gandhi





OUR COMMUNITY WEIGHS IN POST THE SOUTH KITSAP SCHOOL DISTRICT FIRST SCHOOL BOARD TOWN HALL

[South Kitsap School District](#)

16 hrs ·

<https://www.skschools.org/.../joint-statement-of-civility...>

skschools.org

Joint Statement of Civility and Respect

Default Board Post Page - South Kitsap School District

[Ben Compton](#)

John Richardson's name on something about "civility" ... wow ... 🧑

[Debbie Backus](#)

[Ben Compton](#) wasn't he your friend in high school?

[Ben Compton](#)

[Debbie Backus](#) No. Barely knew him. Sure as heck know him now thanks to his repugnant actions & behavior, what he's done to the district.

[Debbie Backus](#)

[Ben Compton](#) I knew of him, but didn't know him...we weren't friends in school. My best-friend works for one of the SK elementary schools, and she seems to like the administrative staff...I don't know...she's more 'open-minded' than I ever will be, though...lol! When I read this letter, it sounds like they're telling parents how to act...almost disciplinary..."if you don't agree with our thinking, then you are wrong" kind of letter. If we put up a 'fight' with the district because we don't approve of the education material, then we are the 'bad guys'...it's ridiculous. Thank goodness I do not have kids...I could never put up with all this garbage they are teaching our kids...let's get back to the three 'R's' for crying out loud!

[Ben Compton](#)

[Debbie Backus](#) That's exactly what it is. Just more of the same. Condescending, arrogant.

[Dave Kimble](#)

[Ben Compton](#) My immediate thought also, followed by "Let's rearrange the deck chairs" since that Titanic of a Town Hall they held.

[Dan Smallwood](#)

Maybe they should not gas light people. I was not appreciating Mrs Espy trying to play her game and was honest about how I felt when she did it. It's a two way street

[Alan Lowe](#)

[Dan Smallwood](#) Can you explain what Mrs. Espy said that was gaslight?

[Dan Smallwood](#)

[Alan Lowe](#) that she knows better than any of us that masks are effective once then they are not. She didn't address the emotional effects they have and tried to divert my question to all the members of the board. I invite her to come to Gig Harbor and watch a forum with one of the main scientists who created MRNA vaccines" Dr. Malone.

I agreed with You actually and am writing an email asking them to show us the studies that prove their mandates are effective and best course. Alleviate our concerns, show me the Innoculation they are allowing and encourage our kids to take, show the ingredients from the boxes they are using and the studies. Are they using the one FDA approved Innoculation?

Bottom line I asked to hear from all of them and she grandstand again and I asked to hear from the others. John Berg did manage to get in a word and admitted he had not gone down and checked it out. I respect his honest answer.

[Judy Arbogast](#)

[Dan Smallwood](#) Science changes as the virus changes. Many people may "read the box" and not have any idea what it means. Let the medical field do their jobs.

[Dan Smallwood](#)

[Judy Arbogast](#) if science has changed, shouldn't our response? We double down instead doing what is not working and is hurting people physically and emotionally. We know this, maybe we should agree to find a better course for all of us

[Alan Lowe](#)

1. I believe masks are effective, some even better than others. I wear mine as much as possible and try to follow the rules in each store or business I visit. Even the wrecking yard and dump have rules that I follow. I did not think Mrs. Espy did anyth...
See more

[Dan Smallwood](#)

I did not complain about the rules of time at all so I dont know why you threw that in there. Mrs Espy already stated her opinion and was trying to use her title to take over the question and divert. I know other people with the same title who feel differently and wanted to hear from other board members but she walked over that request. I know you believe they work and I disagree. You said they could post I formation so that we could understand the need and feel comfortable about it. Something to that effect. By all means show the studies prove it is more effective, show me the risk for kids that covid presents to them. Then show why all of that out weighs the negative effects of masking. BTW how many kids touch their masks 40 times a day. Sorry about the the revalation. It just makes people feel safe. Don't hurt them for feels.

Same thing with the vaccine but with both be honest and fair give benefits and risks. We want transparency, is that too much to ask?

Or are we going to go with the truth. DOH suggested it and OSPI will take our funds if we dont? DOH in Kitsap is on Medical person who makes suggestions to the Mayor's and County Commissioners. Politicians. It's all political wish it was not, but it is.

So yeah as you asked prove to us the need that outweighs the risk and not I think it works better because there are studies that say it doesn't.

I did not complain about the rules of time at all so I dont know why you threw that in there. Mrs Espy already stated her opinion and was trying to use her title to take over the question and divert. I know other people with the same title who feel dif...

See more

[Oran Root](#)

Agree.....but interesting request....held accountable and now it's getting hard. Huh?! Trust is a valuable commodity! As highly paid public officials, the school district has an immediate, legal and moral obligation to do the right thing and hear every single tax paying parent who wants to express their feelings, thoughts, arguments and ideas. You should sit there attentive, positive and supportive as long as it takes, yes, 24hrs if necessary! No matter how elementary, emotional: As-long-as- it-takes! Shutting people down, being smug, displaying a high and mighty attitude, discrediting, calling and reporting parents as terrorists and demonizing the very ones who trust and pay ALL the

bills because your offended.....what do you expect? Take the higher road. You request “civility and respect”, reasonable....but you first. It’s not the tax payers responsibility to appease you. EARN IT!!! DO YOUR JOBS AND SERVE SELFLESSLY! YOU’RE NOT ENTITLED TO ANYTHING BUT THE SATISFACTION OF THE SUCCESS OF OUR CHILDREN (IF YOU SATISFIED WITH THE ROAD WE ARE ON, FIND ANOTHER LINE OF WORK). Time will tell how serious you really are supporting and respecting parents who are only passionate loving their children and their individual futures. Be on the winning side, our future. Hopefully you can earn back the respect you’ve lost and prioritize the children’s best interests as their parents demand it. EARN IT- Represent the people vice appeasement of the Bureaucrats! Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness!

[Oran Root](#)

Question. Do you include those of us who also pay the taxes but have no children in school? Should not the school district listen and respect all the taxpayers and voters and not just the parents with kids in school? 🤔

[Roger Gay](#)

Question. Do you include those of us who also pay the taxes but have no children in school? Should not the school district listen and respect all the taxpayers and voters and not just the parents with kids in school? 🤔

[Oran Root](#)

[Roger Gay](#) Yes! The collaborative nature of success of our community depends on all of us and our taxes so yes, we all have a say! That’s my whole point in regards to the audacity of publicly paid school officials, volunteers or full time public educat...
See more

[Roger Gay](#)

[Oran Root](#)

I agree, but your comment seemed to leave out what are a significant supplier of school tax revenue, those without children in school. We have as much a vested interest in the districts actions as the parents.

[David Young](#)

[Oran Root](#) you also seem to be saying that all tax payers in this area agree with the statements made. This seems to be incorrect as people in the SK school district seem to be unable to agree on much.

I am also having a hard time with this statement "YOU’RE NOT ENTITLED TO ANYTHING BUT THE SATISFACTION OF THE SUCCESS OF OUR CHILDREN"? So they aren’t entitled to respect, common decency (no foul language) or etcetera?

I am not sure what you do for a living or what position you ran for back during the election but I find it hard to believe you would tolerate anyone treating you in an intentionally demeaning manner.

Is this treatment only towards school board members or all civil servants? I see we have some mutual friends, so how about police officers? Their job is to protect and serve so are they not entitled to respect and decency?

I disagree, I have family in law enforcement and back the blue.

I was raised and then had it reinforced in the military and again as a medical practitioner that we treat everyone with respect and decency.

To me that has always been part of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness is respecting others even if I don't agree. Hate breeds hate and solves nothing when it comes to issues in our country, state, county or schools.

[Dan Smallwood](#)

[Oran Root](#) as usual, you said it beautifully. Thank you sir

[Dawn Forsythe Moriarty](#)

[Oran](#), so what sparked the public release is that a/several parents are passionate about their children and are calling people out for not doing their job and REPRESENTING THE CHILDREN?! Makes sense!

[Heather G. Wilson](#)

School Board members earn a \$50 stipend for each meeting. They are not "highly paid public officials". Also, to clarify, it is never appropriate to be unkind, disrespectful or threatening to anyone at anytime. In a public meeting all of those things lead to you losing the opportunity to speak. Furthermore, ALL of the board members are taxpayers and all of them have students that are either attending or have attended South Kitsap Schools, so your 'taxpayers' and 'parents' comments are moot.

[Oran Root](#)

[Heather G. Wilson](#) Thank you. I get it. Yet if you read into the context of my post you will agree this is to ALL who "represent", even IF they volunteered to serve.....especially with a stipend. Deflecting from the collaborative nature of the complaint is our universal problem. ...just a distraction. Humble and selfless representation is desired, not a monarchist attitude no matter if you make \$235k or \$50. My post stands.

[Oran Root](#)

[Heather G. Wilson](#) Again, deflection from the overall point. Motive I guess, continue to play victim. I get it your point, but who works for who? Who applied, interviewed or was elected to the position to do exactly what your trying to excuse . Sit there and listen intently, take notes and suck it up. Earn some respect; bare the burden as public servants for awhile and de-escalate with compassion and restraint. It's hard I get it but nothing is worth doing is ever easy. It our kids! People are passionate, let them be with conviction- they are paying ALL the bills! It's funny when levy's are paid and nobody paying attention all is good. Little pressure, now the parents are the enemy- disgusting! It's not

my responsibility to appease nor cower. Agree though all must try to be humble and kind while accountability is being executed.

[David O'Hagan](#)

[Heather G. Wilson](#) just a comment, on the \$50 stipend... the superintendent has 195k base salary (in 2019) , that's pretty highly paid.

[Heather G. Wilson](#)

[Oran Root](#) Ok. I am trying to understand where you are coming from. Are you willing to help me understand? First, what are you referring to here: "Shutting people down, being smug, displaying a high and mighty attitude, discrediting, calling and reporting parents as terrorists"?

[Oran Root](#)

[Heather G. Wilson](#) With all due respect.....appreciate your dialog but you don't understand?! I'm sure we all can discuss semantics but there is not an endstate in that approach nor desire. Public servants are exactly that, servants of the public.

[Heather G. Wilson](#)

[Oran Root](#) No. I don't understand. I asked specific questions about your statement precisely because I don't understand them.

[Oran Root](#)

[Heather G. Wilson](#) It was not a question, semantics have no end therefore continued dialog is unfortunately futile, especially on SM. I am willing to meet up for coffee as SM only allows a one dimensional view. Serve the people 100%, giving the benefit of doubt.... Parents need trust and confidence in their public servants, which a majority do not have. Once balance is restored, it will all level out.

[Heather G. Wilson](#)

You made a post in a very public forum with many inflammatory and demanding statements and nothing to explain them. I am sure it is not just me that doesn't understand your references. I don't understand what you are so angry about. That's it. (and i think you mean dimensional)

[Oran Root](#)

[Heather G. Wilson](#) Assuming I'm angry is a symptom of today's SM negative side effect. With that, anger is an important emotion, it protects and motivates the promotion of survival. It allows the hunter to stay warm, fight off the wolves and feed our families. You have to love the SM assumption pit. (Ahhh yes, thank you for your correction. While we're at it I believe "I" is capitalized as well!) My offer still stands to meet up for further discussion(not weird I hope) maybe I'll learn something. Have a nice evening Heather and just in case, no hate here, all good discussion. Good night.

[Heather G. Wilson](#)

[Oran Root](#) Good night. No hate.

I can assure you that the school board members, as well as the administrative leadership in our district, most certainly want what is best for our students, families and extended members of the community.

I honestly think part of the problem here is that a lot of people don't really understand the workings of a school district, school board or the duties and responsibilities of the superintendent.

It is absolutely within our rights to ask questions, state opinions and share facts. It is also important to fact check the things you hear in board meetings and (especially) on social media. There is a lot of misinformation floating around and oftentimes that leads to anger and frustration.

There are many, many people at district office that are willing to answer whatever type of question or concern you may have.

info@skschools.org



[Heather G. Wilson](#)

and here: : "It's not the tax payers responsibility to appease you...YOU'RE NOT ENTITLED TO ANYTHING BUT THE SATISFACTION OF THE SUCCESS OF OUR CHILDREN"?

[David Young](#)

[Oran Root](#) can you please cite the source for your stated legal obligation to listen, to demeaning and intentionally disrespectful language? How about the not so subtle threat of cleaning your guns on camera while you intentional demean someone. Where in the by laws is this stated an obligation?

I am quite familiar with Robert's Rules of Order and do not see where that is covered there either.

I see you back and support the military and seem to remember from your bio during the election you may be a veteran.

So I am sure that you understand we all have freedoms. Parents have the freedom to express concerns or grievances to the school board, I absolutely agree. The school board members also have the freedom to turn off the microphone or zoom for someone who is intentionally disrespectful or demeaning especially an adult to a minor. To say that they should sit for 24hrs or however longer it takes is a farce. No one in any business or branch of the government works that way.

What ever happened to mature dialect? If one sees a legitimate problem or concern bring it up the correct way. Politely but passionately is fine. You should also offer realistic alternative solutions though.

Personal attacks do not find solutions or create an environment that leads to successful outcomes. I am not even saying I disagree with some issues that are brought forward. To be taken seriously though in any business or government setting it must be done so with grace and dignity.

Our country is built on Freedom and rights. We seem to have forgotten though that one's right to free speech is not the same thing as forcing others to listen.

Simone much wiser than me once said (paraphrasing) "the right to swing one's arm ends where another's nose begins."

Here's to hoping we can find a civil way to have a discussion. There is so much hate in this country recently I am afraid we are going to tear this sacred Union apart.

[Oran Root](#)

[David Young](#) Agree 100%.

[Heather G. Wilson](#)

[Oran Root](#) One more: "Represent the people vice appeasement of the Bureaucrats!" I am being genuine here. We both graduated from SK the same year. We attended the same church. We have some common ground. I am legitimately trying to understand, but I... See more

[Judy Arbogast](#)

[Oran Root](#) The actual statement is "finding common ground is difficult". Are you upset that the Board does not agree with you? Are you referring to the School Board Forum this week? Did you participate in the Forum this week.

Most Relevant is selected, so some replies may have been filtered out.

[CElizabeth Turner](#)

I assume this means that Director Berg will be closing his insanely disrespectful website where he does almost nothing but bash a fellow Director.

[Brenda Marie](#)

The students are all watching how the adults behave. If we are jerks to each other you don't think this has an impact on them? This then impacts the teachers who teach them and their interactions with their peers. The adults really need to work on being good examples and making good choices. We tell the kids this all the time now it's the adults turn.

[Amber Marshall Byrne](#)

I am fully behind being respectful of others. My question is why my kid who was out of school due to a positive test a few weeks and did her best to stay caught up is feeling a lot of negativity from teachers about kids falling behind? I hope the district is being aware of the challenges of our kids being out sick and yet having to jump in on final projects to be presented as if they have been there and should have the group work done. As parents I know we all are worried about how this pandemic is affecting our kids learning experience. I know most of the teachers I have spoken with are also worried about the kids and want them to succeed. But...I believe the structure of the classes may not be working and expecting business as usual results as far as absences and grading is a lot unreasonable.\

[Kelly Mullins](#)

Amber Marshall Byrne 100%....and more leeway/time for THOSE students actually super sick with positive covid!!!!!!!!!!

[Elaine Hamilton](#)

[Amber Marshall Byrne](#) apply to work at the school district! They are short staffed, teachers have been out sick too and stress about keeping the kids on track. Step up and help!

[Sarah McCoy](#)

[Elaine Hamilton](#) we appreciate you so much Elaine!

\

[Elaine Hamilton](#)

[Sarah McCoy](#) I appreciate all of you working with our kids, thank you!

[Marcie Martin](#)

School districts across the country have not had this level of parent/public scrutiny in a very long time and it shows. I'm very happy parents and the public are excited to get involved. I believe in civility but that is a two way street. I have a child at SKSD and got this notice today with no context, no idea what predicated it. I can tell you what my initial reaction was-and it wasn't good. This district has issues, let's resolve them. Everyone get involved!

[Celinda Miller](#)

If we are driving for civility and respect all our voices should be heard. This is a great Post but why are peoples posts being deleted?

[Yvonne Chri](#)

[Celinda Miller](#) 16 comments and only 11 are showing. 🙄

[Stephanie Kime](#)

[Celinda Miller](#) Probably because some comments aren't being civil and respectful. 🙄

[Rachel Garcia](#)

[Celinda Miller](#) u need to change above the top posted to all comments to get all showing.

[Mary Johnson](#)

Two things I've realized these past few days:

1. Now is a time we should lift our teachers and support staff up, and recognize that they also are struggling and working harder than they have ever imagined they would. The negative comments impact all district employees, which impact our kids.

2. Thank goodness Daniels or Root were never elected to lead in this community.

[E J Ernie Jones](#)

[Mary Johnson](#) , everybody who's working right now is working harder than they ever have. Your ideology is what's wrong with this country, just because they're working harder (like the rest of us) we can't disagree with them??? Don't be weak, stand up for yourself.

[Linette A. Deacon](#)

Does anyone know if there will be a recording posted? I missed this meeting.

[Leah White](#)

[Linette A. Deacon](#) <https://vimeo.com/670779838>

VIMEO.COM

Virtual Town Hall with SKSD Board January 26, 2022. *Profanity Warning*

[Virtual Town Hall with SKSD Board January 26, 2022. *Profanity Warning*](#)

[Linette A. Deacon](#)

[Leah White](#) thank you!

[Leah White](#)

[Linette A. Deacon](#) you're welcome 😊

[Cindy Loid Hansen](#)

I'm honestly coming from curiosity, because there's always more to the story.

What causes a school district to write a statement like this at 5pm on a Friday night?

Has something in particular happened?

(Every one of you who have commented should be sharing this. Hit the share button)

[Cindy Loid Hansen](#)

I'm reading these comments, hostile board meeting open mic?

[Brandee Guarin](#)

I just finished watching the meeting. There were some profanities said towards board members during the zoom. And a few parents mentioned bullying towards their children in school.

[Bernetta Nielsen](#)

Our poor children! 🥺❤️

[Yvonne Chri](#)

I wasn't able to attend the town hall. Will a recording be available?

[Leah White](#)

[Yvonne Chri](#) <https://vimeo.com/670779838>

VIMEO.COM

[Virtual Town Hall with SKSD Board January 26, 2022. *Profanity Warning*](#)

[Yvonne Chri](#)

[Leah White](#) thank you!

[Leah White](#)

[Yvonne Chri](#) you're welcome 😊

Most Relevant is selected, so some replies may have been filtered out.

[Stephanie Voss](#)

And the first 2 comments prove why such a statement is necessary. Thank you for being adults and striving for better for us all, SKSD!

[Sandi Barmore Hubbeling](#)

A rule I like ...do you want me to focus on WHAT you are saying or HOW you are saying it? We can all do better

[Jonathan Carp](#)

Thanks for the update homies

[Dawn Forsythe Moriarty](#)

What sparked this public release?

[CElizabeth Turner](#)

[Dawn Forsythe Moriarty](#) There was definitely disrespect coming from both sides, not just the parents.

[Kayla Gist](#)

[CElizabeth](#) yes. Absolutely

[Kirsten Otterby](#)

[Dawn Forsythe Moriarty](#) There was an open forum board meeting last night. Community members were allowed to ask questions. A few people were really disrespectful.

[Dawn Forsythe Moriarty](#)

[Kirsten](#), I could see that. People/parents are not happy and express that in different ways. But I say, if you don't like it, say it with your vote.

[Angie Cummings](#)

[Dawn Forsythe Moriarty](#) we will do that also

[Kyle Vetter](#)

[Dawn Forsythe Moriarty](#) if I had to guess, I would say it is related to the school board meeting earlier this week. Some of the questions, name calling, statements and interactions towards the School Board and Superintendent were completely uncalled for and disrespectful.

💎Top fan

[Tiffany Wilhelm](#)

There's a difference between being angry about an issue and having your emotions come out when speaking and deliberately using profanity when addressing the board and misgendering a student representative. We can all disagree and have civil discussions without needing to resort to swearing and disrespectful behavior. We try to teach our kids to communicate respectfully, why can't we expect that from adults in a public meeting?

[Dawn Forsythe Moriarty](#)

Thank you for the different versions of the same perspective.

Here is one letter sent to the Kitsap Daily after publication of the Statement of Civility and Respect posted on South Kitsap School District's FB page.

Controversy

for its own sake is sin.

*Controversy for the sake of truth
is a divine mandate.*

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

SKSD has no business defining 'civility'

Monday, January 31, 2022 10:47am | [LETTERS TO THE EDITOR](#)

I am somewhat perplexed by the “civility letter” from the South Kitsap School District and the need for them to tell the public how to act when dealing with the school district and board. While civility is always correct in any personal interaction, I question the district’s place to tell people how to act. You can’t legislate common sense. Folks seem to have forgotten the danger of getting between any parent and their children.

I am also surprised by who signed the joint statement on civility. Mr. Wilson, board president, was apparently speaking only for himself as no emergency board meeting was held to allow the other board members to have input on the letter as required by law. The union leaders who signed all routinely bargain in secrecy so they can avoid the public eye. The superintendent says transparency is their hallmark but several comments reveal that parents don’t know or understand why or what the district is doing regarding their children’s education.

I thought the reason for the forum was to address parent and community issues and concerns without judgment. Educating parents is the job of the board and district, not defending policies as if parent concerns don’t matter. From what I have heard and read, the perceived civility issue lies with many involved; not just a few. Afterward, some parent comments questioned voting for district levies and bonds when the district, school board and union leader’s perceived arrogance tells the community how to interact with those who educate their children.

Jeff Daily**Port Orchard**

COVID on the mind of community members dialing into SKSD's Town Hall

Board members say state pandemic restrictions have tied district's hands

Friday, January 28, 2022 11:13am | **NEWS**



By Mike De Felice

Kitsap Daily News

PORT ORCHARD – Parents of South Kitsap school children had the opportunity to talk with school board members Wednesday during a special South Kitsap School Board-sponsored Town Hall.

With no agenda set for the two-hour Zoom session, the format allowed as many people as possible to voice their questions and concerns about their children's education. The majority of the evening's questions were related to COVID issues, including concerns as to whether remote learning might return and the wisdom of continued mask requirements.

For the most part, the virtual session included respectful conversation. However, a handful of individuals who swore at board members or while asking questions were quickly muted.

The first question centered on how difficult this school year has been on families and students; the questioner asked whether the district planned to return to remote learning.

“School in our district has been like a roller coaster every single day,” Tess

Tolentino said. “[Bus] drivers are out sick. [Schools] are short-staffed. Have we talked about remote learning? Teachers keep sending those notifications that we might. Have you guys talked about that?”

Tolentino’s concern follows SKSD’s closure of schools two days earlier this month because of a spike in local COVID cases among students and staff, which resulted in a teacher shortage. But schools plan to maintain in-person teaching, board president Jeffrey Wilson said.

“We just had a few days off to catch back up because of staff shortages and also having a few kids out. The goal for this year is to try and keep everyone in school for as long as we can do it safely. We do have a backup plan to be able to pivot to remote if and when it’s necessary. Although that’s not our goal,” Wilson said.

“It’s definitely has been very chaotic. We, like every other organization and business, keep struggling with staffing shortages.”

School superintendent Tim Winter echoed Wilson’s comments.

“Right now, there is no plan to go remote. Our goal is to keep students in-person. We want to keep our students in school because we know that’s the best place for them educationally and the best place for them as far as their health is concerned,” Winter said.

A number of parents strongly voiced their desire for school officials to end the mask requirement for kids. Those parents questioned the effectiveness of the cloth masks against omicron and said masks presented problems for kids with medical conditions such as asthma.

Board members said they understood it was inconvenient for students to wear masks but pointed out the board does not have the ability to reject the state’s mask mandate.

“Those folks that are looking for us to do something different than what the state and guidelines do, I think you are going to find yourselves disappointed,” Wilson said.

“We need to follow those laws and regulations in order to keep our funding. Without funding, we have about three to four weeks of funding

and then we would be done with school because we wouldn't be able to pay teachers and staff to keep the buildings open.

"It's frustrating for all of us. It's frustrating for me personally. I'd like to see us get back to normal, but we have to follow [regulations] that will keep us safe," Wilson said.

Superintendent Winter added: "The school district has the responsibility to follow the mandates that have been given to us from the Department of Health, state education agency, and the governor. We all want to have the choice not to wear masks, but at this time we can't. There aren't any districts that I'm aware of in the state of Washington that are defying the mask mandate."

Board member John Berg indicated people have reason to be upset with state requirements but added dissatisfaction with COVID mandates should be focused on elected officials, not the school board.

"I believe a lot of the government authority has overstepped their bounds," Berg said. "I think we need to address our elected officials at the state and national level because as a school board, we are pretty much bound to follow the regulations that are given to us by those higher up."

Concern was also raised over the shortage of bus drivers across the district that has led to difficulties in getting kids to school.

Gerry Austin asked what school officials were doing to entice more drivers. He asked if creative solutions to solve the shortage were being examined, such as partnering with regional transit agencies or approaching those with CDL licenses at the shipyards.

The superintendent replied, "That's a great question. We have looked at those things. We are in a really competitive market for people with CDLs. Every district in the state is dealing with driver shortages."

Winter said this week the district had to cancel two bus routes and add back another one.

A parent identified as "Lindsey" questioned why parents are allowed to attend high school sporting events like basketball games without proof of

vaccination but are not allowed to volunteer to assist in their children's classroom or help on field trips.

The superintendent indicated vaccinations are mandated for anyone working in schools and with students.

“In athletic contests and drama performances, we made a decision to allow parents to come in and be part of their student's activities. When you go to a basketball game, you are not [within] six feet of students. You are there as a spectator by choice. There is a distinction there. It's not scientifically based, it is based on trying to support the community,” Winter said.

A number of parents said they appreciated the work the school board members are doing.

“These are extraordinary times,” Lee Fenton said. “I just wanted to thank everyone on the board for stepping up and representing our school district. It's a job that not many of us would aspire to.”

Fenton said he appreciated the board listening to individual stories from parents and being willing to follow up on special cases.

At the end of the virtual town hall, board members told viewers the session was informative for them and hoped it had also been so for parents.

“I really appreciate every single person who came on and asked questions. This is how we make our district transparent. We increase communication,” said Kate Espy, a newly appointed board member who replaced Eric Gattenby, who resigned late last year.

Berg added: “I think this was a very productive format and I would like to see it repeated.”