

Talk of money over academics is not what parents want

ELISHA MEYER

Port Orchard Independent

Just weeks before the start of the 2022-23 school year, tempers are already flaring between some school board members and parents who want to start seeing results in their children's education and more openness to the public.

The board held a preliminary hearing Aug. 3 for the district's budget, which is

about \$175 million. Budgeted expenditures include over \$130 million in employee salaries and benefits, along with \$21 million in supplies and materials, \$13 million in purchased services, \$576,905 in Capital Outlay and \$250,396 in travel.

Those in attendance in-person or via Zoom were quick to call out the district for pushing more focus on the money and agendas than

educational standards.

Jaime Cross, who has children in the district, said that it is sad to see kids suffering as a result. "It seems like it's all about money and more teachers and more jobs and, you know, there's no hard decisions. You guys don't ever talk about the education that's going on," he said.

Cross also called out the board for not getting the word

out on budget meetings, as Cross was only one of three in attendance. "You can sit there and wonder why there's nobody here," he said. "It's like, really, nobody knows about them unless you're a guy like me that follows the school board and watches the meetings. People don't have a clue what's going on."

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Rhiannon McCarthy talked about racial equity training that she and other staff were required to take. McCarthy said that it was a waste of school resources and that agendas such as those are not beneficial to staff or students.

"We all have different circumstances that

happen in our lives that help define who we are, but that doesn't mean we let those circumstances become who we ultimately become as a person," she said. "What it comes down to is even though you may not agree with someone else's individual thoughts or opinions, you can still be respectful and agree to disagree."

Tempers flared between board members Jeff Daily and John Berg after Daily

pointed out high numbers in staffing and the budgets to accommodate such staffing. The state helps fund staffing, but the number of staff and their salaries can be determined locally.

Despite higher staff numbers budgeted in each category, Daily said that it still has not produced the academic results that he would like to see, and that more money is not going to get the job done. "If all

of those people are not contributing to academic success, I think we, that means me, need to look at that," he said.

Berg then asked Daily whether he expected the district to operate properly with only "one-fifth of a psychologist, one-half of a social worker, and one-and-a-quarter school nurses." Berg was referencing the portion the state pays for.

Daily responded that "we need more in some

areas, but the question is how do we determine that, and is it working? I don't mind the fact that we have a lot of paraeducators. We certainly need them, and for special education, they're very needed. At the same point, you're gonna have to show the taxpayer that you're getting results."

Dave Kimble, who attended the meeting on Zoom, called out Berg for his questioning of Daily, saying that the behavior

was cagey and stands as another reason why attendance of meetings seems to be a problem. "You're not really looking for an answer, just an opportunity to box in a fellow director," he said. "To go on that route is not attractive."

The next school board meeting is Aug. 17 at 5 p.m. Anyone who wants to provide feedback on the budget and other issues can attend in person or on Zoom.