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NEWS

SKSD hints at \$9.5 million in future budget cuts

By Elisha Meyer Port Orchard Independent • February 6, 2023 1:30 am



South Kitsap School District officials are beginning to look at budget cuts and downsizing for the next school year due to lower enrollment and soon-to-end pandemic financial aid.

The news comes at a time when staffing and enrollment are headed in opposite directions.

In the pre-pandemic school year of 2018-19, total employment of certificated, administrative and classified staff was 1,110. That number has slightly increased to 1,114.

Meanwhile, enrollment before and during the pandemic ranged from 9,600 to just above 9,800 but has since fallen dramatically to 8,999.

That has led to a higher certificated-and-classified staff-to-student ratio than in pre-pandemic years.

Projected adjustments needed for the 2023-24 school year stand around \$9.5 million, assistant superintendent Monica Honsaker said in a report to the school board Feb. 1. "We are spending more than we budgeted, and a lot of it is in staffing. A lot of it is in special education staffing," she said.

Honsaker said the main reason staffing has gone up was due to federal aid stemming from the coronavirus pandemic, namely Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funding. The district is spending \$5.3 million in that funding in 2022-23. "Well, that money is going away," she said. "So in 2023-24 we will not have that, and we will have to reduce at minimum \$5.3 (million) we budgeted."

Inflation was cited as a reason for future cuts, as cost of living, salary and benefits have all gone up in the present economy.

Superintendent Tim Winter said the process of identifying possible areas to downsize has begun, but final decisions will not need to be made until the budget's expected approval in August. He also said the district will make clear its priority areas in this decision. "This is the first stage of a long process," he said. "Once the public has had a chance to see these things, we will ask for comments from the public."

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