

Kitsap Sun

EDUCATION

South Kitsap prepping 20-year, \$271 million school bond measure for rebuilding aging schools

South Kitsap's \$271 million bond would cover on-site rebuilds of Cedar Heights Middle School, two elementary schools.



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South Kitsap School District continues work toward preparing a 20-year, \$271 million bond measure that could go before voters during the November 2023 general election and, if approved, would pay for rebuilds and improvements of multiple aging schools.

The bond proposal, currently in draft form, would seek to collect approximately \$1.00 per \$1,000 in assessed value on all taxable property within the district, starting in 2024. The finalized bond measure requires school board approval prior to being put on next year's November ballot.

Heading into 2023, the district continues to gather community input through a series of community engagement events and surveys.

"We're still in this phase of feedback and planning and trying to bring something to the community that the community wants and is in support of," South Kitsap School District Superintendent Tim Winter said.

Winter said the new 20-year-bond, if passed, wouldn't increase current school tax rates. In 2022, South Kitsap residents were responsible for \$2.86 per \$1,000 in assessed value between two levies: the district's educational programs and operations levy and the district's \$21.7 million capital levy, which expires at the end of 2022. The goal is to keep the 2024 total school tax rate, between the EP&O levy and the 20-year-bond, at \$2.86.

South Kitsap voters haven't passed a bond measure, which requires 60% approval, since 1988. Four years ago, voters turned down a 25-year, \$184.7 bond measure that would have paid for a second high school on 57 acres of district-owned property off Old Clifton Road.

This bond measure wouldn't seek funds for a second high school; rather, it would enable the district to focus on replacing Cedar Heights Middle School (a new 110,000-square-foot building with an 800-student capacity), South Colby Elementary School (a 63,000-square-foot building, 400-student capacity) and Olalla Elementary School (63,000-square-foot building, 400-student capacity) on their current sites while eliminating portable classrooms; adding early learning centers at South Colby and Olalla; replacing Explorer Academy and Discovery High School with a two-story building (30,000-square-feet, 400-plus students) on the Madrona Heights campus off Fircrest Drive; renovating/modernizing portions of South Kitsap High School; and improvements/repairs at other district sites.

The schools targeted for the majority of the bond funding haven't undergone any manner of remodeling since 1978 and are among the oldest in Port Orchard. Build years for the schools are 1954 (Olalla), 1956 (South Colby), 1962 (South Kitsap High School), 1968 (Cedar Heights) and 1973 (Discovery). The district hasn't built a new school since adding Hidden Creek, Mullenix Ridge and Sydney Glen elementary schools in 1988.

"We've had to manage," Winter said. "When you drive around and look at our buildings, it looks like they really haven't had any major work done in 30 years."

On Dec. 7, the district's bond steering committee presented to the school board about how bond funding could be divided up for the various projects: \$83.6 million for Cedar Heights, \$50.7 million for South Colby, \$48.3 million for Olalla, \$21.5 million for Explorer/Discovery, \$39.5 million for South Kitsap High School and \$27.2 million for district-wide improvements.

South Kitsap School District spokesperson Amy Miller said all of the district's schools, due to their age, are eligible for Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction school construction assistance funding. Using a funding formula based on building square footage and student enrollment, the bond steering committee estimated the school district could collect \$12.7 million in supplementary funding for Cedar Heights, \$6.8 million for Olalla, \$4.4 million for South Colby; \$3.8 million for Explorer/Discovery; and \$8.8 for South Kitsap High School.