

direct

QUARTERLY NEWSMAGAZINE

SPRING 2023



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the future needs all of us.

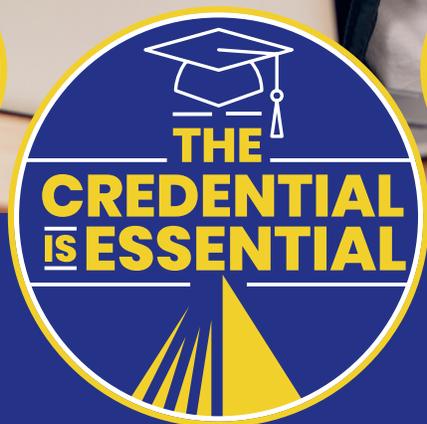


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From the Executive Director

A testament to you

A lot of photos decorate this issue of *Direct* because school directors and student board representatives are working hard on behalf of their communities!

Our latest *Direct* is a testament to your hard work and dedication. You're engaging in advocacy, training, charitable giving, and nurturing one another through networking and sometimes becoming the trainers for your former peers (see [page 12](#)).

I feel so fortunate to work for such a fantastic group of elected officials and see how inspiring our youth leaders are. If your student board representatives are any indication, the future is in good hands.

I'm also grateful to lead such a terrific staff who do their best to provide a resource, support, or representation for every board in every district. You should know that your WSSDA staff are invited to give presentations to other state associations (see [page 6](#)) and sometimes at national-level events, including this year.

By the time you read this, the 2023 legislative session may be over, but don't miss the invaluable advocacy tips from Shankar Vedantam on [page 20](#). His simple but profound insights are also helpful for ordinary daily life.

In closing, I'll echo the words of President Ron Mabry. WSSDA belongs to you, school directors, so I urge you to take advantage of WSSDA's tools and resources and to express yourselves to the entire membership. Please see the article on [How School Boards Direct WSSDA's Advocacy](#). As Director Humphrey said on [page 14](#), WSSDA needs the input of each of you 'to best represent every corner of our diverse state.'

It's an honor to serve you,



Tim Garchow, WSSDA Executive Director





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WSSDA direct

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Directors, students, and the superintendent from the Issaquah School District join fellow WSSDA members and students in Olympia for Day on the Hill, bringing their concerns and advocacy directly to their legislators. **p.16**



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Put the pedal to the metal

I have to admit — I like what I’m seeing, WSSDA. That’s you, school directors! I want to thank everyone who trekked over to Olympia for Legislative Conference and Day on the Hill. With hundreds of you in attendance, it felt great! I know it’s not easy travelling and then worrying about last minute weather, but you did it, and I have no doubt it was impactful meeting with legislators and their staff the following day.

And speaking of legislators, I would like to applaud them for coming off the floor to meet us while the legislature was in session. I think you’ll see some photos of that in this magazine. Not every legislator was able to leave their respective chamber, but all were responsive to our requests to meet with them.

I think our advocacy engine is firing on all cylinders. WSSDA staff continue to do a great job keeping us informed and engaged with the legislative process. Our school directors advocating in the other Washington are winning hearts and minds with a successful trip to Washington D.C. And if you haven’t been able to come to Olympia, you can still provide testimony on bills virtually. That might be one of the good things to come from the pandemic.

So let’s keep the pedal to the metal! I urge school directors from all districts to engage more and more with WSSDA. This organization belongs to you, so join events, take trainings, and keep sharing your ideas and aspirations. If we keep working together, more children will flourish.

Ron Mabry, WSSDA Board President

2023 regional meetings: Top issues facing school boards today — a look at the legal, policy, and leadership implications



Join your peers for discussion and learning on what it means to be a school leader in 2023. Share the successes and challenges that you face in your district and get the legal and policy context of today’s top issues. Learn from others what has worked for their district, share your questions, and collaborate on areas that require further advocacy at the state level.

Regional meeting schedule:

- | | |
|--|---|
| Thursday, March 23
DIRECTOR AREA 3
Sumner | Wednesday, May 3
DIRECTOR AREA 10
Cheney |
| Wednesday, March 29
DIRECTOR AREA 2 NORTH
Shoreline | Thursday, May 4
DIRECTOR AREA 9
Deer Park |
| Tuesday, April 18
DIRECTOR AREA 2 SOUTH
Auburn | Monday, May 8
DIRECTOR AREA 5
North Thurston |
| Thursday, April 20
DIRECTOR AREA 1
Mount Vernon | Wednesday, May 17
DIRECTOR AREA 6
Camas |
| Saturday, April 22
DIRECTOR AREA 4
Sequim | Thursday, May 18
DIRECTOR AREA 8
Yakima |
| Tuesday, May 2
DIRECTOR AREA 7
Bridgeport | Thursday, May 25
DIRECTOR AREA 11
Pasco |

Leadership Development –Tricia Lubach

In public education and in nature, spring is a time to look forward. Graduations are within sight, students look forward to summer break and the next grade level, and school boards finalize budgets for the coming school year. The saying that “hope springs eternal” can also be flipped around to acknowledge that sometimes a season of hope and growth also includes setbacks that require perseverance and steadiness. Many districts are facing hard decisions now and in coming years, from enrollment and financial challenges to school consolidation and competing voices in their communities. My advice? Take a deep breath, center yourself with an intention to be respectful and empathetic to those you engage with, and remember why you do this – to support an environment where children grow into successful adults prepared to lead our future world. As Kalu Ndukwe Kalu reminds us, *“The things you do for yourself are gone when you are gone, but the things you do for others remain as your legacy.”*



WSSDA Director of Leadership Development Tricia Lubach, at right, is joined by fellow Quincy School District colleagues Heather Folks-Lambert, board vice chair, and Nik Bergman, superintendent.

Strategic Advocacy –Marissa Rathbone

In her book, “Hope in the Dark,” Rebecca Solnit grounds us in the notion that “...hope is only a beginning; it’s not a substitute for action, only a basis for it.” It’s an important reminder as we reflect on the 2023 legislative session. At the start, we saw House and Senate bills on special education, transportation, and capital construction funding, as well as universal school meals. There was early evidence of bicameral and bipartisan support to address all these issues. While each bill started at a high watermark, they have all been scaled back significantly. As a result, we will likely see a final budget that moves the needle in these areas, but not nearly enough. It is difficult to “...accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope,” as Martin Luther King, Jr. advised us. Amid frustration, we can turn our attention to students and staff and commit to continued advocacy on their behalf, throughout the interim and in preparation to move the needle more in the next legislative session.



WSSDA Director of Strategic Advocacy Marissa Rathbone, at right, is joined by panelists Tejasvini Vijay (Riverview School District) and Kathy Mulkerin (Walla Walla School District) to interview keynote speaker Shankar Vedantam.

Policy and Legal –Abigail Westbrook

We continue to review legislative bills important to Washington’s K-12 education. It’s time-consuming, but we’ve been able to identify problems and see our proposed revised language incorporated into bills. Changing merely a single word can be legally significant, so the effect is well worth the effort. The 2023 legislative session will impact your school board policies. We’ll go over that with you after session ends. Until then, the latest edition of Policy & Legal News will dive into the thorny legal issues related to advertising on school district property as well as placing limitations on school staff’s personal expressions in the classroom. Prepare for considerable constitutional analysis! We hope you’ll find it helpful as you carry out the important work you do.



WSSDA advocates for you across the nation



Above: WSSDA's Federal Relations Network (FRN) travels to Washington, D.C. to bring our priorities to federal departments and members of congress.



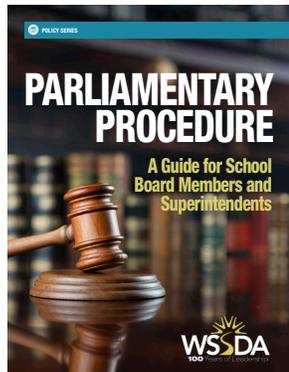
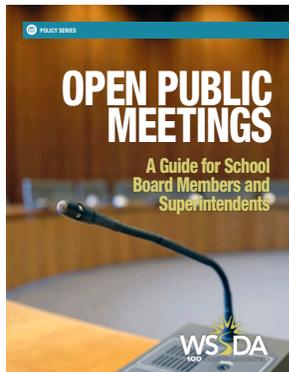
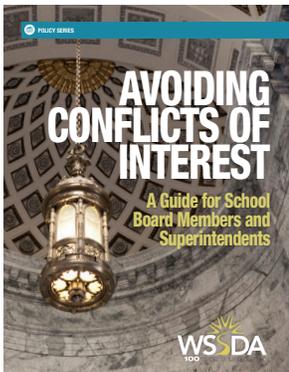
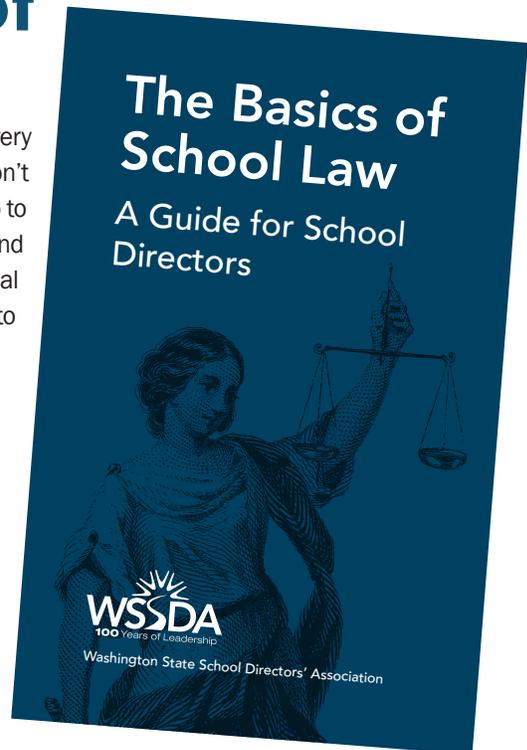
Right: Marissa Rathbone, WSSDA's director of strategic advocacy, was hosted by the Association of Alaska School Boards, where she shared her expertise as well as guidance on bringing stories and testimony to the legislature on behalf of school districts. (She enjoyed a few glaciers, too!)



Start off on the right foot

Updated resources for new (and veteran) directors

Everyone's journey as a school director starts differently. Some started by coming to every school board meeting for their district. Then one day, they asked themselves, "Why don't I just run for school board?" Once you're on the board, there's actually a thing or two to be aware of when you're the one holding the meeting. You must be mindful of rules, laws, and situations to avoid, but don't worry because WSSDA has you covered! WSSDA's foundational legal resources are all-new for 2023. New and veteran board members are encouraged to make full use of the legal publications at wssda.org/publications.





Left: Marcus Young (Vice President, Bethel SD) presents during one of 51 breakout sessions at WSSDA's 2022 Annual Conference. Right: School directors Trish Huddleston (Woodland SD) and Crystal Moldenhauer (Longview SD) participate in a discussion activity during the "Leveraging Student Voice on your Board" from the 2022 conference.

Want to present at Annual Conference?

Ever attend a WSSDA Annual Conference and think, "Hey! I wish someone would present on this topic..."? Well, maybe that someone could be you!

The conference committee seeks a wide variety of topics and presenters to ensure there is something for everyone. School directors and board-superintendent teams present most breakout sessions. Last year's Annual Conference in Spokane offered more than 50 breakout sessions on topics important for school district leaders. Consider how you or your district team might share your successes and learnings in the six topic areas

(called strands) of effective governance, strategic advocacy, visionary leadership, student success, student well-being, or educational equity.

Now is the time to think about submitting your proposal. **WSSDA is accepting proposals from April 12-May 31, 2023.** It's an easy process and a great way to ensure the topics that are important to you are offered. **Be sure to put the May 31st deadline on your calendar because late proposals are not accepted. Submit proposals at wssda.org/present.**

Virtual school director candidate workshops will be available in June

School director elections take place every other year, and 2023 is one of those years. The filing period for those interested in serving – or continuing to serve – on their local school board is just around the corner. Here are some important dates:.

- Filing period: May 15-19
- Primary: July 14 - August 1
- General Election: October 20 - November 7

WSSDA supports those running for office through candidate workshops offered throughout June. These 60-90-minute interactive virtual workshops provide background on the role of the school board, the interaction of the board-superintendent team, and the impact on student success.

Watch for multiple dates in June to hop online and learn with WSSDA.



WSSDA Board Member Aurora Flores brings new books to children (and smiles to faces) thanks to her tireless work in organizing the book drive each year at WSSDA's Annual Conference. Last year's book drive recipients were students of Grant Elementary School in Eastmont School District.

Big smiles for little faces

Aurora Flores is a past WSSDA president. Hailing from Manson School District, she is currently the Director Area 7 representative on the WSSDA board. Thanks to her, book donations to a public school have become a regular fixture of the WSSDA Annual Conference.

Each year, books are collected at the conference and donated to a specific school. From the photo above, you can see that her efforts, and the generosity of conferencegoers, have led to big smiles on little faces. Helping with the effort is Hidden Spring Book Company, which often serves as a collection point and purposely stocks children's books to sell at a discount for donations.

We recently caught up with Aurora and asked her how it all got started. Her comments below were edited for length and clarity.

We started the book drive the year I was installed as WSSDA president, 2018. We also did it the following year, but then we had a break because of the pandemic. We started again two years ago, and I'm really hoping we take it to the next level.

I really want the books to go to districts where it's most needed. Last year, it was Grant Elementary School in my backyard. It's in East Wenatchee, and it's a wonderful school district. The kids were really excited about it.

Seeing the kids and how excited they were was just amazing for me. I really appreciate that the conference bookstore always brings books for the right age group. That makes it easy for our members to donate.

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“It doesn’t have to be a new book. ... Just one makes a big difference.”

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You know, it doesn’t have to be a new book. It could be books that we no longer use at home. Sometimes you have extra books. Just one makes a big difference. Just one book.

I was actually a state auditor for 20 years and then said, ‘I don’t know what I’m doing this for.’ Then I thought, I like teaching, but I really would like to have more of a focus on kids’ success with opportunities for career and college readiness. That’s why I chose the counseling profession. And so, I went back and got my master’s.

I’m a school counselor. I work for the school district in their online academy with kids from grades 9 through 12. I have 253 kids, about half the caseload I used to have.

I did not speak English when I started school, so to me, English

literacy was important. We never had books in our home, so, we relied on the library.

I remember having a fifth-grade teacher that would read to us every day after lunch. That is what spurred my interest in providing opportunities for kids to have that chance to read.

I often talk about my family background. We were nine kids. All of us have bachelor’s, master’s, or professional degrees, all except one. Education, for us, was that door for opportunity.

Public education has been a passion of mine for a long time because I think it’s a way of serving all the kids, helping provide access and inclusion, but especially knowledge and skills. For me, public education is really important, and literacy in particular.

Good Morning WSSDA Team,

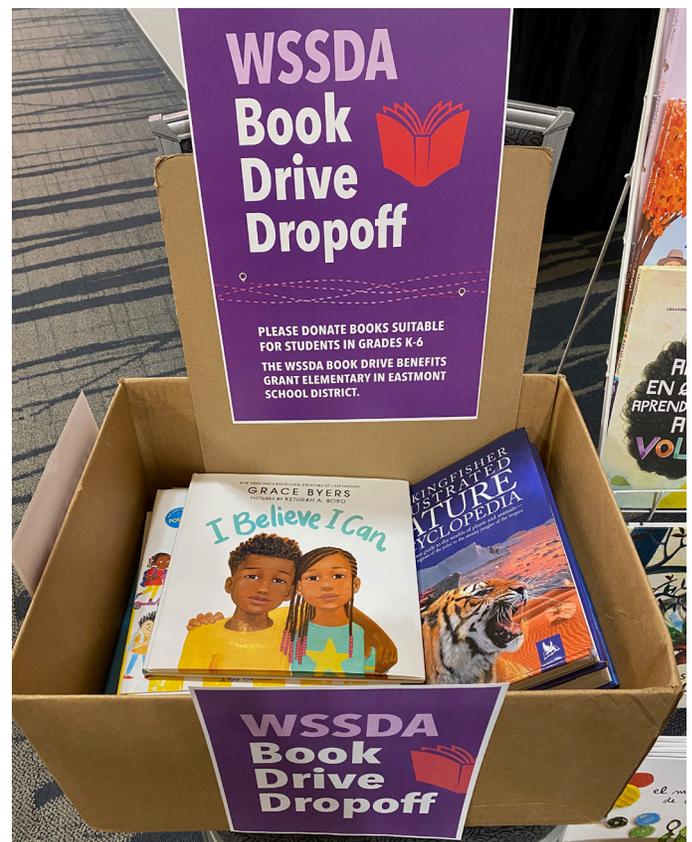
Thank you for the generous donation of books to our library. The selection is wonderful. We love the variety of fiction and non-fiction, wonderful authors are represented, high-interest topics, and some titles that you purchased for us in English and also in Spanish. That is awesome for our EL students! We truly appreciate this donation and the warm intention behind it.

Sincerely,
Kirsten Mittelstaedt
Principal of Grant Elementary School
Eastmont School District

Dear WSSDA Members,

The kids and I thank you for your donation of books. New books are so fun and exciting! The kids will reap hours of enjoyment from every one! Thank you so much!

Sincerely,
Katy Luttrell
Library Paraeducator at Grant Elementary School
Eastmont School District



Donations for the book drive are collected from the WSSDA community at Annual Conference.



OnCall: Promote your school lunch program

It's tough to concentrate on learning when you're hungry. That's why school meal programs play an important role in our public schools. The breakfasts and lunches give students the nutrition and fuel to stay energized and focused throughout the day.

School meals are the primary source of consistent, balanced nutrition for many children. Sadly, in some cases, school meals are the only meals they will receive each day.

Healthy eating is essential not only for nurturing healthy bodies but also for promoting learning and student achievement. Data from the 2019 National Youth Risk Behavior Survey (bit.ly/3J9CWdZ) show that students with higher academic grades are more likely to engage in healthy dietary behaviors than those with lower grades.

Consider these findings from the survey:

- 42% of U.S. high school students with mostly A's ate breakfast every day during the seven days before the survey, compared to 20% of students with mostly D/F's.

- 66% of U.S. high school students with mostly A's ate vegetables (green salad, carrots or other vegetables) during the seven days before the survey, compared to only 52% of students with mostly D/F's
- 41% of U.S. high students with mostly A's did not drink a can, bottle or glass of soda or pop during the seven days before the survey, compared to 21% of students with mostly D/F's.

Many students are eligible to receive low-cost or free meals through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's School Breakfast Program and National School Lunch Program. But for various reasons — including lack of information about the programs — not all families take advantage of them. Some strategic marketing and good old-fashioned word-of-mouth promotion can help schools to build awareness of the programs and how they contribute to student success.

This was excerpted from a longer article that appeared in WSSDA's OnCall. Contact WSSDA to subscribe to OnCall for ready-to-use district communication content, tools, and tips.

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Keeping your board's policies current can be challenging.

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Changes in the law and recommended practices occur frequently, so policy-making should be an ongoing task for school boards.

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Visit wssda.org/policyreview for more information.



Expanding the expertise of school directors

WSSDA's OnBoard training has grown substantially since it was introduced in 2019. Several learning experiences covering school finance, district budgets, and educational equity are available. And more topics are on the way. Being responsive to the needs of school directors has always been a high priority. Therefore, OnBoard is evolving to give directors more choices and greater flexibility.

The requirement to take an introductory course before other equity trainings has been removed. This change honors the lived and professional experience that directors may already have. The background of each school director is unique, and so is the expertise they bring with them.

The educational equity trainings that cover various aspects of diversity, inclusion, and cultural proficiency, specific to the school director role, are now available to take in any order. Starting in 2023, taking any two of the learning experiences will fulfill the legislative mandate for initial training in educational equity. **Learn more at wssda.org/onboard.**



School board members attend an OnBoard workshop at WSSDA's 2022 Annual Conference in Spokane.



New for 2023: live virtual trainings

School directors wanted virtual training options and now they have them. WSSDA put training at their fingertips by offering live, collaborative online courses. This spring, almost 20 virtual trainings hit the calendar with three options offered in person. Besides professional development, directors will build connections with peers and hopefully come away with an even greater capacity to serve their communities. Spots are filling up, so register today. Please note that registration closes one week prior to each course.

Spring training schedule

Advancing Inclusion Through Belonging

- Tue, Apr 4, 2023, 5:30pm - Virtual training (Zoom)
- Mon, Apr 10, 2023, 5:30pm - Virtual training (Zoom)
- Sat, Apr 15, 2023, 9:30am - Pasco
- Mon, Apr 17, 2023, 5:30pm - Virtual training (Zoom)
- Mon, Apr 26, 2023, 5:30pm - Virtual training (Zoom)

Intro to the Commitment to Educational Equity

- Thu, Apr 6, 2023, 5:30pm - Virtual training (Zoom)
- Wed, Apr 12, 2023, 5:30pm - Virtual training (Zoom)
- Thu, May 11, 2023, 5:30pm - Virtual training (Zoom)
- Tue, May 23, 2023, 5:30pm - Virtual training (Zoom)

Identity Discrimination: A Look at Federal Involvement

- Sat, May 13, 2023, 9:30am - Vancouver
- Mon, May 15, 2023, 5:30pm - Virtual training (Zoom)
- Wed, May 24, 2023, 5:30pm - Virtual training (Zoom)
- Wed, May 31, 2023, 5:30pm - Virtual training (Zoom)

See all upcoming training opportunities at wssda.org/training

Meet your OnBoard facilitators

WSSDA has 14 leadership consultants equipped to facilitate OnBoard learning experiences. As new courses are developed, each person is trained before they can facilitate them.

One of the facilitators is WSSDA Director of Leadership Development Tricia Lubach; two are co-developers of the OnBoard curriculum working with Tricia; and another 12 are current or former school directors with impressive credentials and experience. In addition to facilitating OnBoard trainings, the consultants also lead Board Boot Camp and candidate workshops, as well as in-district workshops and retreats. Today, we'd like to introduce you to three of them.



Sandra Zavala-Ortega

"I used to think that being a trainer, I needed to have many years under my belt, and now I think that my lived experience is an asset," said Sandra Zavala-Ortega, a Vancouver Public Schools director since April 2021.

"Equity is part of my lived experience. It's not a choice I have," said Zavala. She decided to lead trainings on this topic so she could shed light on the perspectives of underrepresented student populations. Zavala enjoys learning how each school district encourages student success and their sense of belonging.

When asked to offer advice to school directors, Zavala said, "Trust your gut. Be open to learning new things and accepting different ways of thinking. Most of all, be present with your current students, take time to be in their space, and listen to learn."



Vanessa Edwards

"All it takes is a second for someone to question what they thought equity was ... I want to be part of that second and to give school directors the space to have it, to expand their knowledge," said Vanessa Edwards, who served on the Marysville School Board for four

years and facilitates several OnBoard courses.

When asked what she likes best about facilitating, Edwards said, "It's amazing to watch people come in closed off, and then be laughing and exchanging contacts at the end of the training. Plus, I learn so much from them, from their perspectives and experiences. They help enrich me as a person and as a trainer."

Edwards encourages school directors to take advantage of WSSDA's training and specialized support. "All of you take that seat to do something positive," she said. "So do it with the knowledge to help you lead. You are not alone. I promise you that. Many of us have had quite an experience and would listen or provide guidance to help you get through it. Most importantly, never stop learning and asking questions. You can only grow by doing so, no matter where you are in your journey."



Luckisha Phillips

"I love Board Boot Camp because I remember my first year, and being so nervous," said Luckisha Phillips, a Federal Way school board member since 2018, and a facilitator for OnBoard and Boot Camp.

"It is a big responsibility being a director, and WSSDA's Board

Boot Camp was the first time someone was able to show me the big picture." Phillips believes that all trainings are an opportunity to learn, grow, and build relationships. "I love seeing the ah-ha moments and relief at every training. It is complex learning, but in a positive, supportive environment."

When asked to advise school directors, Phillips said, "Continue to attend trainings, reach out to directors across the state, and remember this is all about the students ... all 1.1 million. What happens in one district has impacts on all of us, so we are truly better together."

At the conclusion of every OnBoard learning experience, participants are asked to fill out an evaluation form. Some of the questions ask participants what their mindset was before they began the training, and how their perspectives may have changed after completing it. Some of their thoughts are featured below.

I used to think... But now I think...

Intro to the Commitment to Educational Equity	It would be a long night and I know all this.	It was fun and I learned something new.
	Equity is one and done.	Equity is fluid and depends on the students, teachers, administrators and board.
	This would be boring.	It was not boring. Provided good historical perspectives and was thought provoking.
	Equity is important but there is resistance to that language.	I can describe equity in terms of the benefit to each child, as every child is diverse.
	We would focus more on equity.	Belonging matters. I wonder what role belonging plays in building resilience.
	I was hoping there were others that were committed to equity like myself. I was a little nervous to share my experiences	I am very glad I was brave. I feel encouraged to see so many amazing school board directors dedicated to students around our state. I'm appreciative to WSSDA for this opportunity and valuable learning.
Advancing Inclusion Through Belonging	Was unclear on outcomes; wasn't really looking forward to another conversation about equity	Powerful entry point into equity and race conversations
	The training would be on racism, institutional racism, discrimination, past history, etc.	We need to treat all students and staff with dignity and respect.
	We need to measure the outputs of equity (academics, student surveys)	We also need to measure the INPUTS (teacher practices/ development, systems, etc.)
	I am exhausted after a full day of work and can't possibly last another minute.	That I'm so grateful to have shared these conversations with other directors. It gives me hope for moving forward our equity work to support children all over Washington.
Tackling Financial Soundness & Deciphering District Budgets	Arrrrgggh budget what does it mean?!	I can do this. I have a handle on finances. My eyes are open.
	Budgets are a mystery understood by specialists.	Budgets can be understood just by tracking down the codes and categories.
	I have a general knowledge of accounting but not for school districts.	I have a better understanding of the complexity of the budgeting as well as the coding process.
	Accounting/budgets – overwhelming	It is actually very structured, is now much more clear for me to understand.
	I have a very loose grasp on the buckets of money.	I understand where the money comes from, how it is coded, and loosely how it can be used.
	How do I understand this information?	I really enjoyed learning how to read and understand the financial health report. :)
	I wasn't sure what to expect.	...I now know a lot more about the 4 fiscal health indicators. This will make a difference for my board during budget season this year.
	This will be different than Thursday's class, but how?	OSPI website just became more interesting. Our district is at a good position, but the storm clouds are strolling in.

How school boards direct WSSDA's advocacy

What do you get when you gather 1,477 school board directors from around Washington state? Answer: 1,477 different perspectives. So how does WSSDA go from 1477 viewpoints down to a single advocacy platform? It's simple: democracy.

Basically, it's a year-round process with three phases: reflection, discussion, and voting. School boards are encouraged to **reflect** on WSSDA's positions throughout the year. In the spring, they **discuss** any updates or changes a board might want and then propose them through an online process. All proposals will be debated and **voted** on at General Assembly in the fall.

"I can't stress enough how much we need every school board to participate," said WSSDA board member Katherine Humphrey of Boistfort School District. "If you're a small district, like mine, please don't think your vote doesn't count. It's important we all engage with the process to represent our schools and communities. WSSDA needs the input of each of us to best represent every corner of our diverse state."

WSSDA has over 200 positions that make up its platform. The platform directs WSSDA's support or opposition to education legislation as it moves through government at the state and federal levels. That's why it's important that all boards participate in the revision process each year.

When position proposals are submitted in the spring, they're sorted into two categories: permanent and legislative. Permanent positions represent WSSDA's beliefs and values and indicate WSSDA's stance on issues of widespread concern for its membership. Those proposals go to WSSDA's Resolutions Committee. Legislative positions are calls to action for the Legislature, so those proposals go to WSSDA's Legislative Committee.

"One of the most important things to remember about the Legislative Committee is that we don't show up representing our own personal point of view or the view of our district," said

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WSSDA members raise green cards to vote at a 2019 assembly event. The 2023 General Assembly will be a hybrid event that allows for both in-person and hybrid delegate participation.

Legislative Committee Chair Rebecca Stillings. “That is one of the key things that we need to remember as we go about doing the work of 295 school districts across the state. We take all the proposals and carry them through debate and discussion, and ultimately decide whether we believe as a committee that these positions are representative of the state as a whole and what we, as an association, want for public education in the state of Washington.” The committee then makes a recommendation of “pass” or “do not pass” for the General Assembly, where boards will vote according to their preference.

“Some of these legislative positions can make a huge difference in the success of our students,” said Legislative Committee member Marisa Peloquin of University Place School District. “For example, I come from a military background, and one of WSSDA’s positions revolves around graduation pathways. We’ve got a lot of students who are sons or daughters of military service members that have moved from other states and still want to have a viable pathway to graduation. And so, part of that legislative position was making sure that students had the right pathway, that barriers were reduced, and that they could still transfer from, say, Fort Bragg, North Carolina, to Joint Base Lewis-McChord and still be able to graduate with the work that they had already done.”

While the Legislative Committee focuses on legislative action, the Resolutions Committee shepherds positions that represent core values, such as the idea that students deserve a voice on school boards. “It’s important to us as a committee that we’re

trying to represent all of Washington in what we do, that our positions are unbiased, they’re nonpolitical,” said Resolutions Committee Chair Trey Ising. “They’ll stand the test of time regardless of what’s going on in the world.”

School boards can consider proposals for the WSSDA platform before spring. Directors are encouraged to read and review the platform year-round. Especially while using it during a legislative session, they should jot down improvements they might hope to see. Then in springtime, if a board agrees upon some improvements, they can propose them between April 17 through May 12 of this year.

Channeling WSSDA’s multitude of perspectives into a single platform is an opportunity to engage in friendly debate, disagree with grace, and find common ground. In the words of Resolutions Committee Vice Chair Melissa Beard, “We might disagree on certain solutions to problems, but we all usually agree on what the goal is, and it’s to make sure students can succeed.”

**Positions
proposal
window:
April 17-
May 12**



**Save the date for
General Assembly
Sept. 22-23, 2023**
Hybrid event!

Participate remotely or in person

**DoubleTree by Hilton - Spokane City Center
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Spokane, WA 99201**

Learning & advocating:

WSSDA members gain, apply advocacy tips at Legislative Conference & Day on the Hill

Chamber music hummed through the air as roughly 400 supporters of public education filed into the auditorium for the opening event of Legislative Conference and Day on the Hill. The two-day event, hosted on February 26th and 27th, kicked off with training in advocacy at South Puget Sound Community College, culminating in meetings with legislators and their staff at the capitol the next day.

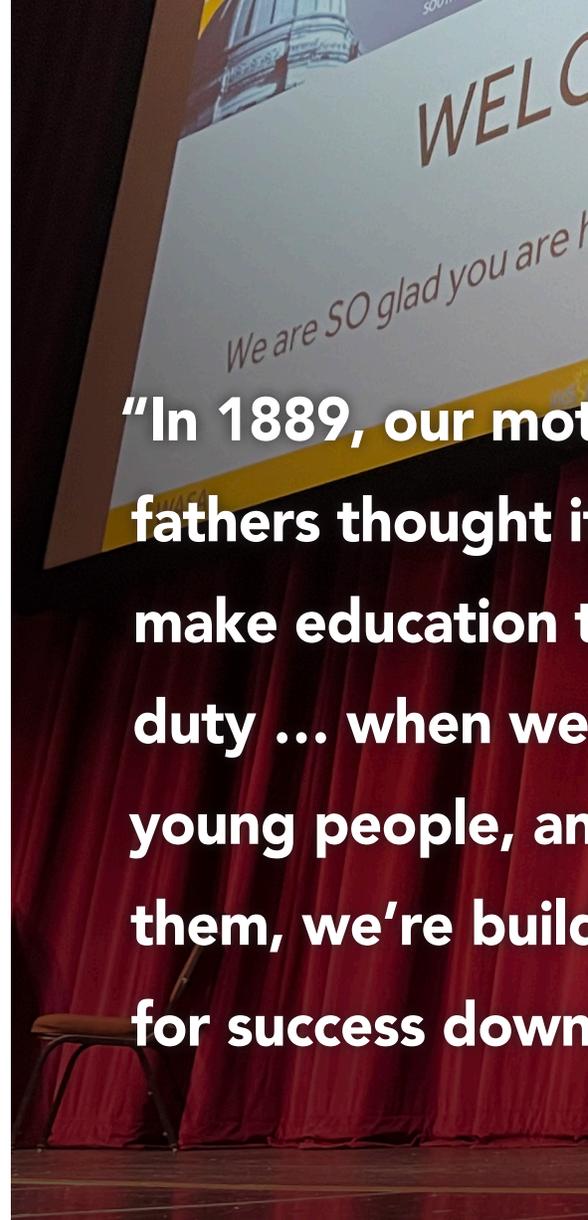
WASA's Dan Steele and WSSDA's Marissa Rathbone took the stage as emcees at the 2023 WASA-WSSDA-WASBO annual event held in person for the first time since the COVID pandemic began three years ago. Both advocacy experts, Steele and Rathbone alternately educated and entertained the students and adults who gathered to strategize ways to champion K-12 public education. The top legislative priorities, or "hot topics" as they're usually called, were funding for special education and transportation.

"Our combined event is a time for school boards and the students they serve to build relationships with Washington state legislators and advocate for public education," said Marissa Rathbone, director of strategic advocacy for WSSDA.

WASA President Michelle Whitney and WSSDA President Ron Mabry made opening remarks. Logan Endres, WSSDA strategic advocacy specialist, introduced student school board representatives from across the state who offered their own takes on this year's legislative priorities. Student speakers included Tejasvini Vijay of Riverview School District, Madhumitha Gandhi of Snoqualmie Valley School District, and Morgan Thomas of North Mason School District.

Superintendent of Public Instruction Chris Reykdal was also in attendance. "People like their local schools," said Reykdal. "They believe in them, and they want them to be successful. That crosses the political aisle. It's in every region of the state." He added, "In 1889, our mothers and fathers thought it was wise to make education the paramount duty ... be clear to future generations that

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COMPL...
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WASBO

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Top: State Superintendent Chris Reykdal delivers remarks on pushing the needle on behalf of students. Left: WSSDA Director of Strategic Advocacy Marissa Rathbone and WASA Assistant Executive Director Dan Steele educate the audience on the current legislative landscape. Above, from left to right: Student Representatives Madhumitha Ghandi (Snoqualmie Valley School District), Morgan Thomas (North Mason School District) and Tejasvini Vijay (Riverview School District) describe how special education and transportation shortfalls affect their school districts.

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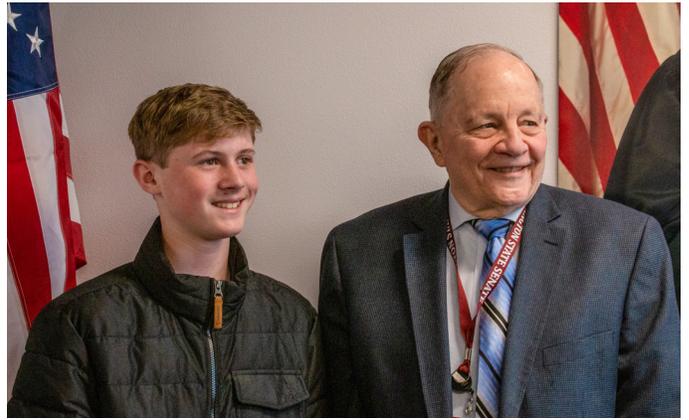
as they grapple with difficult things from economic recession to global pandemics, don't lose focus on the fact that when we invest in young people, and we support them, we're building capacity for success down the road. And, while you are balancing issues of housing, and you are balancing issues of substance abuse and mental health in our communities, the best way to avoid those tomorrow and every day thereafter is a public education system that invests in young people today ... 90% of everybody in the labor force in this state was a public-school student. We are the economic engine of the state."

Shankar Vedantam of NPR's Hidden Brain delivered the keynote speech, offering techniques on the art of persuasion. Washington Governor Jay Inslee and ranking house and senate members from the education committees made appearances in pre-recorded videos.

The following day was Day on the Hill. School directors and student board representatives gathered for a group photo, then visited legislators and their staff in the state house and senate. Students also met with the governor and separately with Superintendent Reykdal. A local news outlet filmed the students peppering the superintendent with pointed questions.



Above: Senator Shelly Short (7th district) speaks with Eastmont School Board legislative representative Whitney Smith.



Above: Student Liam Morensen from West Valley School District joins his school board during their meeting with Senator Mike Padden (4th district).



Student board representatives meet and pose questions to Governor Jay Inslee.



Above: Student board representatives get a chance to ask Chris Reykdal about concerns facing their districts and share their personal experiences.



Above: King 5 News interviews Madhumitha Ghandi (Snoqualmie Valley SD) and Kwabena Ledbetter (Ferndale SD) after the discussion.



University Place board members Marisa Peloquin and Mary Lu Dickenson meet with Eatonville School Board member Ronda Litzenberger in the rotunda.



Student Representative Madison Buchanan (Centralia SD) has an impromptu chat with Governor Jay Inslee.

The art of persuasion: Keynoter Shankar Vedantam shares advice on engaging



During The Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union planned a dangerous joint mission to dock the Apollo and Soyuz spacecraft. In preparation, the cosmonauts studied English, and the U.S. astronauts practiced Russian. “So why in the world would you ask people to speak a second language?” asked Shankar Vedantam, “Because it turns out that when you speak their language poorly, they can understand you better than when you speak your own language very well.”

Shankar Vedantam opened the keynote speech at Legislative Conference with a lesson from the 1975 joint space mission. The host of NPR’s Hidden Brain, Vedantam returned for his second year to teach public education advocates about the art of persuasion on February 26th, 2023.

Three panelists interviewed Vedantam from the stage as he spoke from the big screen to roughly 400 people in the audience. Here are a few highlights from his interview with panelists Marissa Rathbone, director of strategic advocacy at WSSDA, Tejasvini Vijay, student board representative for Riverview School District, and Kathy Mulkerin of the Walla Walla School Board.

“The question to ask is not ‘How do you get the legislator to agree with you,’ but you really have to ask the question, ‘How do I get the legislator into the frame of mind where he or she is able to listen to me?’”

CONVERSATIONAL RECEPTIVENESS

Kathy Mulkerin, who is also on WSSDA’s Legislative Committee, asked, “I’m curious about conversational receptiveness and how we can use it to encourage our legislators to vote for bills and budgets that advance our priorities.”

Shankar described research by Julia Minson of the Harvard Kennedy School, “Very often we enter these conversations with an idea of what it is that we want ... And we fear that if we don’t get our point across very quickly that the other person will basically get their way ... You find that people are very eager to get their point of view out ...” However, Vedantam said that if you allow those with opposing views to fully express themselves, they will be more willing to open up and listen to your views.

Shankar suggested a method employed by psychotherapists in which they repeat what they hear back to the speaker, “Just the fact of having someone basically say, ‘I have heard what you have said, and I’m able to say it back to you,’ in a way that ... convinces you that I have understood.” Shankar said that this “is a very powerful psychological technique because it allows us to basically trust the other person.”

TELESCOPE EFFECT

“Our minds are just simply not very well designed to take in vast amounts of information and data. Many of us freeze up or tense up when we’re presented with numbers and graphs,” said Vedantam. “I call this the ‘telescope effect.’ Basically, when you’re trying to communicate ... it really helps to narrow in on a very, very specific idea that’s powerful, whether that’s an individual story or an individual detail...”

BUILD PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Marissa Rathbone asked, “Given your research on relationship building, how can the idea of receptiveness help us work through

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conflict?” Vedantam answered, “All of communication really starts, first and foremost, with making personal connections, because that’s how our brains operate. Our brains don’t start with the data and the numbers and the statistics. Our brains start with 1-to-1 connections.” He said that for a long period of time, humans were believed to have lived in groups of 40 or 50 people. And what mattered was not whether you shared the same opinions, but your interpersonal and emotional connection with other people.

NAÏVE REALISM

Tejasvini Vijay asked Vedantam to speak about the concept of naïve realism and how it relates to communication with legislators who hold opinions different from ours.

“Naïve realism is one of those powerful forces that affects all of us, but none of us are actually aware of. Basically ... if I see the world a certain way ... I believe that I’m seeing reality accurately. So, if you come along and say you have a different point of view ... I have a conundrum.”

Vedantam explained that our minds tend to react to this conundrum by concluding that either the other person is “an idiot because they can’t see reality accurately, or they can see reality and they lie about it, so they’re just bad people.” Clearly, that frame of mind isn’t helpful for advocacy, so the solution he shared was humility. We should be humble enough to accept that our viewpoint may be limited, so it’s possible someone else could

see a different worldview.

“So a legislator who’s having to make all kinds of different budget decisions, not just looking at schools and education, but looking at a whole host of other things, sees a very different reality than the reality that you are seeing.”

CONCLUSION

Shankar Vedantam’s keynote speech was a great reminder to build personal relationships and to cut some slack for those with whom we disagree. When we want to get our point across, sometimes it’s more effective to listen than just be heard.



Above: Student board representatives pose questions for Vedantam.



Panelists (From L-R) Tejasvini Vijay (Student board representative, Riverview SD), Kathy Mulkerin (Walla Walla PS), and WSSDA Director of Strategic Advocacy Marissa Rathbone help to moderate questions for keynote speaker Shankar Vedantam after the interview.



Trish Huddleston

WOODLAND SCHOOL DISTRICT

What do you do when you're not being a school director?

I have the traditional Monday through Friday, 8-5 work schedule, so I am blessed to be able to enjoy my evenings and weekends with my family. My family consists of my partner of 21 years, two school-aged children, four sugar gliders, and three cats. During warmer months, we spend the majority of our time at the lake, and during the colder months, we hang out at home, bonding with each other and our pets. During the pandemic lockdown times, while working alongside my children attending online schooling, I found I had so much interest in government that I started attending city council, county commissioner, and school board meetings, then ran for the position where I currently sit. I truly enjoy learning and growing with the everchanging education environment and working with supportive colleagues all across Washington state!

What are one or two issues/topics/challenges that are especially important to you and why?

While campaigning and attending various meetings over the past few years, I have met so many amazing people from all around the state, even making a few close friends in the process. My main source of support is my legislative committee partner, Crystal Moldenhauer from Longview. I'm also engaged in various advocacy and educational groups where I seek suggestions and advice from. Colleagues who sit on the Woodland School Board with me have been helpful as well. I've also found a ton of support through WSSDA and the Legislative Committee, which I was recently elected to. I am fairly new to this scene, but I can already tell that I am surrounded by incredible, caring people who only want the best for our students. I am confident that they will be a positive addition to my support system.

What is the most important thing you've learned through your board service that you'd like to share with others?

I come from a business background, not so much education, so this journey has been quite the learning experience. Even after a year on the board, I feel like I've only touched the surface and there is so much more for me to learn. Budgets, policies, and curriculum are extremely important, but I think the most important thing I've learned is that in today's highly political environment, we must put aside our personal and/or political differences and focus on what is best for the students. We are their role models, and they are the leaders of tomorrow, so it is up to us to set a good example. I also want to share how important it is for families and communities to be involved and invest in our children's education. We can never get enough engagement and support from the public!



Richard Beckman

SHELTON SCHOOL DISTRICT

Year started as a student board representative: Sophomore

Why do you like being a board rep?

I really enjoy the fact that I get to amplify the voices of my peers. In my district, there has not been a shortage of controversial decisions or issues that need to be addressed. In my position, I get to represent how students at Shelton High School feel about what's going on, and I get to advocate for the best interests of my peers.

What surprised you about becoming a board rep?

I was surprised by how receptive everyone was to what I had to say. At first, I had imagined school board directors to be on a higher level than students and that they would brush off what kids say, as most adults do. I thought that I would have to work hard to get my voice heard, but the directors have been more than willing to listen and collaborate to address issues in the community.

What is the day-to-day life of a student school board rep like?

I would imagine that it is widely the same as most students that are active in the community. I work on my classes at Shelton High School and South Puget Sound Community College. I also check my emails often because I network with a variety of people in the community, whether that be for school, church, government, or extracurriculars.

What was the most interesting policy you worked on?

The most interesting policy that I worked on was the one regarding increasing funding for special education. I wasn't aware of how much special education costs to school districts, and I didn't know that the state doesn't cover so many costs. I have spent my entire education seeing special education staff in the room helping students, but it didn't occur to me how much it costs to have individual teachers helping individual students.

Is there anything you know now that you wish you knew before you became a board rep?

I wish I had known that I could get as involved in student government as I now am. At first, I thought that my student representative position was a glorified messenger from my high school, but I learned that it can be so much more than that! I wish I had known that I could get involved in WSSDA so that I could have started my advocacy sooner!

How has being a board rep changed you for the better?

It has made me more aware of how public policy affects basically everyone and how difficult it is to reach compromises that satisfy everyone. It has enabled me to think more critically about modern policies and politics because I now understand the process that a policy needs to go through to get approval.

What is advocacy like?

It is empowering and fulfilling. You get the satisfaction of knowing you're helping others by amplifying their voices.

Is there anything we forgot to ask or anything you would like to add?

Besides being a really cool opportunity for involvement on a local and state level, being a representative is really fun! You get awesome opportunities like meeting the governor and speaking with legislators.



Mary Fertakis (State Board of Education), Danny Edwards (Riverview SD), Vice President Derek Sarley (Walla Walla PS), Brenda Rogers (Bethel SD), Executive Director Tim Garchow, President Ron Mabry (Kennewick SD), President-elect Sandy Hayes (Northshore SD), Strategic Advocacy Specialist Logan Endres, Legislative Committee Vice Chair Luckisha Phillips (Federal Way PS), and FRN Chair Drayton Jackson (Central Kitsap SD) visit the U.S. Department of Agriculture to meet the head of child nutrition.

Taking our advocacy to a federal level

WSSDA brings concerns to the nation's capital

About two dozen school directors, including WSSDA's board officers, traveled to Washington, D.C. last month to advocate for federal funding of special education and school meals for all students.

The annual trip is organized by WSSDA's Federal Relations Network, composed of school directors focused on federal advocacy. Joining the school directors were WSSDA Strategic Advocacy Specialist Logan Endres and WSSDA Executive Director Tim Garchow. The group's messaging was grounded in two WSSDA member-adopted priority positions: Support for Special Education Programs and Universal Free School Meals.

Federal lawmakers and agencies are very busy and hear from advocacy groups about many topics every day. Still, the group felt individually seen, respected, and understood in every meeting.

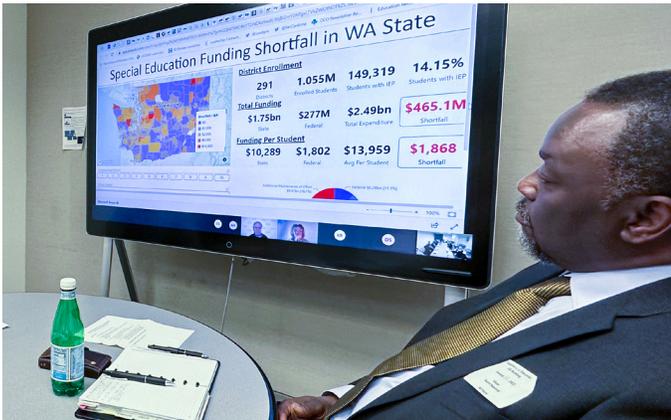
"That's something that can be attributed to relationships," says Logan Endres, WSSDA's strategic advocacy specialist. "Even though our federal government seems so far away and hard to impact, our lawmakers talk to us," said Endres.

The group met with Washington's United States Senators and Representatives, the United States Department of Education, and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). At the USDA, the national directors of child nutrition and several staffers were present. "It was an emotional meeting," said Executive Director Garchow. "We thanked them for their heroic efforts to feed all public school students nationwide during the pandemic. We also praised their rapid responses." As staffers absorbed the delegation's thanks and anecdotes, the impact of their work

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Above: WSSDA Vice President Derek Sarley, President Ron Mabry and past president Brenda Rogers meet with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Below: WSSDA President Ron Mabry looks on during a meeting with the U.S. Department of Education where FRN shared data on the special education funding gap in Washington.



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became clear, leading to a few moist eyes among the USDA staff.

Reflecting on the trip, Federal Relations Network Chair Drayton Jackson of Central Kitsap School District said he was most excited about having newer board members on the trip and building new relationships with federal agencies, particularly the USDA.

Director Korey Strozier of Tacoma School District joined the trip for the first time. He said, “Stepping into Washington, D.C. for the first time is like stepping into a world of history and politics, where every monument and building tells a story. Advocating for students alongside colleagues at Capitol Hill brought a sense of purpose and urgency to the visit, reminding us that the decisions made in these halls will impact the future of our nation’s youth.”

If you’re a school director wanting to impact the future of our youth at the federal level, contact Logan Endres (l.endres@wssda.org) to join the Federal Relations Network.



6th District Congressman Derek Kilmer, (Second from right) meets with (L-R) Korey Strozier (Vice President, Tacoma PS), Lisa Keating (Tacoma PS), WSSDA Strategic Advocacy Specialist Logan Endres, and FRN Chair Drayton Jackson (President, Central Kitsap SD).

WSSDA Delegation’s D.C. Talking Points

In support of special education funding, our talking points included:

- Washington state is currently receiving about 11% of the federally promised 40% funding from the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA).
- Special education funding is regressing, and costs are rising.

In support of free school meals for all, our talking points included:

- Students deserve access to healthy meals at school. Hungry kids can’t learn.
- This is a unique issue because school districts already know how to serve meals to all students – as proven by the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- School district experience significant administrative costs to manage the current meal programs, many of which would be reduced or eliminated with a free meals for all students program.

WSSDA direct

QUARTERLY NEWSMAGAZINE

WSSDA *Direct* is evolving. Our hope is that it will grow into a platform that helps school directors share their knowledge, experience and perspectives with each other. In this way, it will become a resource informing and reflecting the work of Washington's school boards. *Direct* will be published quarterly. The views expressed by individual authors do not necessarily represent WSSDA policies or positions. If you have a disability and need this publication in an alternative format, please contact our Communications department.

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