



WSSDA

# direct

QUARTERLY NEWSMAGAZINE

SUMMER 2021

## A new normal

Scholars call for a new normal in public ed, **p.11**;  
Oakville's new and improved district-community  
relationship, **p.12**; WSSDA President gets a  
teaching degree, **p.7**; Director Spotlight: Donna  
Sinclair, **p.9**; Students talk about highly capable  
programs, **p.10** And MORE! >>

ARTWORK: *Parallels*, by Issaquah  
High School student, Taylor Yingshi.





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From the Executive Director

## The only constant in life...

**A**s the saying goes, change is the only constant in life. First, we had the challenges of how to shut down schools, but now we have the challenges of how to reopen schools. As hard as it is, that's a change we're welcoming with open arms!

I'm so proud of the strength, courage and perseverance school directors have shown as we've moved from one challenge to the next. This spring at regional meetings, we talked about where this experience will take us. **On p.11, the scholars behind our board self-assessment tool** continue that discussion by laying out a vision for a new normal in public education.

And speaking of scholars, take a look at **p.7, where WSSDA President Rick Jansons shares what he learned about special education** while getting a bachelor's degree in the subject. President Janson's story offers insight on special ed plus tips on how to approach learning, one of the three pillars of school board service. (The other two pillars would be advocacy and governing.)

**On p.10, advocacy and governance are touched on** through an update about highly capable programs. Many thanks to the students who shared their experience with an OSPI advisory group and for the longstanding service of past WSSDA President Marnie Maraldo, who has served more than four years on that group. And I know there are many more school board members like director Maraldo representing WSSDA by learning and advocating through a variety of committees, task forces and other groups statewide. Thank you to all of you!

My final thanks goes to **Taylor Yingshi, a student of Issaquah High School**, for allowing us to use her artwork for the cover of this issue. You'll notice her painting also highlights change; from the traditional to contemporary. Just look at Taylor's talent and remind yourself of why we do what we do. Thank you school directors!

*Tim Garchow*

**Tim Garchow**, WSSDA Executive Director



*Photo: Wins for school directors in the 2021 Legislative Session, p.8.*



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**Julie Veal**

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# WSSDA direct

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#### *Parallels* by Taylor Yingshi

**S**tudent art has graced the covers of WSSDA publications for the past three years. The works are part of the OSPI High School Art Show, curated from regional award shows across the state. This year's cover, Taylor Yinshi's oil painting, *Parallels*, won the Superintendent's Choice Award and we're very happy to have permission to reprint it for our 2021 Summer cover. The piece explores the difference in worldview between Chinese elders and Chinese American youth. "The Kandinsky-esque painting and traditional shan shui represent my art's Western and Eastern influences," says Taylor. The painting will now reside at OSPI's headquarters in downtown Olympia for all to see.

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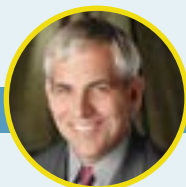
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## From the Board President



**M**aybe our society has always been contentious, but it seems to me that we've become more divided as a nation rather than united as a community.

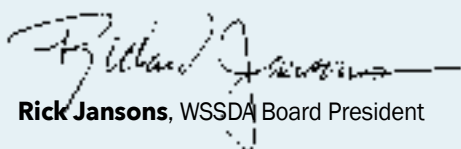
Like many of you, I have an opponent in this year's school board election. I hear, again and again, questions about whether I'm "for" this issue or "against" that issue. We've all heard about critical race theory, or the 1619 curriculum, changes in sex-ed curriculum, and other issues that, in my opinion, are sometimes used as hot political topics to generate emotion which leads to votes. Sometimes these conversations are necessary, and challenging. But we've become so divided that it's frequently difficult to hold meaningful, thoughtful discussions about policy.

I've talked with some of you who've thought about resigning because of the conflict and heated emotions that came with COVID closures. I know many board members who've received hate mail, and even some who've received death threats because of how they cast their votes. Truly, we are serving in challenging times.

But I want to encourage you in your service. It's not whether we're "pro" or "con" any issue. Instead, we serve to do what's best for our students. Our sacred duty is to remove barriers that stand in the way of our students' success. Our mission is to provide supports, which may differ from student to student, to ensure each child has the best chance to reach their goals and dreams. We are leaders in our communities, and it's up to us to bring people together around this mission.

So instead of being for or against any particular issue, frame your thoughts and decisions around what's best for students. Instead of sliding into political rhetoric, rise above the issues that divide, and look to the values we hold. Values of community. Values of equitable treatment for our students. Values of high standards for our staff and students. Values of respect, caring and collaboration.

Abraham Lincoln said that a nation divided against itself cannot stand. As leaders in our communities, we need to unite people. Almost everyone can agree to unite around what's best for kids. Let our words and actions demonstrate our values, and let's stand for, and speak about, what's best for each and every one of the students we serve.



**Rick Jansons**, WSSDA Board President

## Leadership Development – Tricia Lubach

Poet Laureate Amanda Gorman summed up our resilience in "The Hill We Climb" with the recognition that "even as we grieved, we grew; that even as we hurt, we hoped; that even as we tired, we tried." The acknowledgment that struggle and perseverance co-exist can sustain us as we look for ways to return to a more familiar version of life and education. As you start planning in earnest for next school year, take the long view. Allow time to answer important guiding questions; for example, one year from now, what do you hope for the students in your community? How will they have recovered from a difficult year and gained from the experience? In five or ten years, how will they be impacted by the focus your board puts on their success now? As you examine your policies, budget, strategic plan, and goals for the superintendent and board, remember that your actions now will impact students' futures. That's why you serve. As Gorman notes, "for while we have our eyes on the future, history has its eyes on us."

## Strategic Advocacy – Marissa Rathbone

The opening quote of last month's Equity Conference reminded me of the importance of being in love with our work: "*The secret to success [in life] is to stay in love. Staying in love gives you the fire to ignite other people, to see inside other people, to have greater desire to get things done than other people.*" John Stanford, former Seattle Public Schools Superintendent, may not have been talking about being in love with policy and advocacy work when he made these remarks, but that is where his message took me. To advocate passionately for laws that impact all students and staff, is to acknowledge that words on paper matter for implementing equitable systems and practices. As we work this interim, I encourage you to feel the love for the work you do – and remember that advocacy-informed laws and policies are at the heart of the practices that make a difference to each and every student.

## Policy and Legal – Abigail Westbrook

By now, we hope you saw our new document about masks at in-person board meetings and the newly revised FAQ about the in-person component of board meetings. Both documents reflect gubernatorial proclamations and Department of Health (DOH) guidance, and both are kept up to date as the governor or DOH issue new guidance. We recently completed the 2021 Council of School Attorneys Spring Workshop and have begun reviewing position proposals with the Resolutions Committee in preparation for this fall's WSSDA General Assembly. Please keep an eye out for the June edition of *Policy & Legal News*, which focuses on the impact of the 2021 legislative session.



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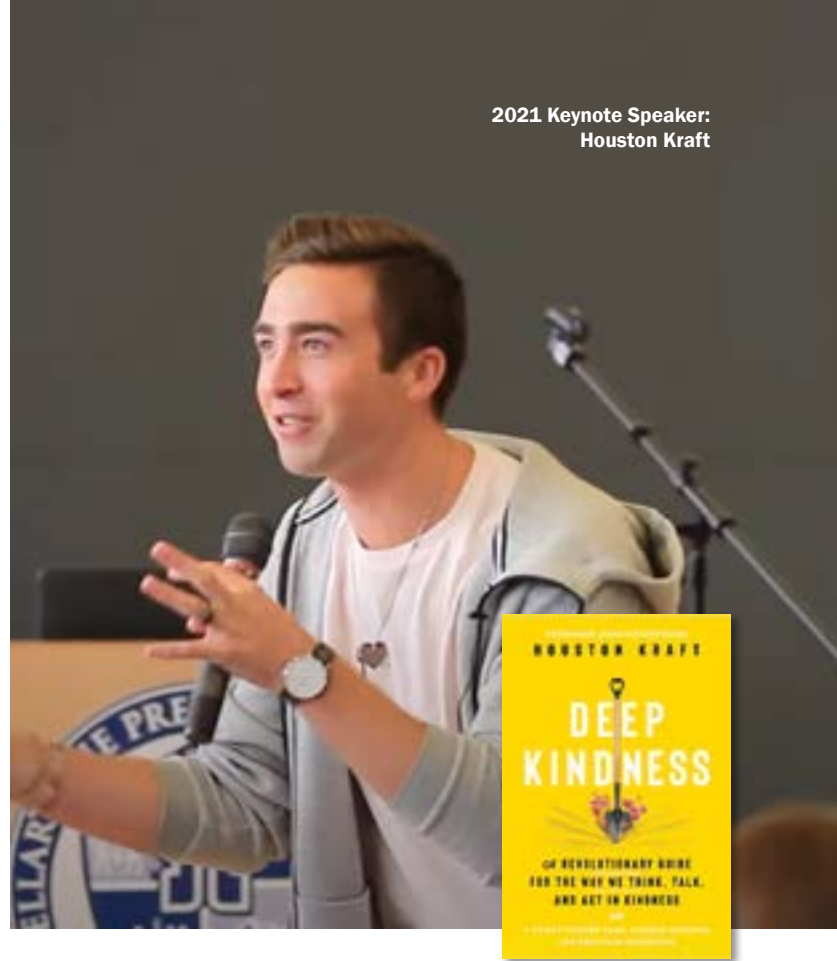




# Motivation, inspiration and illumination from Annual Conference keynotes:

HOUSTON KRAFT ON KINDNESS

**Have you ever noticed that the way you think about yourself doesn't always align with what you do?** Annual Conference keynote speaker Houston Kraft will urge us to take an honest look at the gap between our belief in Kindness and our ability to practice it well. Yes, that's Kindness with a capital K. As explained in his book *Deep Kindness: A Revolutionary Guide to the Way We Think, Talk and Act in Kindness*, the type of Kindness that is intentional, hard and meaningful is not light confetti kindness that just gets sprinkled around. Houston will share through his masterful storytelling what gets in the way of a Kinder world and how we can transform our own intentions into action. Houston co-founded *CharacterStrong* with John Norlin in 2016 to teach students social and emotional skills such as self-regulation and resilience. Together, they have worked with more than 2,500 schools in 10 countries and across 50 states to impact more than 1.5 million students worldwide. At Annual Conference, let him impact you.



**DID YOU KNOW?** Registration for Annual Conference opened June 3. Don't miss this opportunity to learn, share, connect and be inspired. Visit [wssda.org/AC](https://wssda.org/AC) to learn more and reserve your spot.

# ESDs go the distance to support school PPE needs



Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the Association of Educational Service Districts (AESD) has been central to helping schools across the state get the personal protective equipment (PPE) they need for in-person education. Since spring 2020, Washington's nine

ESDs have worked together through the AESD and on behalf of the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to facilitate two purchasing rounds of much-needed PPE for school districts, tribal compact schools, charter schools, and private schools across the state.

ESD 112 in Vancouver, WA, stepped up to oversee the statewide cooperative purchasing process that secured the best pricing on PPE at a fraction of the cost available online (for example, disinfecting wipes were secured for \$1.95/100, versus the open market rate of \$8-9/100). "The ESD went beyond the call of duty in helping provide PPE for our school district," said Randy Russell, Superintendent of Freeman School District in Spokane County. "We are so thankful to the team's tireless and collaborative work to help our district and so many others to prepare for the school year."

During the first round of purchasing, **ESD 112 traveled 250,000 miles** delivering PPE directly to **90 percent of schools** and **160 private schools** throughout the state. During the second round of purchasing and delivery, other **ESDs supported PPE** delivery to school districts in their respective regions.

In total, PPE orders consisted of thousands of items, including: **19 million face coverings, 750,000 packages of sanitizing wipes, 120,000 boxes of gloves, 250,000 gowns, and 80,000 gallons of hand sanitizer.**



## WSSDA President earns a degree in elementary and special education

By day, Rick Jansons is a manager at the Hanford Nuclear Site. By night, he's been a student of the Western Governors University teacher certification program. And somewhere in between day and night, he's also served as president of WSSDA and the Richland School Board.

After approximately two years, President Jansons recently earned a bachelor's degree in elementary and special education, inclusive of student teaching during the pandemic.

"The Zoom sessions allowed us to see directly into the home environments and really made me realize the diversity, and the very different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds of the students and families we serve," said Jansons. "I learned a lot about the complex legal and procedural steps teachers have to navigate. And I saw such a great desire by the special ed and general ed teachers to meet the needs of the students they serve."

Jansons said he enrolled in the program to prepare himself for helping make decisions as the Richland School District works to improve its own special education program. "A good school director looks for ways to learn and improve how they serve kids," said Jansons. "Leadership WSSDA and OnBoard meet both those needs, but to me, this was just one step further. Special ed is important to me, so I made time for it."

CONTINUED page 9



**"I saw such a great desire by the special ed and general ed teachers to meet the needs of the students they serve."**

**"The weekly Networking Calls have been an easy way for me to keep up with issues that are important to my district and our community. The legislative updates during the session were especially important in receiving timely information and being able to communicate my district's needs to legislators. I appreciate the behind the scenes work that the WSSDA staff does to provide these calls for us."**—Diane Sundvik, Kennewick School District

**"The weekly networking calls and the HUGE amount of support that WSSDA has given me during this past year have vastly improved my capacity as a board member. WSSDA's calls have made being a board member during a pandemic a potential gold mine for information and knowledge - for those willing to take advantage of it. I feel like I have grown the equivalent of 10 years as a board member in the last 12 months!"**—Jenn Stevenson, Othello School District

## WSSDA's weekly networking calls keep working!

**W**hat started as a weekly online meeting to deliver urgent COVID-19 updates has evolved into an ongoing source of information and inspiration. WSSDA's weekly networking calls have become a board member's personal briefing for essential information school boards need to know at that moment. The calls serve as a catalyst for sharing solutions, innovations, and for gathering input from directors statewide. The calls have been a hit with WSSDA members. Read what they had to say.

**"The networking calls have been an invaluable weekly touchpoint to learn about health/safety guidance for schools, updates coming out from OSPI, consideration and decision-points for board directors, legislative advocacy, and strategies being used in other districts through this time. It has helped me be better prepared for the work in our district, as well as connected with other directors across the state. It's like a mini-annual conference each week and I hope they continue well into the future."**—Sara Betnel, Shoreline School District

**"The agendas are full of important information and updates that keep school directors on top of the rapidly changing pandemic environment. Being a director in a large district, I find great value in learning from small, medium, rural and suburban districts. The innovative practices shared on the calls have directly benefitted Lake Washington students as we look for new ways to meet student needs."**—Cassandra Sage, Lake Washington School District

**"The WSSDA networking calls have provided a great opportunity to get timely updates and legislative information. Most helpful to me, however, has been the sharing between districts of the great work happening to improve learning conditions for our kids."**—Denise Vogel, White River School District

2021 LEGISLATIVE SESSION:

# A big thank you school directors!

**A**mid a challenging and highly irregular legislative session, you showed up in unprecedented ways—for your students, staff, communities, fellow board members and legislators. The virtual session provided challenges but you were there to provide information and insights. Your voice—expressed in writing, during testimony or legislator meetings—made a significant impact in the ways the session played out. Thank you for your many contributions to effective advocacy at the local, state, and federal levels.

Our senators and representatives also stepped up this legislative session. Prior to the session, many of our legislators spent hours in Zoom meetings and on phone calls to learn about the impacts of the pandemic. In response, they proposed and pushed legislation to provide for your students' needs. A huge thank you to the legislators who continue to advocate for the resources our staff and students need to teach and learn effectively. Now that it's interim (the time between legislative sessions), be sure to schedule time to talk with your legislators about what went well during the 2021 session and how best to prepare together for 2022. A great way to start your next meeting is with a thank you and an offer of support, data and information. Now is the time to learn about shared interests so that we can show up in the most effective ways before and during the next session.

During the 2021 legislative session, WSSDA staff and members responded to a myriad of legislative proposals. We provided written comment, testified in favor or opposition to bills, provided suggested amendment language to right-size various approaches, and communicated our gratitude and needs throughout the session. Here is a snapshot of how we showed up together to respond during this most unusual of sessions:

## ADVOCACY BY THE NUMBERS

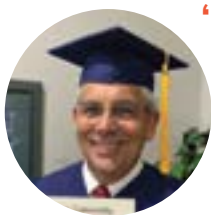
Bills for WSSDA's Bill Tracker	How many?
<b>PASSED</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>DIED</b>	<b>66</b>
Testimony	How many?
<b>PRO (staff)</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>OTHER (staff)</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Con (staff)</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>PRO (school director)</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>OTHER (school director)</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>CON (school directors)</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>PRO (students)</b>	<b>5</b>
Sign In	How many?
<b>PRO</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>CON</b>	<b>0</b>



## WINS FOR SCHOOL DIRECTORS

- **Flexibility in use of Learning Assistance Program (LAP)** dollars via HB 1208
- **Levy protection** for the 2021-22 school year via HB 1476
- **Transportation fund flexibility** during times of emergency via SB 5128
- **Small Schools modernization** Grant funding for 40 of districts in capital budget
- **Graduation waivers** for 2021 and beyond via HB 1121
- **Prompt pass-through** of federal dollars via HB 1368
- **Transportation “hold harmless”** for 2021-2022 school year in final operating budget
- **Ninth grade students allowed** to earn college credit through College in the High School via HB 1302
- **Elimination of school lunch co-pays** via HB 1342
- **State grant program** for devices for students and staff via HB 1365
- **Broadband access expansion** via the operating and capital budgets





**“You have to be willing to challenge your assumptions ...to do that, we need to be open to learning new things from whoever we meet in the education system.”**

But there was one experience that propelled him to learn more: speaking with a coworker at the Hanford Site. “She is a great employee doing serious work in nuclear safety. When she told me that she was a product of special education, it shattered a lot of my preconceptions.”

The coworker shared that when she was in special education, she thought it meant that she wasn’t smart. It took her a long time to change that idea and to realize that she simply learned in ways that are different from others.

“She is obviously a smart and successful employee,” said Jansons. “Speaking with her made me realize that not all kids learn the same way. And that our system should be set up to meet the learning needs of all the kids we serve, not just the majority of kids.”

Finally, Jansons learned one more thing that could apply to all school directors. “You have to be willing to challenge your assumptions,” he said. “I encourage folks to go out and discover if what they think is correct is really accurate. To do that, we need to be open to learning new things from whoever we meet in the education system.”

## Education in the 21st Century!

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**DIRECTOR SPOTLIGHT**

## Meet Donna Sinclair

WASHOUGAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

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

You can often find me reading, prepping, grading, or Zooming in to WSU Vancouver or Western Oregon University to teach U.S. History, Gender & Public Policy, or Public History. I might be presenting the memoir I co-wrote with Gloria Brown, *Black Woman in Green: Gloria Brown and the Unmarked Trail to Forest Service Leadership* (OSU Press, 2020), or Zooming with students, colleagues or collaborators on community or political issues unrelated to the board. I might be preparing a blog post, working on a newsletter, planning my next

book, or listening to a podcast or audio book as I walk my dogs or jog through the nearby woods. I have three children and two granddaughters, and am looking forward to spending time with them and my parents very soon!

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

My top issues are civic engagement, digital literacy, and equity and inclusion. I believe one of our most important jobs is to prepare students for citizenship by teaching them how government works and providing them the tools for informed, evidence-based decision-making. That means prioritizing solid implementation of the state's civics mandate and, in our ever-shifting social media environment, teaching the critical thinking skills that allow them to make distinctions between good information and bad. This goes hand in hand with equity and inclusion and truth telling in our organizations and history. This is why I serve on WSSDA's Government-to-Government Task Force, our district's Equity Advisory Committee, and WSSDA's Resolutions Committee.

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

I can't choose one lesson only, so here are some of the most important things I've learned: serving on school board is an ongoing learning journey; good people of all backgrounds care about public education; we work together to advocate for the best interests of children, regardless of politics; as elected officials, we have a responsibility not only to listen to our constituents, but also to help them understand local governance; if you want to effect change, get involved and do the work; if we keep our priorities straight—the kids—good things will happen; the questions you ask matter because they can help shape policy outcomes; collaborative decision-making is worthwhile; public service is gratifying; each of us can make a difference.

## Gifted education group hears from students

**S**tudent voice is integral on local school boards, so that's why WSSDA jumped at the opportunity to invite students to share their stories with OSPI's Advisory Committee for Gifted Education. Gifted education, also referred to as highly capable programs or "Hi-Cap," provides instruction, activities, and services to accelerate the learning of young learners identified as "highly capable."

In early May, a panel of students visited with the advisory committee to share their experiences. They said that highly-capable programs do a great job of providing additional rigor in their academics, but they expressed a desire for deeper student-teacher relationships and a more predictable school routine.

The benefits of participating in a highly capable program are far-reaching and long-lasting. Therefore, equitable access is a significant concern. "Why we wanted to hear from students was to understand their experiences," said Marnie Maraldo,



school director for Issaquah. "Hearing about their experiences, we'll begin to look at what are the barriers around improving diversity in our highly capable programs."

Director Maraldo, a past president of WSSDA, has served as a school board representative to the committee for more than four years. Bringing together parent, staff, student and school board perspectives, the committee serves as a resource for the superintendent of public instruction when making decisions about changes or updates to Washington's Administrative Code.

**Thank you to the following students for collaborating with WSSDA to share their perspectives: Kari Olson from Sequim, Spencer Peloquin from University Place (both pictured above), and Karina Lu from Bellevue.**

## TRUST LANDS: Moving Forward



WSSDA's Trust Lands Advisory Committee (TLAC) members continue to work at the local, state and federal level to assist WSSDA with ensuring trust land revenues are maximized to benefit school construction, remodeling and even district infrastructure. The committee, chaired by Russ Pfeiffer-Hoyt of Mount Baker School District, is comprised of nine school directors from around the state.

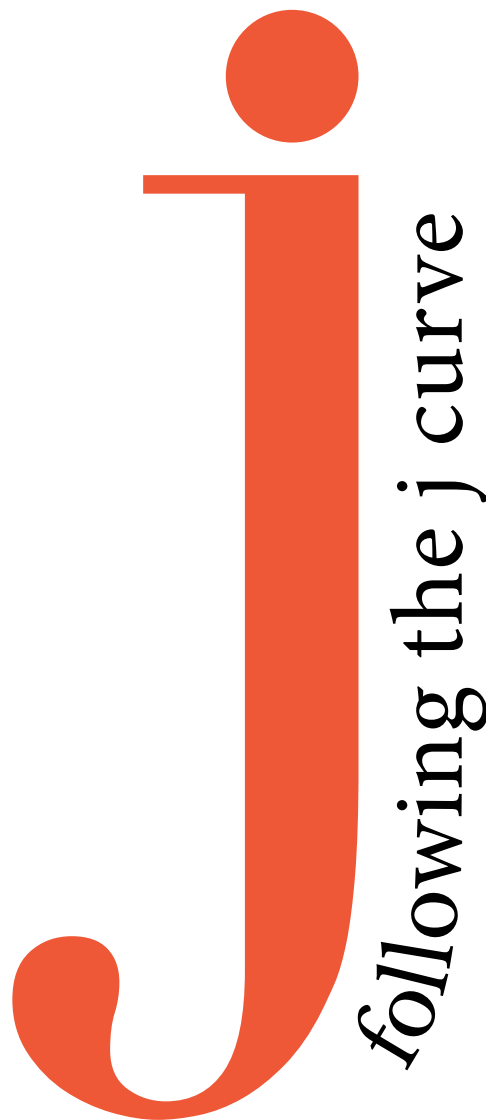
One of the many projects they've worked on this year is "trust lands 101," a toolkit that will provide information about the background, history and relevance of trust lands and describe why they are so vitally important to school districts.

The committee has also realized an unprecedented increase in reach and relevance during the 2021 legislative session, greatly aided by the efforts of WSSDA Advocacy Consultant Brian Sims. Through Brian and the committee's efforts, WSSDA has come to be a valued source of information and input for assisting the Department of Natural Resources as it works through policy matters.

One of the successes of the last legislative session was helping advocate for DNR funding to build towers in rural areas to improve internet access. The DNR got that funding, thanks in part to the committee's advocacy work.

Moving forward, the TLAC committee would love to hear from you! If you want to learn more about WSSDA's Trust Lands Advisory Committee or school trust lands in general, contact any of the group's members found at [wssda.org/tlac](https://wssda.org/tlac).





# following the j curve

## A call to create a new normal in American public education

*by Dr. Ivan J. Lorentzen and Dr. William P. McCaw*

**T**he large tree had blown over and was now lying in what used to be the kitchen. What was once familiar was now barely recognizable. Talking to a local TV reporter, the homeowner was lamenting the recent loss. But with a determined look, the homeowner took a deep breath and said, “Our favorite shade tree is gone, and so is the kitchen. But you know, there were things wrong with that kitchen. We will build a better one. We have to see this as an opportunity.”

Such reframing of a situation and consequent rebuilding can be represented by a concept known as the J Curve. The J Curve hypothesis, originally introduced in 1962 by sociologist James C. Davies, describes a trendline showing an initial loss followed shortly by dramatic gain. It has been used in reference to medicine (getting sicker before experiencing recovery), political science/sociology (revolutions creating more chaos before effecting improvements), and even kitchen remodeling (the kitchen during construction becoming utterly dysfunctional before ultimately emerging better than before), and others.

The idea is that things often get worse before they get better, which often makes getting started too-long delayed. It is often said that by just getting started one is already half done. How the present situation plays out in terms of public schools will be up to local school boards. Perhaps we are nearing the bottom of the “J,” where we have the opportunity to build something better. >

### Events as Opportunities

Today’s triple events of the pandemic, the recession, and social protests are like the tree in the kitchen: they are events that have imposed changes across many segments of society. There’s little doubt there are spillover effects on public education. We may not get to choose when or what kind of events arrive at our doorstep. But we do have a choice of how to respond. Done well, the new public education that eventually emerges can be better than the old one.

It all depends on whether we perceive current events as an opportunity to enhance those things that work—and to adjust those things that need improvement.

Trustees can no longer be so cavalier about their duties given their sworn oath as elected members of school boards.

This is the time to think about ways to better represent the communities within which we are embedded and better serve those within our care. These long overdue changes should not be based on personal preference, intuition, or political promises. Instead, changes should be based on 20+ years of research describing how the most effective boards go about their work. >

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# Oakville

The power of community engagement

## Healthy schools lead to healthy communities. So when Oakville School District set out to improve school facilities, they ended up improving much more.

In 2019, the Oakville School District, southwest of Olympia, set off on a journey to get their students safe, healthy buildings. Current structures had become nearly unusable. The building that housed the kitchen and cafeteria no longer provided a safe and healthy space for student meals to be prepared or consumed. In fact, when it rained, the building conditions were so poor that children were eating their lunches next to buckets used to catch the water leaking from the ceiling.

But before building upgrades could be made, the district had to secure the funds to do so. For starters, Oakville applied for a Small District Modernization Construction Grant through the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. At more

than \$4.6 million, the district received the largest such grant ever awarded. The district also reached out to their local legislators, who helped the district secure an additional \$517,000 in state funds.

But despite their success, even more funds were needed to realize their vision. “We considered a bond, but we weren’t sure what would happen,” said Board Chair Tamra Ruymann. Nevertheless, the district decided that seeking approval for a bond was the best next step.

To get the bond passed, the board-superintendent team knew they had to be transparent with the community, clearly stating what the funds would be used for and why the district needed them. The team was very clear about the goals set for renovations, and prepared to communicate them on multiple occasions during community meetings. They also planned to allow ample time for attendees to give their opinions and feedback.



“ It can be discouraging when you hold a meeting and only ten people show up, but those ten people will spread the word, and who knows how many will show up to the next one. ”



However, not many people showed up to the initial community meetings. “It can be discouraging when you hold a meeting and only ten people show up, but those ten people will spread the word, and who knows how many will show up to the next one.” And that is exactly what happened.

Word began to spread about the conversations taking place in these meetings, and the community gradually became invested. Director Ruymann has been on the Oakville School Board for 10 years and shared that she had never before seen so much community involvement. “Honestly, I have to give kudos to our superintendent. He set a goal of really engaging our community and involving them at a higher level than we had ever done before, and he has made significant strides toward that goal.”

When asked how he got the community involved, Oakville Superintendent Rich Staley said it started by identifying key stakeholders in the community. He made connections with community members in the local library, firehouse, churches and even met with a group of gentlemen that gather at the local restaurant once a week. “Once you identify stakeholders, you can begin building relationships and asking if they want to participate in district activities,” said Staley.

Superintendent Staley explained that in order to ask for help from your community partners, you need to find specific opportunities that relate to their strengths and services. For example, at various times in

the year, a local restaurant has sponsored meals for school events. The local fire station hosts an open house for students to visit. A church in the area even took on the task of providing school supplies for the Oakville students.

Since building these relationships, the Oakville School District has seen a number of improvements. They have built their much-needed kitchen and cafeteria space, updated windows, lights, HVAC system, intercom system, and some wiring needed to provide internet access. And more improvements are still to come.

The success of community engagement around facilities has sparked community involvement in other ways. “We’ve had times where we were bumping up against OSPI deadlines to get board members, but now we are seeing more than one person running for a position,” says Ruymann. “Also, when we have an open position where we have to appoint someone, we’re getting multiple letters of interest, which has never happened since I’ve been around,” she continued.

The Oakville community is showing its commitment to the district in even more ways. In the last year, enrollment has climbed from 225 students to over 300, and out-of-district transfers have declined. Superintendent Staley attributes this to the relationships that have been built. “Many of our students transferring out of district were a part of the tribal community. By having conversations, we discovered many

**“With our community being highly engaged, our district is headed in a great direction. There are so many opportunities that lay before us.”**



tribal families want to have personalized school experiences, so we are trying to give them that.”

What started as an effort to renovate school facilities has blossomed into a renovation of the entire district-community relationship. Appreciating the transformation she’s seen, Board Chair Ruymann said “with our community being highly engaged, our district is headed in a great direction. There are so many opportunities that lay before us.”



*Editor's note: The Oakville School District was recognized by WSSDA as 2020 Board of the Year in the small districts category.*

“The J Curve hypothesis...describes a trendline showing an initial loss followed shortly by dramatic gain.”

# j

## following the j curve

CONTINUED from page 11

This should be a time to set aside personal issues so boards can better attend to larger and more important matters known to be related to improved student achievement. Boards cannot expect to continue business as usual. We cannot deny the size and scope of the broad cultural changes we are currently experiencing. From instruction in the classroom to decision making in the boardroom, public education is being challenged and reinvented. Boards can either embrace and respond to the current reality or risk becoming irrelevant. The public will be insisting on assurances in **1. safety and security, 2. equity of supports and funding, 3. improved decision-making processes, and 4. a better return on public investments in education.**

In response, boards will need to: **1. Act to protect all students and employees in their care, 2. guarantee monies are spent to ensure that all students have access to the programs and supports that address their needs (especially those students facing poverty and minority students previously ill served), 3. embrace decision making that is open and data driven, and 4. better engage the larger community in an ongoing relationship dedicated to making the school a vital part of community life.** No longer can public education focus on the preferred, the privileged, or the “easy” students and use their experiences as evidence of district success. >

### Morally Required Change

Many students living in poverty and most minority students predictably do not achieve in school at the same level as white and advantaged students. However, there are enough districts in the United States that have reversed this inequity to know the disparity is not inherent.

Those groups of underserved students do achieve at high levels when programs and policies are enacted to address their needs. This cements the idea that certain groups underperform not because they are incapable but because of false expectations, discriminatory policies, and systemic district inattention.

If public education is to truly serve the needs of the public, then changing current expectations, policies, and supports is morally required of today’s education leaders. No one should ever have to negotiate for their own equity. Rather, this is a duty for the board. Lessons can be learned by studying the districts who have done this.

The public will soon include new voices demanding equal access, fairer treatment, and high performance for their children. Inequities in services will no longer be tolerated by those who have now found their voice. It is not an overstatement to say the ground has shifted under our feet. >

The tree not only destroyed the kitchen but exposed the fact that the house is no longer sitting firmly on its foundation. It is easy to see a new kitchen is needed; but on closer

inspection, we also need to build a broader foundation supporting the whole house.

Boards would do well to begin to consider these changes now. Budgets and programs needed to help the most vulnerable without putting the most privileged in jeopardy is the challenge and the new normal for public education.

This can only be good news for students, schools, and the country as a whole. But for a board, this can be a troublesome dilemma: how to balance the needs of all the students against the needs of particular students.

### Time for Improved Boardsmanship

It is well known that effective classroom instruction is the best predictor of student performance. What is lesser known is that competence and incompetence at the level of the board are also good predictors. Student achievement in any district can be reliably predicted simply by watching a board meeting. Board actions matter, and board members should be cognizant of this fact and concede their share of responsibility for the student achievement scores in their district.

Improving student achievement in any district may first require improvements in boardsmanship. However, changing board behavior is difficult. >



Previous publications and research have described in detail the board actions that have statistical relationships to high and low student achievement. So much detail was shared that perhaps most boards and their members found the ideas not relevant to their day-to-day duties. Perhaps this is because the ideas were too abstract, or maybe the boards failed to appreciate the sizeable influence their actions and inactions have on student achievement.

In any case, for too many boards, these suggestions were deemed unimportant and therefore were insufficient to motivate the board to enact necessary changes. As a result, improvement in boardsmanship has been resisted. In fact, some state school boards associations are so frustrated with board intransigence they have considered abandoning board training altogether. This is not good.

Perhaps now is the time to take another look at board improvements in a slightly different way. Rather than focusing on the details, it may be helpful to propose more concrete and strategic concepts in hopes of underscoring the urgency for change that recent events are requiring of public school boards.

### Anticipating the Future

Responding effectively to current realities will take courage and foresight. Those districts and boards that fail to

step forward and acknowledge the new reality will fail in the duties contained in their oath to serve everyone fairly. The board's job is not to focus on district details, but rather on the foundations, fundamentals, and finances related to the district's broader mission. Boards need to get their own house in order, fix the foundation, square the house, and set the allowable budget and expectations of outcomes.

The administration and staff then take over to execute the plan and operate effective programs within the parameters set by the board. In the end, the house will once again sit firm, with not only a new kitchen, but a new foundation that works for all the students who are fortunate enough to attend this effectively governed district.

Boards that have figured this out have lessons to teach. Several overarching notions have been found descriptive of the most effective boards that govern the highest-achieving districts.

These boards tend to:

- 1. Be guided by an affirmative, long-term vision**
- 2. Treat everyone with respect**
- 3. Focus on important issues with districtwide implications**
- 4. Be open to change**
- 5. Emphasize strategic actions**
- 6. Work to create a uniform, districtwide system of education**
- 7. Take responsibility to address district characteristics**
- 8. Believe all students can achieve at high levels.** >

In contrast, the boards of underachieving districts tend to: **1. Be distracted by narrow, short-term issues** **2. View some with contempt** **3. Focus on urgent issues lacking district-wide implications** **4. Promote/defend the status quo.**

- 5. Emphasize short-term tactics**
- 6. Accept disparate achievement scores between student groups, schools, and neighborhoods**
- 7. Deny responsibility for addressing district characteristics**
- 8. Believe only some students can achieve at high levels**

Looking back several years from now, it would be good to realize that public education had improved in several ways: First, that student needs influence budget development by reflecting efforts to serve all students according to individual needs (e.g., safety and equity); second, that boards respect their proper governance role by reducing incidents of micromanagement; third, that board members resist making intuitive or political decisions and acknowledge that the most effective decisions align more closely with research-based descriptors (e.g., Texas XG school board standards); and fourth, that because of the effective response, the general public has greater respect and appreciation for public education and is more supportive of the vital role of boards, administrators, teachers, and staffs. >

Recent events appear to have caused permanent changes across society within which public education is embedded. There is no reason to believe this crisis will pass and all will return to normal.

We have needed a "new kitchen" for years, but getting started was postponed again and again. But now, getting started has been imposed. The smartest thing might be to see this as an opportunity and go beyond the immediate repairs to make other reasonable changes, as well. The old appliances still work, but why put them back in the new kitchen?

Let's not be limited by fixing only the obvious. Let's use this as an opportunity to create something of greater value for everyone. The time has come for school boards to challenge each business-as-usual assumption and prepare to make the necessary changes that will transform board governance and, therefore, public education into a system that achieves its ultimate goal: high achievement for every student.

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## ONCALL: Students need an inspiring graduation speech

Last year graduation ceremonies and celebrations were upended when the pandemic started, but this year many schools are planning to hold in-person events. Graduates deserve a hearty pat on the back—literally and virtually.

**Share wisdom from your own experience.** What do you wish you had known as a young adult? What have you learned that you can pass along as food for thought?

**Organize tips into a brief list of advice.** Think in bullet points. Use humility and humor if that fits your style.

**Follow the show-don't-tell rules of storytelling.** Use your own stories about education or how a career changed your life or your outlook. Give examples, and be authentic.

**Use your strengths.** Students can benefit from learning about our failures, and how we leveraged our strengths to improve our lives or advance our careers. Talk about what you know, not about what you think they should know.

**Put it in writing.** Graduation ceremonies can be overwhelming. Students may not hear what you say in the moment, but they may appreciate the chance to reflect on your words of wisdom later. Be sure to post your comments to your school or district website or social media channels.

**Start with a really good title.** Have fun and capture attention with a catchy title that makes them want to know more. A few examples are, “Things I shouldn’t have done but glad I did”, “How adulthood is like a carnival roller coaster” and, “What was I thinking?” (a personal favorite).

**Provide food for thought.** The ceremony should be personally meaningful to students. Help them reflect by including questions to help them think about their future like, “What things do you want to leave in the past as you face your future?” or “Name three to five dreams, goals or aspirations you want in your future life.”

**Give advice, but keep it simple:** Graduation speeches should include advice. After all, this is the boundary between childhood and adulthood, isn’t it? Share what you know, but keep it light:

Writing speeches can be daunting. It may help to check out inspirational speeches from other schools or notable guest speakers. Here a few from last year, also a pandemic graduation:

**Dear Class of 2020**, speeches by Barack Obama, Beyoncé, Collin Jost, John Mulaney, Katie Perry, Lady Gaga, Mariah Carey: [www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=dear+class+of+2020](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=dear+class+of+2020)

**16 Best Graduation Speeches That Leave a Lasting Impression** [www.teenvogue.com/story/best-graduation-speeches-examples-ideas](https://www.teenvogue.com/story/best-graduation-speeches-examples-ideas)

**The 21 greatest graduation speeches of the last 60 years** [www.vox.com/a/greatest-graduation-speeches](https://www.vox.com/a/greatest-graduation-speeches)

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

## Steilacoom's Military Youth of the Year

**S**teilacoom High School sophomore Ethan Ashford has been named the **2021 Washington Military Youth of the Year in Boys and Girls Clubs of America's National Youth of the Year program**. The Youth of the Year title is a prestigious honor bestowed upon an exemplary young person in recognition of leadership, service, academic excellence and dedication to live a healthy lifestyle. Now in its 74th year, the program honors our nation's most awe-inspiring young people on their path to great futures. As the Washington State Military Youth of the Year, Ethan will serve as an ambassador for all teens in the state, will receive a \$2,500 college scholarship from Boys & Girls Clubs of America.

As a member of the Hillside Youth Center at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Ethan has served to support his peers and youth experiencing the unique challenges of military life. As President of the Keystone Club, a teen group dedicated to leadership and community service, Ethan has organized various volunteer activities in the surrounding community. His most passionate work has been as a Junior Staff support for the Passport to Manhood Club, a targeted program to engage young boys in discussions and activities that reinforce character, leadership and positive behavior.

“We are incredibly proud of Ethan and all the Youth of the Year nominees,” said Jim Clark, President and CEO of Boys & Girls Clubs of America. “Being named Youth of the Year is a lifelong honor. As the Washington State Military Youth of the Year, Ethan will serve as a spokesperson for Boys & Girls Club kids and teens across the state who face the many unique challenges associated with military life.”

This fall, Ethan will compete for the title of Pacific Region Military Youth of the Year and an additional \$20,000 college scholarship. Five regional winners will advance to the virtual National Youth of the Year event in October 2021 to compete for the title of National Military Youth of the Year. The final stage of the journey, National Youth of the Year, presents the opportunity to receive an additional scholarship of \$50,000 and a brand-new Toyota Corolla.



Steilacoom  
High School  
Sophomore,  
Ethan Ashford



A photograph of a young boy, Adiel Rangel, sitting at a wooden desk in a library. He is wearing a red hoodie and is smiling at the camera while using a black HP laptop. Bookshelves filled with books are visible in the background.

**Adiel  
Rangel**

## Clover Park kids can!

### **When schools began virtual learning last spring, Lochburn Middle School eighth grader Adiel Rangel was ready to dive in head first.**

Online learning was a perfect fit for him and his interest in computers made logging in, learning and doing his work a breeze.

Along with excelling in the online classroom, he was always the first to volunteer to help classmates or teachers when technology issues arose during the day.

"I don't know if he independently taught himself Microsoft Teams or if it was a program he was already familiar with, but he was months ahead of everyone else in his classes," said Lochburn assistant principal Celena Zanuttini. "He is an impressive student and a quiet leader. I am excited to see what the future holds for him."

Adiel is fascinated by technology. He has a knack for working with computers, phones and tablets and hopes to turn those interests into a career by building his own technology business. He's not sure what that looks like yet but he's constantly trying to imagine it in his head.

"Technology can do and be so many different things," he said. "Machines help us do work and can even help heal people who are injured. It's really amazing."

For now, Adiel is happy to get started with technology by building his own PC to use at home. He is also competing in the district STEM fair

this month with a project that explores how the shape and aerodynamics of different styles of paper airplanes compare to one another.

Unsurprisingly, his favorite class at Lochburn was the school's technology class, and he looks forward to more classes that allow him to learn about engineering, coding and computer science as he moves onto high school next year. He excels at math and works hard to learn everything he can to become a stronger student.

"He's very persistent about making sure he understands math concepts and works hard to turn his assignments in on time," said Lochburn math teacher Lysa Garber. "I appreciate that he's always willing to participate in class, whether it's through solving a tough algebra equation or tackling a corny math riddle."

Adiel is one example of the more than 12,000 students in Clover Park School District who succeed inside and outside the classroom every day. His resilience when the district moved to virtual learning and his willingness to help others transition along with him demonstrate his willingness to collaborate and be a leader.



This story and many more can be found at [ourkidswa.com](http://ourkidswa.com). Let districts statewide see your good news by sending it to [ourkids@wssda.org](mailto:ourkids@wssda.org).

# 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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