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SPRING 2022



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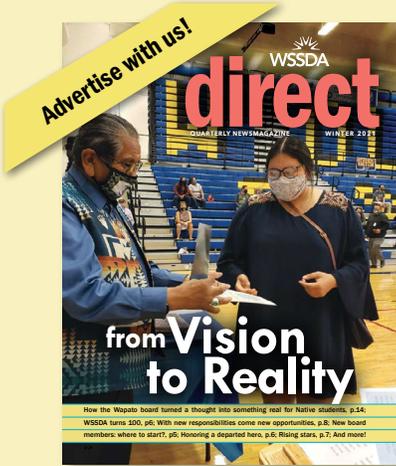
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Washington State School Directors' Association

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From the Executive Director

## A refreshing change

**T**his issue of *Direct* arrives as change is in the air. For one, spring has started to arrive, and second, the logistics of delivering schooling are beginning to assume a new normal that isn't crisis driven. As WSSDA President Danny Edwards points out on **page 3**, we're starting to hear more conversations about students and the great things they're doing rather than how to tackle the latest challenge.

And since we all draw inspiration from our students, let me direct you to **page 11**. Clover Park middle schooler Ivonne Berrios-Rodriguez won a national art contest for a drawing that embodied her reaction to the events of 2020. She explains that she saw conflicts based on a person's identity and experienced a few herself. That's what inspired her art, and gives all of us an opportunity to reflect.

And while we aren't in full-blown pandemic mode, the experience did lead to lessons we can take with us beyond Covid. On **page 8** see how Auburn's focus on community and staff engagement allowed the district to be innovative and responsive to family and employee needs.

Finally, I'd like to give a special thanks to all the folks who testified to the state legislature for the first time this year. In the last session, we avoided some outcomes we weren't looking forward to and realized some that we were. If you've never testified, students or school directors, see **page 6** for some tips from our veterans.

Thanks everyone, and enjoy *Direct*!

**Tim Garchow**, WSSDA Executive Director



(Photo Above) 2022 Legislative Session: Stories from school boards, see page 6

# WSSDA direct

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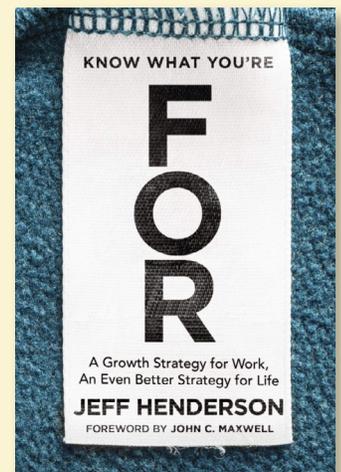
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## Leadership Development *-Tricia Lubach*

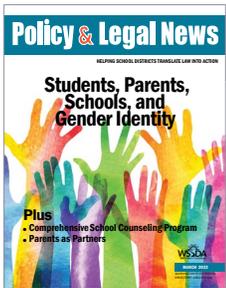
As I survey the landscape of public education, I'm reminded of a proverb that says, "when the winds of change blow, some people build walls and others build windmills." It is safe to say that education leadership has had its fair share of gusty days over the past couple years, perhaps leaving you feeling a bit wind battered. As life and schools begin to return to a more familiar look and feel, consider what it would look like in your district to build "windmills." How could your board encourage community members who are currently expressing frustration or anger at school board meetings to channel that energy into something positive? If you need support or resources, WSSDA is here to assist. Change is a constant in education. Those who build the mechanisms to capture change and transform it into progress are the visionaries.

## Strategic Advocacy *-Marissa Rathbone*

Results of the 2022 legislative session yielded some budgetary support for additional staffing, enrollment stabilization, and a few other areas. The session saw fewer bills introduced and fewer bills passed than usual. A huge 'thank you' to all the school board members and student board reps from across the state who testified in remote hearings. With the session's closure, we're in what's called the interim. Use this time to foster ongoing relationships with legislators and thank them for their recent work. To prepare for next session, ground yourselves in the existing 239 positions from our advocacy platform and consider how improvements can be made through the proposal window running through April 20.

## Policy and Legal *-Abigail Westbrook*

Happy spring—the season of renewal! Not only are the days growing longer, trees, plants, flowers, and yes, several legal matters are blooming. One matter coming into bloom is that with the end of the legislative session, we expect many board policies will be impacted by new legislation. Please rest assured that your WSSDA legal staff will be scrutinizing the new legislation for impacts to model policy and revising accordingly. Another legal issue coming into bloom is the U.S. Supreme Court is expected to hold oral argument for *Kennedy v. Bremerton*. The decision in this case might alter the long-held prohibition of teachers or coaches engaging in prominent displays of religious beliefs during their public-school duties. We're monitoring this closely to see how it could affect school district liability for possible religious discrimination or undue coercion of students. Meanwhile, thank you for serving on your school board. Keep blooming.



## From the Board President



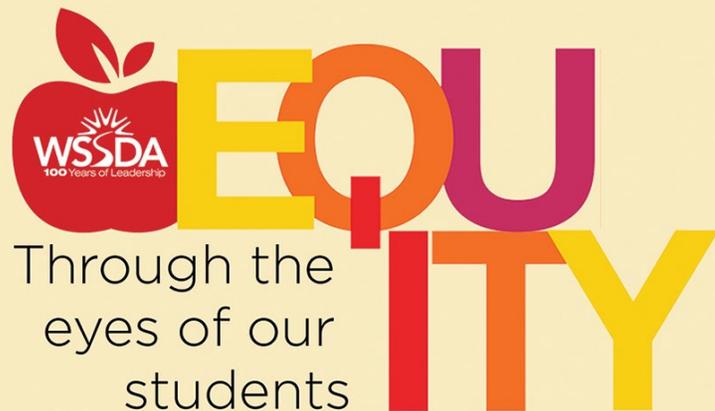
Spring is upon us, and gosh do I look forward to a feeling of renewal! COVID has given us about a two-year winter, but with all the health data trending in the right direction, I'm relieved to see the work of delivering a high-quality public education slowly becoming more about the education rather than the latest public health update.

But what a great job we've done to get to where we are today. Our health professionals and so many other public servants, district staff, and you, my fellow school directors, have shown such resilience and dedication. I've been hearing so many stories of great work that's been happening in districts, like the one featured in this issue of *Direct*. Nice work Auburn!

I'm also grateful to see our conversations shifting more and more back to the accomplishments of our students, and I encourage my fellow school directors to keep bringing the 'good news' stories to our statewide networking calls. Within WSSDA, I also know there's been interesting work happening with student board representatives, so we can all look forward to learning more about that soon.

I hope you enjoy this issue of *Direct* and I wish you all the best,

Danny Edwards, WSSDA Board President



The event will take place via Zoom May 18, 2022, 12:00-1:30 p.m. and 5:00-6:30 p.m.



REGIONAL MEETINGS:

## Time to connect and converse

Each regional meeting will include a meal, highlights from the host district, and a structured program. Mealtimes will be best for networking opportunities, chatting, and getting re-connected with directors in your region. The program will give school directors the chance to share their experiences from the past year, the challenges they were able to overcome, and the successes of their districts. Directors will also receive an overview of the results of the 2022 legislative session, and staff will share ideas for advocacy efforts during the interim.

See a full listing of meeting locations and dates on **next page**.

**DON'T MISS!** Throughout the months of May and June, Intro to Equity trainings will be offered at locations throughout the state. The training is a mandatory class for school board directors. [WSSDA.org/trainings](https://www.wssda.org/trainings)

## New faces at WSSDA

**E**arlier this year, Rick Maloney of University Place School District, Hilary Seidel of Olympia School District, and Douglas Benjamin of Bellingham School District became the latest additions to the WSSDA Board of Directors. **Douglas Benjamin** has served his local school board since 2014 and has worked as a licensed mental health counselor in Bellingham for 30 years; he also has five children who have studied in Bellingham Public Schools. **Rick Maloney** has a Doctor of Education degree and has served on his local board for over 20 years. He is an author, a former WSSDA board member, and a current member of WSSDA's leadership development trainers group, which facilitates workshops for school boards. **Hilary Seidel** is a long-time veteran of education, having worked in youth development programs, higher education, and currently at the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction as the statewide recognition coordinator.



RICK MALONEY



DOUGLAS BENJAMIN



HILARY SEIDEL

# Advocacy in WA, D.C.

In late January, a group of WSSDA's Federal Relations Network members and WSSDA staff attended the National School Board Association's **Equity Symposium & Advocacy Institute** in Washington, D.C. The institute provided opportunities to learn and network with school directors from across the country, and for WSSDA's delegation to meet with Washington state's members of Congress and the U.S. Department of Education.

Advocacy while in Washington, D.C. was strong and diverse, focused on WSSDA's federal-level legislative priorities, including Special Education/IDEA, Universal Free School Meals, Increased Funding for *McKinney-Vento* and Impact Aid programs. **"We felt so much mutual respect in all of our meetings,"** said Logan Endres, WSSDA's strategic advocacy specialist. Drayton Jackson, WSSDA's federal relations network chair, thanked the student representatives that participated, saying that they were **"amazing and represented not just their fellow students, but our state so eloquently."**



## Regional Meeting Schedule

by Director Area

### DA 1/ Anacortes

Tuesday, May 24 • 6:00 pm–8:30 pm

### DA 2/ Federal Way

Monday, April 18 • 6:00 pm–8:30 pm

### DA 2/ Lake Washington

Wednesday, May 25 • 6:00 pm–8:30 pm

### DA 3/ Bethel

Wednesday, April 20 • 6:00 pm–8:30 pm

### DA 4/ Central Kitsap

Saturday, May 7 • 6:10:00 am–1:00 pm

### DA 5/ Shelton

Monday, April 25 • 6:00 pm–8:30 pm

### DA 6/ Kelso

Tuesday, May 17 • 6:00 pm–8:30 pm

### DA 7/ Quincy

Wednesday, April 27 • 6:00 pm–8:30 pm

### DA 8/ Mount Adams

Thursday, May 5 • 6:00 pm–8:30 pm

### DA 9/ Colville

Thursday, June 2 • 6:00 pm–8:30 pm

### DA 10/ Endicott

Tuesday, May 10 • 6:00 pm–8:30 pm

### DA 11/ Prescott

Wednesday, May 4 • 6:00 pm– 8:30 pm

Check the WSSDA website for the most current information regarding times and locations:  
[wssda.org/events/regional-meetings](https://wssda.org/events/regional-meetings)



# Stories from school boards give context for legislators

**W**ith the 2022 legislative session conducting public hearings remotely, testifying on a bill has never been easier. Also, testifying before the Legislature ensures that your district's voice is heard and provides context for legislators engaged in ongoing policy conversations.

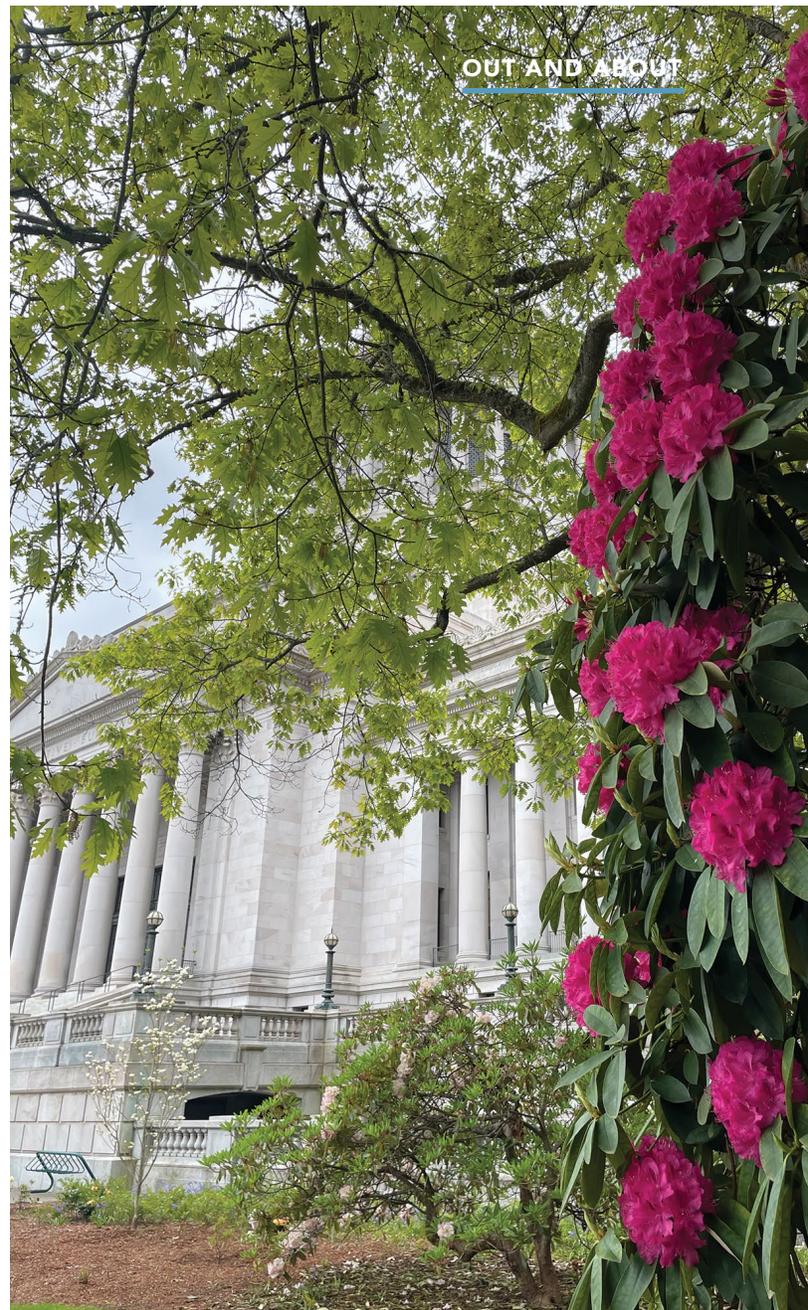
Throughout the 2022 legislative session, 14 school directors and two student representatives testified on approximately 32 bills on behalf of WSSDA. Their efforts were crucial, and yours would be, too. If you would consider testifying next session, see WSSDA's top five tips for success.

While preparing testimony, Sequim school director **Jim Stoffer** emphasized the importance of knowing your audience. He suggests looking at the committee member rosters to familiarize yourself with legislators' priorities, passions, and backgrounds because that can influence your choice of words.

Additionally, **Marisa Peloquin**, a school director for University Place, shared that she reflects on how proposed legislation will affect education in her district. "It helps me to convey the impact of legislation when I consider the statistical data in terms of individual students," she said.

**Sara Betnel**, a school director in Shoreline, added that focusing your testimony on students is particularly important. After drafting her testimony, she reviews it again by asking herself, 'how does this help us support students?' If the answer isn't clear, she revises it "because when students are at the heart, the why for the testimony is always clear."

As we prepare for the 2023 legislative session, we encourage more school directors to consider participating in the legislative process by giving testimony. The experience is exciting, rewarding, and fun. As Director Peloquin said, "I find it fulfilling to testify on proposed legislation because it helps me make a positive impact, not just for my school district, but for public education in Washington state."

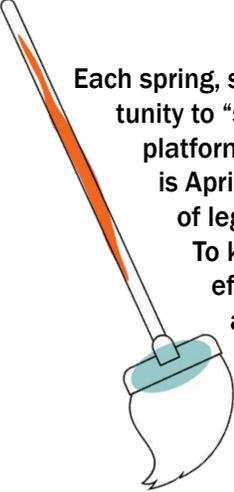


## TESTIFYING AT LEGISLATIVE SESSION

1. Learn about the legislators on the committee in advance
2. Plan on having 60 seconds to speak
3. Keep the message focused
4. Tell a story
5. Follow up with details

## Refining WSSDA's Advocacy Platform:

## An exercise in spring cleaning



Each spring, school directors have the opportunity to “spruce up” WSSDA’s advocacy platform. This year, the window to do so is April 1-20. WSSDA’s platform consists of legislative and permanent positions. To keep the platform relevant and effective, all school board members are encouraged to review WSSDA’s positions before recommending revisions or additions. Currently, WSSDA has 239 positions that have been

adopted by the membership, which consists of all 1,477 school directors statewide. When the window opens, WSSDA gives directors an online form to submit recommendations, if they have any. The recommendations that emerge from the “spring cleaning” of positions are studied by WSSDA’s Legislative and Resolutions Committees and then put in front of members for a vote at WSSDA’s General Assembly in the fall.

To learn more visit [wssda.org/positions](https://wssda.org/positions).



DIRECTOR SPOTLIGHT

## Meet Lisa Rivera Smith

SEATTLE SCHOOL DISTRICT

**What do you do when you’re not being a school director?**

I’m busy finding that balance between being a board director and still just being a parent in our district. People often forget that many of us are district parents too, and want to experience all that comes with that—helping out at school, socializing with other parents, bringing in treats for our amazing teachers, and more! That’s where you’ll often find me. And thanks to the unfailing support of my husband, I also serve on the leadership team of our local Girl Scouts troop, and as a director with New Dawn Guatemala, a Seattle-based organization that promotes development and educational advancement in the rural community of Nuevo Amanecer, a community of repatriated refugees in Guatemala.

**Where do you turn for new ideas about serving your district/community?**

I’ll confess, I love to visit other school districts’ websites to see what they and their board directors are up to! In Washington state, but also throughout the country, school districts face very similar issues and obstacles, so grabbing glimpses of how they tackle the issues is very eye opening. I’m also excited to be part of the 2022 Leadership WSSDA cohort. What most attracted me to the program is the opportunity to learn from and with directors from across the state. I also like to keep up on publications such as *EdWeek*, *Chalkbeat* and WSSDA’s Daily eClippings email. But I’ve found the best place to turn to, is to the communities themselves! Parents, students and staff are full of fresh ideas and advice on how to serve them better

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

As a Mexican-American who experienced poverty and homelessness as a child, I am keenly aware of the impact a quality—and equitable—education can have on a child. So, breaking the school-to-prison pipeline is incredibly important to me, as is early learning. I firmly believe that the only way to reach our 3rd grade, or 7th grade, or graduation goals, is to start in preschool. Research has shown that high-quality pre-K cuts in half the rate of children being held back a grade; it decreases juvenile arrests by a third; increases high school attendance by a third; increases college attendance by 80%; and increases employment by 23%! So, I believe we absolutely must set our students up for success through investments in inclusive, full-day Head Start and preschool.

# We're listening

## Sometimes we just need to be heard



**C**ommunity engagement in education is one of the five core principles of the Washington School Board Standards. The Auburn School District, whose board of directors received WSSDA's 2021 Board of the Year award for large school districts, didn't let a little thing called COVID-19 stop it from fulfilling that principle. Instead, the district sought input from parents and staff and made remarkable, timely adaptations despite all the barriers. Parent listening sessions, a brand-new PM school, and creating an intentional process for listening to staff are just a few of the ways the district adapted.

When COVID closed school district doors in March of 2020, students, staff, and community members alike felt shut out. There was no more chit-chat in school drop-off lines, quick comments with the teacher, or side conversations at sporting events that served as both personal and professional check-ins. The ease of access to each other that everyone enjoyed just vanished.

With information continuously changing and the opportunity to ask questions and voice concerns no longer so easy to find, school board members began getting calls. As inboxes began to fill, it became apparent that there needed to be a clear communication path for many school boards. In response, the Auburn School District began

creating new ways to hear from their community, starting with school board meetings.

When living rooms or kitchens became classrooms and board rooms, it was implied that community members could attend virtual board meetings just as they did in person, but Auburn wanted to be sure their constituents knew they could join in. The district gave clear instructions on where, when, and how people could attend school board meetings, and they spread that information far and wide. "We have a great communications team," said Auburn school board director Sheilia McLaughlin. "They shared the Zoom links to our board meetings on our website, in social media, and the newspaper," she continued.

Making sure people knew how to attend school board meetings was only one side of the coin. The other was making sure they had the opportunity to be heard in the meetings. Auburn accepted both verbal and written public comments at every board meeting. But to make it easier to provide written comments, the district provided a special "public comment" email address. The options helped avoid disenfranchising those who couldn't attend due to technological hurdles and ensured those who could attend had time to speak.



**“...it became apparent that there needed to be a clear communication path for many school boards. In response, the Auburn School District began creating new ways to hear from their community, starting with school board meetings.”**

“People needed to know we were listening,” said Director McLaughlin. “They needed to know we cared and we were going to help meet their needs,” she continued.

### **Parent Listening Sessions**

Attempts to hear from the community didn’t end at providing easy access to school board meetings. The Auburn School Board also created a Family Town Hall meeting series. In these meetings, families and community members had opportunities to communicate their struggles and ask the district administration for what they needed.

To provide equitable access to the town hall meetings, each was held at a different time of day and was supported by translators in three different languages. “We wanted to connect with as many families as possible. It was important to us that the community had an opportunity to communicate with the district,” said McLaughlin.

### **PM School**

From those town hall meetings, the district discovered that many parents were dealing with a similar issue. “We found that parents couldn’t be home during the day to help their younger children with school work. And older students were too busy helping their younger siblings with their work to do their own,” explained Director McLaughlin.

In response, Auburn created a PM Online School Program. With this program, children could complete their schoolwork in the evenings when their working parents could be home to help them. From this came incredible results. The district received a huge number of applications to join the program. “An idea that stemmed from families speaking out helped build buy-in. It made students excited to do their work,” said McLaughlin.

### **Staff Feedback Process**

Though the district wanted to ensure their community was heard, they also knew their district staff needed a space to speak about their concerns. The district began requesting monthly updates from schools regarding distance and hybrid learning to increase communication between district staff and administration. In these updates, a school represented by its principal and several teachers would provide a frank assessment of the successes, challenges, and opportunities they saw for improvement. “It was important to the board that district staff knew they had a safe space to talk about their concerns. [The updates] also allowed the teachers and principals to learn from one another,” stated McLaughlin.

CONTINUED on page 10



## ONCALL: The value of in-person communication

### **It's tough to get parents and community members to come to meetings or other events these days.**

They are busy with jobs and families. Meeting in person is still a worry for some because of the threat of COVID-19. And it can get pretty discouraging to invite people to important meetings and have only one or two show up. So what to do?

### **Make it convenient**

Sometimes parents don't come to meetings because they don't have childcare. Or they work late and don't get home early enough to get the family fed before heading out again. Many schools have successfully boosted attendance by providing meals for the family prior to meetings and providing childcare for the children. Pizza, hot dogs, tacos and other simple fare are relatively inexpensive but well-received by families. Parent volunteers and high school students can often be recruited for childcare. Also, be flexible with meeting days and times. Earlier meeting times, such as 5:30 or 6 p.m., often work best for families with young children who have an early bedtime. Saturdays are sometimes the best choice for certain types of events.

### **Go where parents are**

If parents aren't coming to you, try going to them. In some districts, teachers schedule home visits with the families of each kindergarten student prior to the start of the school year. Home visits are more informal and allow the teacher and families to connect on a more personal level. It's also less intimidating for some parents to meet the teacher on home ground rather than go to the school. Home visits are also a way for teachers to better understand the children they teach.

### **Be creative in the types of gatherings you host**

Many principals and superintendents host regular "chats" where they invite parents for coffee and doughnuts and a chance to chat informally. One Oregon elementary school that has a high number of Latino students invites parents to Friday morning parent meetings, called "cafecitos," where parents get together for coffee, pastries and homemade tamales. There is sometimes a short program where experts talk about topics of interest, everything from getting a job to opening a bank account.

*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.*

These monthly updates allowed the board to hear directly from the staff on what they needed in their individual schools during this time. Tangible outcomes came from these updates, such as more personal protective equipment, more COVID tests, and letters sent to the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, but the greater value came from the items that couldn't be seen.

"The monthly updates let the staff know we were here for them. No, we don't all agree, and no, we won't be able to meet the needs of everyone, but they knew we were there for them, and we were doing all we could to help."

Every time COVID attempted to take away the community's microphone, the Auburn School District continued to find ways to give it back. When school board meetings needed to be held virtually, the district created new ways for the community to be heard. When families said they couldn't make it to a town hall meeting, the district hosted more so families could be heard. When there were language barriers, the district got translators so everyone could be heard. When their students couldn't get help during regular school hours, the district created a program to do schoolwork in the evening, showing those who spoke that the district was listening.

Ingenuity and creativity thrive when more minds think about solving a problem. As Auburn found out through community engagement, great ideas can come from community conversations. If you genuinely want to help your community, you need to hear from them what they need. And sometimes, it may just be that all they're looking for is someone to say, "I hear you."



OURKIDS

# Thomas Middle School student wins the #USvsHate Contest

For the second consecutive year, a Thomas student has been selected as a winner of the #USvsHate contest. Seventh grader Ivonne Berrios-Rodriguez was selected as a winner of the national #USvsHate winter 2021 art contest. She is one of 10 winners whose artwork is featured on the #USvsHate website.

The contest asked students to submit a creative anti-hate message that successfully communicates the #USvsHate values of inclusion and justice for all. Ivonne's artwork is titled "All We Want Is Equality." She was inspired by events unfolding in the United States in the spring and summer of 2020.

**Student Ivonne says:** "My intention behind the message of this drawing is just to be able to make people realize that everybody deserves to be treated nicely! So, I wanted to make something that could represent what was happening in 2020, and like the title of the drawing says, 'all we want is equality'. I realize now just how judging people can be towards others, especially when it comes to POCs or the LGBTQ+ community. And it



**"My intention behind the message of this drawing is just to be able to make people realize that everybody deserves to be treated nicely!"** -Seventh grader Ivonne Berrios-Rodriguez

just confuses me how someone can dislike another person just because of their skin color, or sexuality/gender identity. And in the years, I did experience some things like that which led me to want to do something about it, whether it would make little impact on people or not. This led to the inspiration of 'All We Want is Equality.' This drawing is the interpretation that if we just help each other out on making a change, if we work together, then at one point, we will be able to achieve that goal."

**Teacher Miriam says:** "For years I've taught the novel *Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry*, and every year I find more meaning in it. This year, students were more inspired than ever because they saw their school mate Noel spread this message of tolerance. After Noel was featured on the #USvsHate website he has taken on a leadership role at our school. Our superintendent even wrote him a letter and had his art put on a canvas for him to

CONTINUED next page



hang at home. To create some background knowledge for the book I show “The Children’s March” by *The Mighty Times* and I use many of the lessons created by *Learning for Justice*. This documentary always captures my students’ attention because most people do not know that children were very involved in the Civil Rights Movement.

After creating some context, we then listen to the audio book and follow along in the novel. We answer text-dependent questions, we do Socratic seminars and share our experiences and perspectives. Students often have deep questions like was it morally right for the children in the book to get revenge on a racist bus driver? Or how

did the KKK start? This is always engaging for students and myself as well. I’m always learning! As a “mixed race” child I’ve always felt like I didn’t belong to any group, and I never met anyone else who was mixed with Korean and Native American. I became passionate about racism and making change, even as a young child. Being an educator gives me the opportunity to fight hatred and change lives for the better every day. #UsvsHate has been a powerful tool for me and my students to create awareness of the challenges students face and make BIG changes in our community. With this one project we have seen improvements in awareness and recognition of the LGBTQ community within our school and our school district or other areas where we need equity.

**“Being educators gives us the opportunity to fight hatred and change lives for the better every day.”**



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).



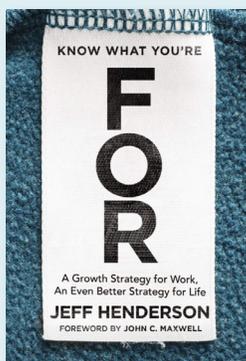
## BOOK REVIEW: **Know What You’re For**

Reviewed by Josh Collette

**A**s public servants, school board directors are recipients and conduits of feedback from their communities. In a new book called *Know What You’re For*, author Jeff Henderson urges readers to know what they’re for, not against, in order to influence positive change and bring others into the conversation.

Jeff Henderson has spent much of his career working in marketing for large organizations. “This concept of putting people first is obvious,” he says, “but often we fall short in practice.” He emphasizes the need for a shift in marketing that moves away from promoting products and focuses instead on promoting people. In other words, Henderson’s strategy for growth is about being for people.

Henderson shares powerful stories from experience that helped shape his “for” strategy. In one story, he tells of his experience driving a well-know corporate executive to a speaking engagement. Henderson was surprised when the CEO inquired about his family instead of talking business. At that moment, Henderson says, he knew this man was for him: more interested in the business of growing people than he was in growing a business.



To practice growth, Henderson believes we should ask ourselves two questions. First, “what do you want to be known for?” This helps determine our purpose, which in turn, helps us to serve the people and things we are for.

The second question, what we are actually known for, is a barometer for measuring whether we are fulfilling that purpose or not. The answer to this question, he says, comes from the people we serve. “When the answers to the two questions match,” says Henderson, “we have found success—the place where purpose and action meet.”

Henderson talks about these ideas in ways that guide us towards growth in our lives at home, the office, and in our communities.

Like many working parents, I sometimes find myself so busy that I don’t have time to read. After having heard several reviews of *Know What You’re For*, I decided to make the time. At first, I used my commute to work as an opportunity to listen. I found the concepts and advice so impactful and relevant that I bought a copy of the book and have since re-read it several times.

*Josh lives in Elma, Washington, where he has served the community for the past 10 years as a volunteer firefighter and was elected to its city council in 2019. Currently Josh works for the Washington State School Directors’ Association as its Chief Financial Officer.*





# TRUST BEGINS WITH TRANSPARENCY.

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