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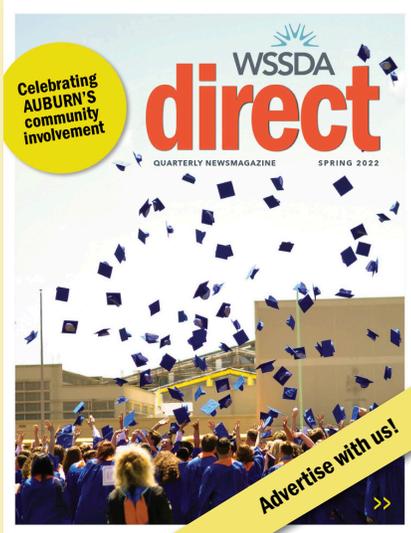


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From the Executive Director

## Belonging, advocacy, and inspiration...

WSSDA belongs to you, school directors! President Danny Edwards' piece on **page 14** about General Assembly makes that clear. WSSDA is your organization, and one of the best ways to make it work for you is to participate in the annual cycle that includes the WSSDA General Assembly. If you've never participated before, I hope President Edwards' piece will inspire you to come on September 30 and October 1.

While General Assembly is virtual, the WSSDA Annual Conference is in-person this year at the Spokane Convention Center, November 17-19. The theme of this year's conference is "Belonging." Annual Conference is the biggest event of the year for school directors to come together for learning, networking and to become inspired. There's no better event for helping to increase your ability to effectively serve your community.

And a terrific example of serving the community can be found on **page 16**. You'll find a great story about Steilacoom School District, led by last year's Board of the Year for medium districts. You'll learn about their approach to professional development for staff, communications with the community, and their work to help students feel at home in the district. As their superintendent, Dr. Kathi Weight said, "students achieve at high levels when they feel a sense of belonging."

Finally, thank you to the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction for the annual Superintendent's Art Show. And thank you to all the students who have shared their artwork with us. If you're in need of inspiration, look no further than **page 6!** When you have a tough day on the board, just pull out this issue of WSSDA Direct and gaze at the art show pages. You'll remember why you do what you do for the community.

Thank you for your service, school directors, and have a good summer!

Tim Garchow, WSSDA Executive Director





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# WSSDA direct

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**VIEW VIDEO**



## From the Board President



### Congratulations to the graduating class of 2022!

Graduation is truly my favorite part of being a school board director. As I did this year, I often have the privilege of handing out diplomas to our newest graduates. And a privilege it was!

This group of seniors had a much different path to graduation than most. However, what I observed was a sense of accomplishment, a sense of pride, and an auditorium filled with gratitude that we were in person again. Things are finally starting to feel just a little more normal.

I hope each of you felt something similar this year. Although I'm not certain that we are entirely out of the woods yet, it feels like we're much closer to coming out of this pandemic. I feel like we've learned a lot, and the steps we took to give our students the best educational experience possible will make us better prepared going forward. I'm extremely proud of the work performed at nearly every level in our communities, but especially our teachers, building staff, superintendents, central office personnel, and YOU, the school board directors! You worked tirelessly for your communities in what had to have been the most challenging years that you have ever faced on your board!

I've also been able to witness how hard your WSSDA staff works for all of us, including the support they provide to your WSSDA Board of Directors. As president of WSSDA, I'd like to do a huge shout out to the board of directors that represent you. These people are some of the finest individuals I've had the privilege of working with. They represent all 11 of WSSDA's Director Areas across the state, and they are passionate! While we don't always come to unanimous decisions, we tend to find consensus because each person sitting around that big table is advocating for their kids, our kids, your kids! The next time you happen to see your area's representative on the board, consider giving them a thank you for all the time and work they put in for all of us!

Thank you all, and it's my honor to serve as your president.

**Danny Edwards**, WSSDA Board President

## Leadership Development –Tricia Lubach

While others enjoy ice cream and watermelon on hot July days, your Leadership Development team was in Spokane sampling autumnal main dishes and bread pudding to ensure your meals at the November Annual Conference keep you fueled to engage. Not every task is so appealing, but we spend 12 months a year preparing for the conference. This year, we have some surprises up our sleeves, including a new event – the President's Dinner – to kick off three days of learning and connecting.

Developing and delivering OnBoard training is another year-round effort. Watch for educational equity trainings offered statewide in early fall and again at conference. School finance and budgeting learning experiences will also be available. Simultaneously, we are developing new OnBoard trainings this summer, and many of you have graciously attended pilots to help us perfect them. You work hard all year leading your districts, and we do the same to support you.

## Strategic Advocacy –Marissa Rathbone

Jane Goodall believes that the survival of humanity is dependent on hope, and in *Book of Hope*, she names the “power of youth” as one of the reasons she remains hopeful. In bringing that concept of hope to our work, one of the seven key tenets of our branch is student-centered advocacy. To embody this aim, your strategic advocacy specialist, Logan Endres, has established a robust, statewide Student Representatives Network (SRN) where we can call on students to share perspectives aligned with your member-adopted positions and priorities.

This summer, WSSDA staff will be working with two recently-graduated student board representatives from the SRN to identify tools and resources that will help school directors continue to elevate student voice in decision-making. Be on the lookout for these resources later in the year. In the meantime, we hope you are able to maintain hope by engaging with the young people in your lives. As Goodall reminds us: *“This is how we spread the light.”*

## Policy and Legal –Abigail Westbrook

And now for something completely different. As properly understood only by watching *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, the Policy & Legal branch continues “to interrupt this program [your work as school directors] to annoy you and make things generally irritating.” In other words, we've just released one batch of important model policy revisions, and are already at work on the next batch.

Do the ongoing changes to the legal landscape tempt you “to complain about those complaining about the complaints” and cause your policy manual to be perpetually outdated? WSSDA now offers policy manual review by the slice for those short on time. In a world that is both serious and very silly, we're committed to your crucial work.



# WSSDA Staff Picks from the OSPI 2022 Student Art Show



**Staff Advocate:** Multiple Votes

**Artist:** Analise DuMontier, Olympia High School

**Title:** Girl on a Bridge

**Medium:** Ink Pen, 12" x 9"

"Inspired by a hike this last summer with my sister. The sky was clear and the trees were encompassing her figure as she passed over the rushing creek. This piece was drawn entirely with micron pen."

**Staff Advocate:** Chelsey Lindquist

**Artist:** Mei-Lien Tanner, Kelso High School

**Title:** Flétrie

**Medium:** Pencil, 14.5" x 18"

"This was my first all pencil drawing that I put my all into. Flétrie means "withered" in French. I believe this feeling is something we've all felt, especially during our pandemic. I wanted to create a piece to remember this time period."



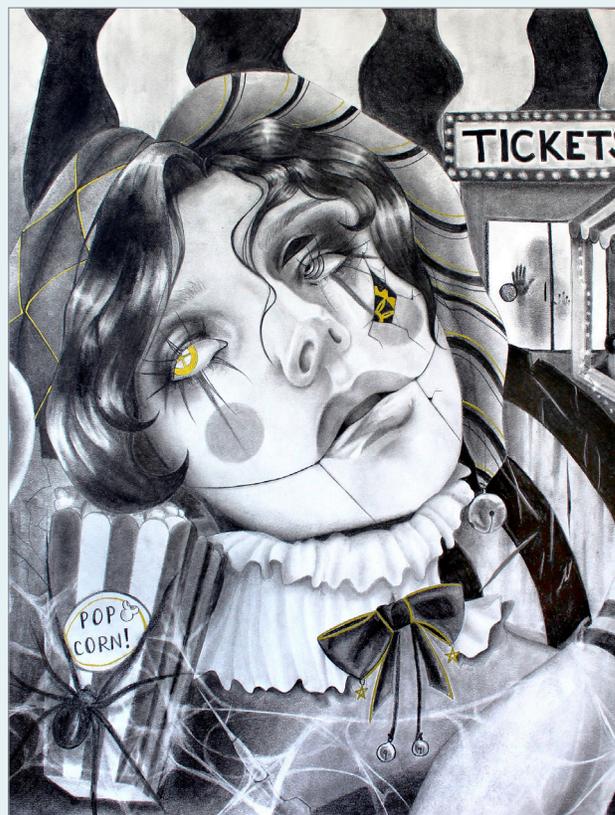
**Staff Advocate:** Abigail Twombly

**Artist:** Ella Sherin, Olympia High School

**Title:** Traditional and Contemporary Hand Drum

**Medium:** Acrylic on Rawhide

"I first made the drum from rawhide and a cedar ring, then painted the rawhide by combining traditional and contemporary designs from my tribe, the Cowlitz."



**Staff Advocate:**

Kelsey Winters

**Artist:** Sophia Rusk,  
PRIDE Prep Charter

**Title:** Myna Birds,  
9" x 6"

**Medium:** Pen and Ink

"I have learned to create texture and show value, which is a constant challenge for me to create a light source when you can only go darker on the paper. I believe I have much more progress to make, but it was a fun first attempt to draw feathers."



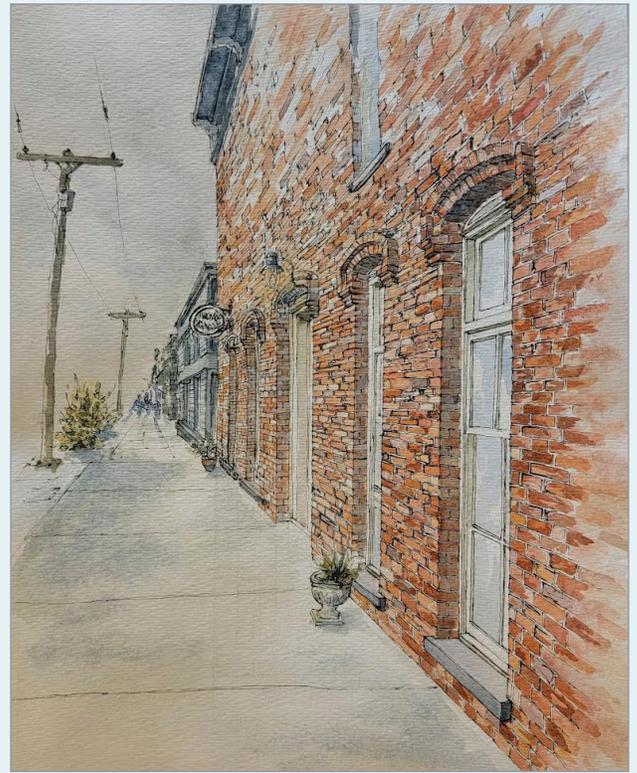
**Staff Advocate:** Multiple Votes

**Artist:** Bojorquez Marcus, Bremerton High School

**Title:** Retro Sunset

**Medium:** Digital Art

"I love art. I started getting serious about photo manipulation a few years ago. The main style I shoot for in my art is a kind of cinematic scene. I achieve this look by keeping a direct point of lighting throughout my entire composition."



**Staff Advocate:** Daniel Lunghofer

**Artist:** Noah Walter, Kingston High School

**Title:** Grey Port Townsend

**Medium:** Watercolor and Pen, 12" x 9"

"This is painted from a reference photo taken by myself on a trip to Port Townsend. I lay out guides in pencil and then compose a detailed pen drawing. Lastly, I fill in the lines with watercolor, adding any additional pen strokes as needed."



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## Focusing on What Matters

by Tricia Lubach

*What's Right, Not Who's Right* author Robert Tipton has a message of encouragement specifically “for our elected officials – may you find the courage and patience to seek answers rooted in ‘what’s right’ and not ‘who’s right.’ We need your compassionate leadership and wise decision-making.”

It’s a tall order to practice “compassionate leadership” when people are yelling at you. Tipton proposes that “far too much time is wasted – in business, family life, and education – because we are mired in endless debate, in bickering, politicking, and posturing.”

The magic in Tipton’s advice is the “what’s right” part. Here are a few strategies to keep your board centered on conversations and decision-making that are most impactful to the students they serve:

- Continue to focus unwaveringly on the things that will have the greatest impact on student success and resist getting pulled into tangential topics.
- Use your board meeting agendas to focus on the most important issues for student success.
- Consider putting the public comment period at the end of your meeting so your community learns about the most critical work and focus of the board and district.
- Use an annual board calendar to ensure your board covers the most important areas throughout the year. This calendar should include regular departmental reports from staff, data review of student outcomes and progress, opportunities for student input, superintendent evaluation, and professional development for the board.

When school boards consistently focus their meetings on the right things, there is less time and focus for anything else.

*Tricia Lubach is the Director of Leadership Development at WSSDA and a member of the Quincy School Board.*



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# belonging

WSSDA **2022** Annual Conference

**“Belonging” is the core theme of this year’s conference;**

when each student feels a sense of belonging in our schools, they are empowered to learn and strive. Adults have that same need to belong, and WSSDA’s Annual Conference is that place for school directors. It’s a unique space where the ideas and identities of all Washington school board members matter, and there is strength in being seen, valued, and appreciated. Please join us – you belong here.



The 2022 WSSDA Annual Conference will take place at the Spokane Convention Center.

# Celebrating school directors with new events and more choices

**B**ack in Spokane for the first time since 2018, this year's conference offers more choice, exciting new events, and expanded opportunities to reconnect with old friends and make new connections. You'll have options for deep dives into important topics in pre-conference workshops, hands-on instruction in district finance and educational equity, inspiring educational leaders to learn from, and more than 50 breakout sessions from your peers.

Here are some of the highlights of this year's Annual Conference:

## President's Dinner - *New Event!*

A celebration of school board leadership, this event kicks off the conference on Thursday after the pre-conference workshops and OnBoard learning experiences. Sit down and relax with an elegant dinner among your fellow school directors. The evening's focus is on leadership, and highlights include the 2022 Leadership WSSDA graduation and recognition of the WSSDA Boards of Distinction.



## WSSDA OnBoard Learning Experiences

Have you experienced OnBoard yet? This highly-interactive training has been designed specifically for Washington school directors to increase their knowledge and ability to lead in their own districts. Select from among two school district budgeting and finance trainings and three educational equity trainings.

## Nationally-known Thought Leaders

Floyd Cobb and John Krownapple's book "Belonging Through a Culture of Dignity" has stormed the education world over the past three years. Now you have the opportunity to spend five hours learning from them in a pre-conference workshop that is sure to sell out. The learning continues as keynote speakers bring state and national expertise to the general sessions. Inspirational Washington state Teacher of the Year Jerad Koepp shares the value in focusing on each student's strengths, while Dr. Adolph Brown brings his unique and powerful style while sharing how to close the empathy gap between us all. The incredible emcee Erin Jones brings all of this together with her signature humor and energy.



Floyd Cobb



John Krownapple



Dr. Adolph Brown



Jerad Koepp  
(Wukchumni)



Erin Jones

Register online at [wssda.org/ac](https://wssda.org/ac). Early pricing available until Sept. 23.  
Seats are limited for some training sessions.

# 2022 WSSDA Annual Conference Agenda

## THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 17

9:00am – 2:00pm	Pre-conference Workshops: The Road to Belonging is Paved with Dignity, Law Conference, Board Boot Camp
2:30pm – 4:00pm	Open Government Training
2:30pm – 5:00pm	OnBoard: Introduction to the Commitment to Educational Equity
5:30pm – 7:30pm	President’s Dinner with Leadership WSSDA Graduation and 2022 Boards of Distinction

## FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 18

7:30am – 8:30am	Breakfast
8:30am – 11:30pm	General Session with Washington State Teacher of the Year Jerad Koepf
11:30am – 12:30pm	Lunch
12:30pm – 2:00pm	Breakout Session #1
12:30pm – 3:00pm	OnBoard: Introduction to the Commitment to Educational Equity
12:30pm – 3:00pm	OnBoard: Identity Discrimination – A Look at Federal Involvement
2:15pm – 3:15pm	Breakout Session #2
3:30pm – 4:45pm	Breakout Session #3
5:00pm	Board’s Night Out

## SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 19

7:30am – 8:30am	Breakfast
8:30am – 9:30pm	Breakout Session #4
9:45am – 12:00pm	General Session featuring keynote speaker Dr. Adolph Brown and 2022 Boards of the Year
12:00pm – 1:00pm	Lunch
1:00pm – 2:15pm	Breakout Session #5
1:00pm – 3:30pm	OnBoard: Advancing Inclusion Through Belonging
1:00pm – 4:00pm	OnBoard: Tackling Financial Soundness
2:30pm – 3:45pm	Breakout Session #6
4:00pm	Conference adjourns

## What are attendees saying about the Annual Conference?

### Overall Conference:

“WSSDA’s conference is the best professional development our board gets all year. We learn from breakouts and amazing speakers, and from other school directors from all over the state.”

“Getting time together as a board to learn and get to know each other outside the boardroom is one of the best parts.”

### Pre-conference:

“This session was incredibly useful, and I came away with profound new knowledge.”

### Onboard:

“This was wonderful, interactive; learned so much from my table mates.”

“Perky pace, very engaging.”

“Very informative and interactive, the time flew by!”

### Board Boot Camp:

“One of the best programs WSSDA has to offer! Vital for new board members.”

### Law Conference

“Knowledgeable presenters with timely information clearly presented.”

### Breakout Sessions:

“Very relevant, very real, very timely.”

“Wonderful, energizing session, providing valuable insight.”

“Great session, well prepared and a lot of great workable ideas.”

“Great workshop. So many practical and tangible examples.”



## OnCall: Cultivate a Network of Key Communicators

Tapping into a network of trusted local leaders used to be an important communication tool. Now, it's essential because school leaders face increasing polarization in their communities.

Every district is unique, but most have similar networks, including rotary clubs, chambers, city clubs, government leaders, police, clergy, and school-based councils or parent groups. Consider going to their events and meetings; don't just invite them to yours. However you network, fit it to your personality. If you're not a gregarious person, don't try to be.

**Authentic events only:** Don't set up "relationship building" events like monthly lunches, then not attend, or let them

dwindle. Go every time, even if you don't have an issue to discuss. Get to know each other and talk about the little things, like hobbies or how much you liked the school play.

**Stay positive:** Regardless of the issue, make every interaction positive, especially with polarizing opinions. Listen, don't judge or argue. Thank them for sharing. Build on what's going right, not wrong.

**Be responsive:** Don't just focus on the latest social media technology to keep in touch. Stay simple with timely callbacks or emails. Even if you don't have all the answers, reply quickly and keep it short. That tells them you know they're important.

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.

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## Keeping your board's policies current can be challenging.

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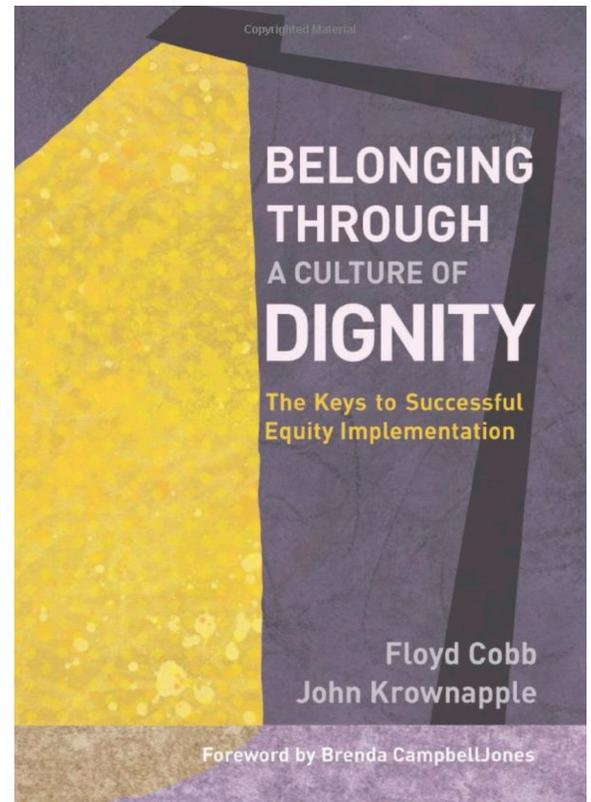
# The Power of Belonging

## Transforming the way we think about equity in education

Since its publication in 2019, the concepts suggested by authors Floyd Cobb and John Krownapple in their book “Belonging Through a Culture of Dignity” have taken off, especially as the pandemic upended education and shined a light on many challenges and inequities faced by students. Our students, staff, and parents were suddenly isolated and working virtually to deliver learning that has been designed for in-person delivery for centuries. This sudden shift accelerated the recognition that school is much more than delivery of content by teachers and acquisition of knowledge by students. In the best environments, it is a place where adults and children feel seen, understood, and cared for in a way that makes them feel like they matter. That they belong.

In their book, Cobb and Krownapple define belonging as “the extent to which people feel appreciated, validated, accepted, and treated fairly within an environment such as school, classroom or work. ... Belonging isn’t just a nice sentiment on a Hallmark greeting card. It’s a need that is hardwired into human beings.”

Belonging may seem an unlikely path toward educational equity, but it makes sense when you consider that each of us goes through situations daily in which we feel a sense that we either belong or don’t. If you are comfortable in your work environment or at home, you likely have co-workers or family members who make you feel valued and accepted, and you are more likely to feel like an important contributor. Think of a time when you have felt you did not belong. Perhaps you felt excluded from a social group, or marginalized at work, or made to feel



unwelcome at an event. Both your ability to be a contributor to and recipient of value in these situations is reduced.

Many leaders in education have experienced the “dysfunctional cycle of equity work” described in the book where well-intentioned people focus on solutions that simply don’t work. The authors submit that equity is a condition that can never be met within an education system that feels unwelcome to many of the students, staff, and parents within it. Only when students are anchored by a sense of belonging will they engage, and only when they engage can they achieve. The shift in mindset from “achieving to belong” to “belonging to achieve” is profound.

So profound, in fact, that WSSDA has incorporated this approach into the OnBoard educational equity training for school directors. It is also the theme of the WSSDA Annual Conference this November, where we invite you to be seen, to be valued, and to belong.

**Only when students are anchored by a sense of belonging will they engage, and only when they engage can they achieve. The shift in mindset from “achieving to belong” to “belonging to achieve” is profound.**



**“General Assembly is really about us representing our students. I strongly encourage you to come listen, speak to your priorities, and be part of making decisions about WSSDA’s platform, which we’ll use to benefit students across the state.”**

– Rebecca Stillings, Rainier School Board Vice Chair, WSSDA Legislative Committee Chair



**“If you ever feel that WSSDA doesn’t represent your school district, come to General Assembly and make your voice heard.”**

– Trey Ising, Cascade School Board Chair, WSSDA Resolutions Committee Chair

**“I am super excited about having this virtual option, because it makes it a little bit more accessible for everybody across the state.”**



– Luckisha Phillips,  
Federal Way School  
Board Member,  
WSSDA Legislative  
Committee Vice Chair



**“If small school district boards aren’t participating, then we’re not hearing that voice about how to create better solutions. We need people to say ‘hey, that’s not going to work for us and here’s why.’ ”**

– Melissa Beard, Tumwater School Board Member, WSSDA Resolutions Committee Vice Chair

# WSSDA belongs to you

## Claim it by participating in General Assembly

By Danny Edwards, WSSDA President

General Assembly, a combination of the former Legislative Assembly and Delegate Assembly, is the single most important event that we school directors hold each year; it is simply paramount.

All 295 public school district boards have the opportunity to have their voices heard at General Assembly (and through the position proposal process that precedes it).

All 295 boards get the chance to teach others by sharing their locally-developed ideas, experiences, and solutions as part of the discussion about positions up for a vote. Conversely, all 295 boards get the chance to learn by hearing differing ideas and insights from other localities.

And this tremendous teaching, learning, and advocacy opportunity is free! All you need to do is show up to influence the direction of WSSDA's future work. Heck, you can even influence WSSDA's future from the comfort of your home if you want because the event is virtual.

WSSDA belongs to you, school directors, so we need all of you to participate. On the points where your district has a common stance with the positions approved at General Assembly, WSSDA's platform will strengthen your advocacy with the Legislature. And where your district may differ, you're still going to advocate as you see fit, so you only stand to benefit by engaging in the process that culminates with General Assembly.

Even if you just come to listen, look at the handbook and pick the spots where you'd want to tune in, do that! If you want to speak up, do that! (But you have to be logged in as your district's voting delegate to speak.) If you want to show up without a ton of preparation, I don't recommend it, but even that's OK too; let's face it, we're not all perfect. Levels of participation, like our viewpoints, are on a spectrum, and all are welcome here!



Above, Top: Current President Danny Edwards (then president-elect) takes the podium at 2021 General Assembly. Above: Executive Director Tim Garchow's station is prepped for the event to begin.

## WSSDA Advocacy Cycle

### Spring

#### Proposal Window

Boards can propose changes to WSSDA's positions

### Fall

#### General Assembly

Board delegates debate and vote on proposed changes

### Winter

#### Legislative Session

Boards can use WSSDA's positions to advocate with legislators

General Assembly is a virtual event on September 30 and October 1.  
For more information visit [wssda.org/ga](https://wssda.org/ga).



# Where Lesson Plans Include Emotions and Brain Function

Steilacoom Historical School District recognized for effectively implementing  
a whole-student approach to teaching and supporting students

**F**rom kindergarteners to army colonels, everyone connected with the Steilacoom Historical School District is learning the same lessons.

Social emotional learning (SEL) and neural education are helping students and adults build relationships, better understand each other, resolve conflicts and solve problems. SEL and other initiatives unified under a single umbrella called Enriched Core Instruction helped the district move the needle for student achievement.

This strong, integrated focus led WSSDA to recognize the Steilacoom Historical School District board as its 2021 Board of the Year and Board of Distinction for middle-sized districts.

“Students achieve at high levels when they feel a sense of belonging in school. We emphasize SEL competencies and brain science to maximize learning potential,” said Superintendent Kathi Weight.

Dr. Jennifer McDonald, district board vice chair, described school as a relationship. Like any relationship, we have to find ways to understand each other and see why we do the things we do, she said.

“How do we make school a place where everyone is understood a little bit better?”

Understanding the whole student—what’s happening at home, how students are managing remote learning, etc.—is core to SEL and neural education teaching methods.

The focus on SEL seems to have arrived at just the right time.

“With all of the difficulties that came up with COVID, especially, I think families were grateful to have a focus on how kids were doing with their overall social connections and mental health. It seemed to empower families a little bit more, and we heard good things from the community,” Director McDonald said.

The board adopted a five-year strategic focus framework for 2019-2023, with a specific focus area each year. Directors chose “Identify opportunity gaps and target interventions to specific needs” as the focus for the 2020-2021 school year.

“We created a leadership team that worked directly with the board to establish district improvement goals. It’s one of the best things we’ve ever done as a district,” Superintendent Weight said.

The resulting Enriched Core Instruction umbrella was applied to every aspect of the school community. Thus far, the board has seen an increase in the availability of SEL data in grades 3-12, an increase in staff trained in neural education, and more



staff trained in universal design for learning and inclusionary practices.

### **Ongoing Professional Development**

Nearly 150 teachers and staff are certified in neural learning, with another 65 staff members registered for neural education professional learning this summer. Mary Snyder, Director of Social Emotional Learning, offers monthly sessions so educators can deepen their understanding of the topics.

As a condition of working for the district, new employees must agree to complete neural education training and apply it on the job.

“Neural education and social emotional learning give teachers a toolkit to use with their students,” Director McDonald said. “But I think it also gives teachers a toolkit to understand themselves a little bit better too and to develop some skills for managing what they may have been going through during COVID, for example.”

Directors are as immersed in SEL as any staff member, Weight added.

“[Directors] immediately recognize the interdependence between cognition and social, emotional needs of kids. That’s pretty unique for a group of five non-educators. They’re the champions for the work. They love it.”

In each monthly study session, directors include time for professional learning, building their knowledge and skills together on topics relevant to their current and future work.

### **SEL in the Classroom**

SEL and neural education are put into action across the district every day.

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**“Winning awards isn’t the goal of our efforts,” Director McDonald said. “Our purpose is to help highlight our district and our students, showing the community ‘we’re working hard for you.’ ”**



Students who are stressed about a test know how to recognize their body’s indicators and can calm themselves with breathing exercises.

When there’s a conflict between students, they learn to talk it out, saying “I don’t like it when ...” or they walk away.

During remote learning, students who were struggling felt more comfortable asking for help by connecting with a teacher they trusted.

“Social emotional skills are helping kids become more aware of themselves and how to approach and help those around them. I have a classroom community unlike anything I’ve ever seen before,” said Dana Payne, 5th grade teacher at Saltar’s Point Elementary.

Over at Steilacoom High School, JROTC teacher Victor McGee said that learning about brain function and how people think has helped his students focus academically.

“If they’re in a conflictive state, they’re not learning anything,” the retired army colonel said. “Students are way more perceptive when they’re relaxed, they’re trusting you and they feel a sense of belonging.”

Payne said one big lesson for her was learning to “teach to the orchid, not the dandelion.

“Orchids need more care and attention than dandelions, which can usually sprout anywhere. By teaching to the orchid with different techniques and styles, we can affect all students in the class and not just those who are going to thrive in whatever they’re doing.”



Movement is teacher Stefanie Froehle's favorite aspect of the program for her kindergarten students at Cherrydale Primary School. They start each day with a "Step Up to Learn" exercise that combines kinesthetic movement with reading and math.

Other movement activities incorporate songs or bouncing a lacrosse ball. During remote learning Froehle sent lacrosse balls home so they could all continue bouncing and counting together.

Movement activities help students transition, refocus and prepare for the next activity, Froehle said. "We also take time to talk about our days. We give them the space and time to share. And time to move!"

### **Communication Builds Pride, Interest**

To highlight the progress in academics and SEL, directors asked the district to provide more communication with the community, families, students and staff.

Regular communication channels have increased parent and community engagement, and pride in their school system. For example:

- ParentSquare is a new communication tool for families. Via a text messaging-type platform, information can be shared at the district, school or classroom level. Teachers find it's often faster than email for connecting with parents, opening stronger lines of communication.
- Superintendent Weight provides a monthly community update. The news is also posted on the district website and is printed and mailed inside the Town of Steilacoom's monthly utility bills.
- In the neighboring City of DuPont, where many district

students live, Weight's monthly update is included in the city's newsletter to residents.

- Online "Family Academy" sessions are monthly forums with topics such as working with students to reduce stress, supporting them in remote learning, internet safety, and strategies to improve sleep.
- The district prints and mails its annual report to every household in its service area. Weight said it's a worthwhile investment because they've received much better feedback and partnerships than when the report was only shared on the district website.
- A director who belongs to the local Kiwanis Club reports school news at the group's weekly meetings.
- Nearly 300 people participated in each of two "Thoughtexchange" forums. The goal of the conversations was to help people feel more connected to their schools. Participants asked the district to continue focusing on students' social emotional needs and continue increasing the communication efforts. More listening, more student-to-student connection opportunities and more social emotional learning for families also surfaced as priorities.

Listening and building stronger connections was especially important throughout the pandemic and remote learning. District staff and leaders continue to work hard to make sure students feel they have someone in their corner.

"Winning awards isn't the goal of our efforts," Director McDonald said. "Our purpose is to help highlight our district and our students, showing the community 'we're working hard for you.'"



# Fir-tip Lemonade, Medicine Bags, and State Teacher of the Year Jerad Koepp



Above: Jerad Koepp (Wukchumni), 2022 Teacher of the Year, teaches a U.S. History Through the Native American Perspectives class at River Ridge High School. This class is part of the expanding curriculum on Native American studies for North Thurston Public Schools students.

State Senator Sam Hunt joined North Thurston Public Schools (NTPS) Superintendent Debra Clemens, NTPS School Board Member Graeme Sackrison, and other NTPS district leaders to visit with Jerad Koepp (Wukchumni), the 2022 Washington State Teacher of the Year.

Mr. Koepp and the River Ridge High School U.S. History through the Native American Perspectives class served as the host for the day. The lesson: a hands-on exploration of Native American cultures, including the creation of fir tip lemonade and individual medicine bags. The classroom was full of students excited to learn more about these traditions.

As Washington's first Native American teacher of the year, Mr. Koepp continues to expand Native American education opportunities for NTPS students. New curriculum is on the docket for the 2022-23 school year, including two dual-credit courses in Native American Literature and Native American Civics.

"Native education definitely supports Native American students," said Mr. Koepp, "but it also benefits students school-wide." That was clear during the visit. Native and non-native students laughed and learned in a warm and inviting

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Above Left, Right: Senator Sam Hunt attends a lesson Jared Koepp teaches about how to create fir-tip lemonade and medicine bags.

room. There was no rush to the door when the final classroom bell rang. Instead, students stayed until the passing time waned. It was clear to all visitors that day: Mr. Koepp's classroom is a special place for students!

## Our Kids Our Future



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



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## RECLAIMING EDUCATION THROUGH LIBERATION

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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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