

we2.0

Washington Education Association
Volume 53, Number 4 – Fall 2015



Seattle, WA



Spokane, WA



Kelso, WA



Pasco, WA

BARGAINING
ROAD TRIP



Why I am a UNION MEMBER

I remember my first day as a teacher. It was my second career. I was a whole whopping 25 years old. I was hired two weeks into the year and I thought I'd been hired to teach at the high school. The sign that said North Middle School should have been an indicator. The first

union building meeting was soon after I began and I figured everyone would be there. After all, this was our union. Wouldn't everyone want to be part of working together to make great gains for our students?

I believe I made it another couple of weeks before being asked to run for building representative. I didn't become a building rep because I wanted protection. I didn't do it because I wanted some specific gains in my contract. I did it because I knew then, as I know now, the value of collective voice. That's why I joined the Everett Education Association and the Washington Education and that's why I became involved.



WEA President Kim Mead visits with members on the picket lines.

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- 4 Members across the state walked the line and stood strong in tough negotiations for fair pay and other school-quality issues.
- 6 "This is bad." A seventh-grader's perceptions on state-mandated tests and why he's opted out.

On the cover: Strength. Resolve. Determination. Despite the ability to improve compensation, benefits and learning conditions for students, school administrators in several districts steadfastly refused to spend the money needed, pushing frustrated educators to strike and amp up pressure this year.

I could talk about all of the changes that we advocated for to make education better. I'm proud of the work we did. But I've also learned that when I tell the stories of the past, it is very much like hearing how my parents walked five miles in the snow to get to school. That was then, this is now. I think it's more important to look at what the value of collective voice means today and the results it will bring to our students. We see it in this year's collective bargaining agreements which address much more than compensation. The contracts cover everything from curriculum to recess. Together, with parents and the community, we make great things for public education happen.

When I was a student, school was my safe haven. I loved learning. I loved the people that made up my schools. Three of my grandparents were first-generation U.S. citizens and each talked about how important and how lucky we were to get to go to school. It let them be successful in life in a way that wouldn't have happened if their parents hadn't moved to the United States. I knew attending school was the key to fulfilling dreams.

Why am I involved in my union now? Because we stand for students when their voices can't be heard. We know the difference education makes. Those of us who are WEA members provide the opportunities for dreams to become reality. To be part of a union with 85,000 heroes who make dreams come true is an honor.

Why are you in the union?

WE Are WEA: MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

WE Are WEA MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

It's been quite a year for WEA members.

"WEA and our locals are making significant gains on the big issues you care about: fair evaluations, competitive compensation, smaller class sizes and increased state funding for K-12 and higher education," says Kim Mead, WEA president.

We're providing relevant, focused high-quality professional development — and enforcing our collective bargaining agreements at the school district level.

We also face challenges driven by politics, court action and changing demographics. There is a well-funded national campaign to defund and destroy public sector unions.

"Fortunately, we are starting from a position of strength," says Armand Tiberio, WEA executive director.

The vast majority of WEA members value their membership and support our work. Many locals are at 100 percent of their potential membership, and WEA-PAC membership is at an all-time high.

Regardless of what happens in the courts or in the political arena, we need to make sure we remain united and strong. That's why we've launched **WE Are WEA: Membership Matters**.

Teams from every region are working to strengthen membership and identify members who are interested in union work. Connecting one-on-one and face-to-face with WEA members at their worksites is a major focus of this work. Some local associations are further along, while others are just starting.

Membership Matters is led by veteran WEA staffers Sara Rosin and Jim Meadows from the Center for Education Quality, with help from three WEA members who have been released full time to focus on this work: Kent teacher Chase Parsley, Federal Way teacher Shannon McCann and Pasco teacher Miguel Saldana. WEA staff from several regional councils, communications, membership and legal also are part of the team.

Saldana says the focus of **Membership Matters** is clear: "The union is formed by educators, and educators are the union."



"I think the union is a positive force. Collective bargaining is a positive force. If we had each negotiate a separate contract with the district, it would be a nightmare. Having that opportunity to have that collective voice to represent us is really a valuable thing."

*Paul Schneider
AP U.S. History teacher
University High School
Spokane Valley*



"I think our voice is heard a lot louder in numbers and it's important to have people on your side when things get tough. I think membership matters because it's more than just looking out for yourself. It's looking out for others and making sure everyone reaps the benefit of our collective voice and standing together."

*Bridget Piper, counselor, Coweeman
Middle School, Kelso*



"A membership that is engaged is a membership that is strong because if you have people that are not engaged and not doing things together we wouldn't have gotten nearly as far as we have — not only for ourselves personally but for our students as well."

*Angela Bina, music teacher
Audubon Elementary
Spokane*

BARGAINING

Unified across the entire state



In highlighting collective bargaining, it is somewhat tempting to elevate locals who go on strike. Strikes are very visual. They give members unique time to bond with one another. They produce emerging leaders. The media coverage is unending. There is a clear beginning and an ending. They often (but not always) yield good results.

As we know, however, going on strike is a tactic members use as a last resort to change the balance of power and make necessary gains. We pay tribute to *some* of 140 locals who were (and some still are) bargaining this fall. We can, in no way, include all of the locals that made strides. Instead, we highlight examples as we remind ourselves that there are abundance amounts of money — billions of dollars -- heading toward our schools. The money is available because of WEA members' tireless and unending support to force legislators to meet their paramount duty and improve school funding. It's up to all of us — whether we are bargaining team members or supporting bargaining teams — to ensure we do not leave that money on the negotiating table.



We begin our bargaining tour in Wilbur, a small town nestled in wheat country on Highway 2, where our classified members were the first in the state to reach an agreement with an 8 percent raise, or 11 percent with the state cost-of-living adjustment, for this school year and an additional 6.8 percent or a total of 8.6 percent in the following year. Courage to demand what is right comes in all sizes.

Our largest local in the state, Seattle, made history — and the national news — when they went on strike this fall for the first time in 30 years. Strong community support and rock solid picketing and other activities gave the bargaining team the power needed to bring back a contract that:

- Removes testing from teacher evaluations;
- Gives educators a larger role in determining how many tests are given;
- Guarantees recess for elementary students;
- Creates diversity teams at 30 schools to address disproportionate discipline and other factors in the opportunity gap;
- Addresses workload concerns; and
- Provides office support professionals and paraeducators with their largest raise ever.

Top: Spokane educators hang homemade posters and write messages of support for their bargaining team.

Bottom: In Pasco, PAE members and supporters picket at Aug. 24 emergency Pasco School District School Board meeting to authorize taking legal action to force teachers back to work if PAE members strike.

SOUTH
WHIDBEY
EXIT AHEAD

SHORELINE
3 MILES AHEAD



Left to right: Seattle paraeducator Angela Mosely-Freeman leads the picket line at Rainier Beach High School. Shoreline EA bargaining team member Caitlyn Rockey and her husband, Mark, carry yard signs home — and answer questions from neighbors wanting similar signs for their own yards. Seattle educators, parents and students share smiles and fun — and awareness of recess time inequity among schools — at an Aug. 27 rally for SEA's proposal of having 45 minutes of guaranteed recess for elementary students across the district.

"This agreement signals a new era in bargaining in public education. We've negotiated a pro-student, pro-parent, pro-educator agreement," said SEA President Jonathan Knapp.

Just north of Seattle, Shoreline EA members fought for and achieved a contract settlement while averting a strike. The bargaining team negotiated a three-year agreement that will ultimately result in an increase of approximately 8.3 percent or 11.3 percent with the COLA. Additional locally bargained increases in year two and three are likely to total up to 4-6 percent. The contract also increases staffing in every school, providing more resources to students. As a result of the bargain, Shoreline will be adding a 1.0 FTE Counselor and a .5 FTE Instructional Coach in every elementary school; a 1.0 FTE Instructional Coach at the middle and high schools; and at each high school, a .4 FTE Athletic Director, a .6 FTE Activity Coordinator, and a 1.0 FTE Dean. Additional language guarantees that members' children will not lose boundary exceptions for opting out of standardized testing.

Shoreline members organized over the last year to support their bargain. Approximately 60-70 percent participated in one-to-one interviews and completed a bargaining survey. Over the summer, SEA mounted a yard sign campaign to engage the parent community, and supportive yard signs are still visible on streets in Shoreline today.

Head due east, as the crow flies, for 222 miles and you'll land in Spokane, Washington's second largest local, with more

than 3,000 members. What makes bargaining in Spokane unique is we represent nearly every staff member across the District — nutrition service, security, warehouse, grounds and trades workers, secretary/clerical, before- and after-school program workers, instructional assistants, coaches and, of course, certificated educators. While bargaining at eight tables concurrently, SEA begins with separate bargaining teams then melds them together into one vast "negotiating room."

Like Shoreline, Spokane averted a strike and won a contract that was both healthy and creative. Abandoning the idea that every member receive the same percentage in raises, highlights include: Spokane mental health therapists received

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Amanda Wilson, a sixth-grade teacher at Curie STEM Elementary, channels history ... and keeps a positive outlook on the Pasco picket line.



Say what?

Many educators are wondering whether it is permissible to communicate with students, parents and the community regarding a student's right to opt out of the Smarter Balance Assessment or other standardized tests.

The answer to that question is very specific to your district, whether it has provided you with direction regarding opt-out communications. Failure to follow any such direction could result in discipline.

To be sure that you have all the necessary information to assess the relative risks of engaging in particular opt-out activities, you are advised to contact your UniServ Director or Local President.

As a parent, an educator may opt his or her own child out of testing and communicate as a parent with other parents/community about opting out. However, this activity may not be protected if you are communicating as both a parent and an educator. For clarification of potential risks, please contact your UniServ Director or Local President.

Members may still lobby your legislators about standardized testing and other matters of concern.

Local Presidents may work as liaisons with PTSA groups around concerns about standardized testing, including supporting parent opt-out activities.



Snohomish EA President Justin Fox-Bailey and his son, Aidan, share a smile and thoughts on opting out from state-mandated testing.

Opting Out

...from the voice of a student

Snohomish Education Association President Justin Fox-Bailey is an English teacher and parent of three students in the Snohomish School District. His oldest, Aidan, is a seventh-grader. With the exception of one section of the Math MSP in the third grade, Aidan has not taken any other state standardized test. Recently, he had a conversation with Aidan about his perceptions of being opted out from state-mandated tests. As more families consider the pros and cons of new testing realities, *We2.0* offer some of the Fox-Bailey observations.

Q: Why haven't you taken any of the other tests? Do you feel like you're missing out having not taken those tests?

AIDAN: I think taking the test is a waste of time and money of students and the district. I really don't think I've missed out. If anything, I've missed out on my class time that is owed to me, of the need to have time to complete work and do my projects. I was in the back of the computer lab, tapping away silently for hours on end, because everyone else has to take those tests.

Q: What would you rather school is focused on?

AIDAN: I would rather that we would have more time spent on instruction, and that even if the tests themselves aren't going to go away, that there is some sort of program for the kids who have opted out to go and do something else productive ... working towards a project or studying for something, but just not sitting in a tiny corner and silent for hours.

Q: Do you think opting out is worth it?

AIDAN: I think opting out is a new issue. It's only really been brought up in the last couple of years. I think opting out is something that I feel I should do and I feel something other people should do, as a cause that we need to change this. We're not going to change this by going along with it.

I think what needs to happen is enough kids need to opt out and enough protests need to happen and enough awareness needs to be raised that people say, "Hey, this is bad. We need to do something about that."

Q: How do other kids feel about opting out?

AIDAN: I don't think other kids understand really the importance of opting out. I think they understand that it's a waste of time. I don't think they understand how much time and how much money really goes into it, especially for our teachers who are doing test prep on their prep times when they should be doing other tasks like prepping for class time and stuff.

Q: How do you know you're going to be prepared for high school? Do you feel like there's information you don't have? Are you at all worried that you opted out?

AIDAN: I am not worried. I don't think this type of testing is A) good for kids, B) doesn't really help kids learn, and if it's not going to affect our grade or we're not going to get any specific feedback, it's just sort of this black hole of time and money. It's not really helping us with later testing. It doesn't really tell us to take tests any better.

Q: If you had the opportunity to talk to a legislator or talk to somebody who had created these tests, what would you want them to know about the reasons you're opting out and your education?

As part of the 2013-15 Washington State Operating Budget, Central Washington University's College of Education was directed to conduct a study identifying the duties encompassed in the typical workday of a state-funded teacher. Among its findings: 15.3 percent to 17.8 percent of teachers' instruction time was devoted to preparing students for state tests.

AIDAN: A fifth essentially of our class time is spent on a test. It takes millions of dollars. It doesn't affect our grade, growth or learning development in any way, shape or form ... 1 in 5 days spent on testing with no real learning application is a huge amount of time we're spending not learning.

I would rather be a classroom learning than in a computer lab taking a test. It is poorly designed in the way that it takes up so much money and that it just has no affect in any way. It's just appalling to me.

These tests don't make sense. They don't help us. They don't help the teachers. They make it harder for the district. It closes down the computer labs. And, it takes a huge amount of money and time. It just doesn't make sense. They need to stop.

Court agrees with WEA ... Charter schools are unconstitutional

When the Washington Supreme Court threw out our state's controversial charter school law in September, the timing was a surprise, but the decision itself was predictable — and correct.

In a 6-3 decision, the court ruled the law was unconstitutional because it diverted funding from existing K-12 public schools to new charter schools operated by private organizations.

The court was clear: Under our state's constitution, schools that are funded with taxpayer dollars must be accountable to the voters who fund them.

WEA is part of the coalition that challenged the law. While charter school supporters have asked the court to reconsider its decision, it is rare for the court to do so.

There also have been calls for the Legislature to "fix" the unconstitutional charter school law either in a special session or when the regular session begins in January.

"Instead of trying to fix an unfixable law, let's focus on finally funding quality public schools for *all* of Washington's public school students," said Angel Morton, president of the Tacoma Education Association. "That's what the constitution requires, and it's what our children deserve."

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Governance and Administration

Kim Mead, WEA President

Stephen Miller, WEA Vice President

Armand Tiberio, WEA Executive Director

WEA Communications Staff: Dale Folkerts, Adam Isaguirre, Brooke Mattox-Ball, Linda Mullen, Eddie Westerman, Linda Woo and Rich Wood

We are interested in your feedback and ideas. Reach Editor Linda Woo at lwoo@washingtonea.org, by mail at P.O. Box 9100, Federal Way, WA 98063-9100, or 253-765-7027.

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Correction: *There have been several Washington teachers inducted into the National Teachers Hall of Fame in recent years, including Debra Howell in 2011 and Geri Rohlf in 2007. The We 2.0 Spring issue had incorrect information listing state honorees.*

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Kelso teachers send a message of solidarity from a bridge just north of the Cowlitz County Courthouse Sept. 25 while their bargaining team waits to hear a judge's ruling on whether he should fine KEA for defying a court order to go back to school.

From BARGAINING, page 5

8 percent more in addition to state COLA; nutrition service workers and before and after-school program employees received 6.5 percent raises or 9.5 with the COLA plus the opportunity to work up to 20 more hours per month (for additional pay); secretary/clerical members received 5.5 or 8.5 percent with the COLA plus alleviating workload issues; teachers and other certificated members received a four percent raise in addition to the COLA plus more control over planning time.

"I am proud of the fact that we're looking at this like a starting point instead of an end point," Spokane UniServ Rep Rebecca Powell says. She and her colleague, Michelle Jenner, say they are also extremely proud that the combined efforts from all of the teams got the members a "rocking deal."

Speaking of rocking deals east of the Cascades, Pasco Association of Educators made significant gains in nearly every area members demanded, despite one of the most vicious administrative responses in recent WEA memory. Teachers went on strike for 14 days, defied a court injunction ordering them back to school, and nine days of classes were cancelled. The result: full new K-12 curriculum within two years, more classroom supplies, local raises of 4.25 percent the first year

and 4.45 percent in year two (for a total of 13.5 percent with the state COLA), plus increased pay when teachers are assigned other duties during planning time. The new contract also will reduce class size, increase planning time, empower members to elect department chairs, clarify TPEP language, and reduce testing by ending optional tests that aren't directly tied to curriculum.

Like in so many other locals who have not recently been highly engaged in bargaining, Pasco members were frustrated enough to stand up and put a great deal of pressure on administrators and fight for their students and their own families' needs.

Meanwhile, South Whidbey members walked out for a "quickie" strike then settled for 5.2 percent increase above the COLA this year and an additional 5.5 percent above next year's COLA. South Whidbey is part of a steadfast bargaining cluster in the northwest corner of our state. Burlington Edison, Ferndale, Bellingham Association of School Employees among other Fourth Corner locals all did not settle until they received more than 5 percent above the COLA.

Heading south on Interstate 5, Bates Professional Technical Employees (in Tacoma) negotiated a creative agreement to get every member to a wage that was, at minimum, \$15 an hour. This gave some members a 24.8 percent raise and everyone received at least a 4 percent raise above the COLA. Auburn EA members are taking home at least 4.4 percent more beyond the COLA this year. Classified members in Soundview UniServ Council also bargained robust contracts. For example Clover Park ESP members focused on bringing minimum wages toward \$15 an hour so they eliminated steps and gave flat increases to members who received at least a 5.3 percent increase above COLA. Many received closer to 6 percent and those at the very beginning of the salary schedule received a 20 percent increase.

Further south on I-5, Kelso EA went on strike and stayed on strike for eight days until their bargaining team brought them a tentative agreement. The Kelso community was among the most fervent of supporters, demanding a meeting with the superintendent, standing up for KEA members and genuinely personifying the town's "We are Kelso" values.

WILBUR
JUST AHEAD

PASCO
EXIT TO RIGHT

SPOKANE
3 MILES AHEAD