



## Back to school ...

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- More K-12 funding but not for class size and compensation
  - Innovative look at high-stakes testing pressures
  - Thoughts from a Hall of Famer



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*On the cover: Juliette Kern, vice president of Bates Technical College Professional/Technical Employees, learns about the ins and outs of being an effective local leader and building successful leadership at WEA's Summer U last July.*



*Spokane EA's Greg Pschirrer was excited about the opportunity to open a dialog about how students and adults in our schools are coping with high-stakes test pressures. Page 4-5*

# Bargains close the loop

It's nearly back-to-school time. I hope your summer has been restful and you are ready to greet your excited groups of students in the weeks ahead.

Looking back, it's been quite a year. Running right up to the last possible deadline, the Legislature ended up providing more money for education than it has in close to two decades. As we know, it still fell short on educator pay and smaller class sizes.

Local bargains must address closing the loop to make up the difference between what the Legislature did and what our members need. Our ability to collectively bargain is at the core of what we do with and for our members. Between district reserves and new money from the state, local bargainers will be well positioned to improve professional level pay for our members.

Throughout this year, our members have stood up for what they believe. Given the pent up demand for pay, and frustration with the Legislature, I expect we could see various actions at the local level this fall. This could be due to difficult bargains or locals taking votes in response to New Business Item 18 from our Representative Assembly. NBI 18 calls for locals to decide if they will strike against the Legislature this fall.

Given this year's events, I am sometimes asked why WEA doesn't call for a unified,

statewide strike. At the state level, we don't have the authority to call a statewide strike. A decision to strike must be made by members at the local level. We can't impose a strike on members without their engagement. Strikes can be powerful ways to make a statement. All of the reasons why a strike would be held should be considered along with thoughtful debate and discussion

so that members can make a well-informed decision.

We hope to hear the state Supreme Court's response to the state budget soon.

Throughout this year,  
**our members**  
have **stood up** for  
what they **believe.**

As attorneys for the plaintiffs aptly note, reinstating the legally required COLA is a far cry from providing professional competitive wages. Deferring class size reductions for grades 4-12 until after the 2018 implementation date disregards the needs of our kids' education as well as the Court's order.

In the coming weeks we will look to the Court, and we will need to push hard at the bargaining table.

Our students and members deserve no less. Thank you for your dedication to public education.

*Kim Mead*  
*WEA President*



# LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

## Pivot to bargains

When 2015 started, WEA committed to a two-pronged approach to improve pay and reduce class sizes for our members. The first was to push hard in the Legislature, which is being held in contempt of the state Supreme Court for failing to meet our educational and constitutional obligation to our kids.

The second was to connect legislative and bargaining programs to increase visibility for our issues and ultimately improve lives for our members and educational opportunities for our students. Last fall, as we reported here, the WEA Board approved a statewide goal of 5 percent pay increases per year of contract in addition to what the state provides, through local bargains.

We focused on creating actions in people's communities where they would be visible to parents, voters, school officials and legislators and, of course, lobbying efforts in Olympia.

As the session dragged into triple overtime, legislators finally approved a budget. Education funding is up nearly \$2.9 billion, or about 20 percent over prior years, but as we know, they didn't go far enough to improve pay and reduce class sizes. The COLA did not make up for the 13 percent loss in pay due to the six-year suspension, and only 20 percent of our students will see smaller class sizes. Given rising health care costs and increased retirement contributions by Plan 2 members, many members could still see pay go backwards, without improvements from local bargains.

What we do know is that the \$2.9 billion increase provides new funds to districts, and that most of that money can be bargained at the local level. And though there were attempts by Senate Republicans to limit our abilities to bargain contracts, we retain those rights.

Bargaining is how we close the cycle to improve pay and working conditions for our members. There are 140 locals that have open contracts this year, with a short window to bargain contracts. WEA has been working with local leaders and bargaining teams about our goals and how we may achieve them in the bargaining season. Contact your building representative, bargaining team or local president to learn more about your contract negotiations.

We know that the Legislature failed to meet its constitutional responsibility to our students. The state Supreme Court will soon announce its decision on the constitutional muster of legislative actions and we will keep you posted as they do. For now, it is our responsibility to close the loop with local bargains to improve pay so that we can ensure every student has qualified and committed educators leading their education.



*It took a record three special sessions for Washington legislators to write and pass a two-year state operating budget. Read our full summary of the legislative session at [www.OurVoiceWashingtonEA.org](http://www.OurVoiceWashingtonEA.org). Above: WEA UniServ Rep. Lisa Lewison chats with members at Summer U about how to keep compensation and class size issues at the forefront with local collective bargaining.*

### WEA member actions this year

- Rallies in nine communities, with over 3,000 members
- Doorbelling and literature drops at nearly 30,000 homes in key legislative districts
- One-day rolling strikes in 65 districts, by 72 locals, representing over 40,000 members
- 1351 actions at the state Capitol

### Key legislative outcomes

- 3.0% COLA increase over two years
- 1.8% temporary increase over two years, which goes away in 2017
- \$12-a-month increase in health care costs
- 1% increase in retirement contribution by Plan 2 members
- K-3 class size reductions
- Class size reductions in grades 4-12 delayed until 2019

# Kelly the Destroyer vs. the Springfield Cobras

## A NEW MUSICAL



Lewis and Clark High School drama students take a hard look at “success,” as defined by others and by one’s self in light of stresses students, educators, parents and administrators face in the high-stakes culture created in our schools. The rock musical, “Kelly the Destroyer vs. the Springfield Cobras,” made its debut in Spokane earlier this spring.

## Can high-stakes testing be music to our ears?

It takes gumption to stage a world premier musical about controversial issues. It takes a great amount of courage to ask your high school drama students to forgo putting on that well-known classic spring musical and agree to work with playwrights to produce a show about the pressures of being a high school student in today’s high-stakes test taking, premier-sports playing, “race to the top” world.



Greg Pschirrer

Spokane EA member and Lewis and Clark High School drama teacher Greg Pschirrer did just that last fall when he asked his students if they were willing to be in the first-ever performance of a play called “Kelly the Destroyer vs. the Springfield Cobras.”

The play, loosely based on the mythological Kali, the destroyer of worlds, is written by Rob Hartmann and Katie Kring, two playwrights from New York and Missouri. The rock musical follows high school transfer student Kelly to a new school where the test stakes are getting higher by the day, the students and teachers are stressed out, and education consultant Miss Hannah has been hired to produce excellence in the

Springfield System. As situations get strange and more and more students fall under the sway of the Miss Hannah, Kelly and her friends are forced to discover the alarming truth about the Springfield System, before it’s too late.

Pschirrer says he originally contacted Hartmann and Kring to see if they would provide some material for their students to try but never expected them to offer that his students be the first to take on a brand new show. He jumped at the idea. The students were nervous and very excited at the prospect of working directly with the play’s writers. The student input helped shape the play and the playwrights sometimes based characters on the actual Spokane students.

“The incredible thing about the show is that it doesn’t tell you testing is bad, what we’re doing is wrong” Pschirrer says. “It raises a bunch of issues and says, ‘What do you think?’”

“It talks about the pressures students face — the lack of sleep that we’re getting, all the tests that are piling up for us, the hours of homework that we’re getting,” says newly minted senior Emma Lyons, who spent countless hours in her junior year taking one kind of assessment or another.

The show gave students and Pschirrer time to examine what it means to fail, to be considered “a success” by others and by one’s self and to look at the stresses that students, parents,

administrators and educators face in this high-stakes pressure cooker being created in our schools.

“There are many teachers who take on that idea of, ‘My students represent me, therefore I am a perfectionist. I must be the best so my students are the best so that we are the best,’ and it snowballs and the immense amount of pressure we allow ourselves to be placed under can get out of control,” Pschirrer says.

The student actors say the show gave them a chance to closely examine how much pressure is put upon them and how much pressure they put upon themselves. “We’re struggling a lot as a school,” says Lyons, “because a lot of kids just don’t want to take the test, but then we’ve been told by a lot of our teachers that the school will lose funding if we don’t take it.”

“Test us often but don’t make it so crucial for that one time because you never know. Something might be going on that day and if you’re having an off day and you take a test that’s not even reflecting how you do, that’s unfortunate,” says graduate Dominick Betts. “Everyone has a test every single week in every single subject and it’s crazy and you start to wonder why and how well you’re doing as a teenager can affect the rest of your life and that’s scary.”

The audience enjoyed how the play blended the science fiction and reality elements, and how they gave perspective to real life and to testing and how hard testing can be for students, students note.

“I got a lot of, ‘You really hit the nail on the head for how high schoolers and teachers feel about it.’ We got a letter from one of our AP English teachers saying that he wanted to send it to Olympia,” says graduate Anna Maguire.

“You’re so much more than a number on a piece of paper,” former senior Ilan Hernandez says. “Your life doesn’t end after school. You get to go on and do so many more great things that you shouldn’t have to worry about the ‘B’ you got in class just now.”



Ilan Hernandez

Pschirrer feels the show gave the community and, even more, his own students and other students at Lewis and Clark the chance to take a look at how they cope with public school policy which is decided and dictated by those who are many miles from school.

“I’ve loved how this process has shaped me as an artist and as a student,” graduate Hernandez says. “It’s given me a great perspective . . . and I will never forget it.”



*The show follows high school transfer student Kelly to a new school where the test stakes are getting higher by the day, the students and teachers are stressed out, and education consultant Miss Hannah has been hired to provide “excellence” in the Springfield System.*

*Hear what Spokane students and teachers say about being a part of the world premier at [www.washingtonea.org/musical](http://www.washingtonea.org/musical)*



## ESEA update

In July, the U.S. Senate passed its updated version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), informed by and crafted with a historic amount of input from educators here in Washington and across the nation.

NEA supports the Senate bill which among other things:

- Improves opportunity for all students, through use of indicators of school success or student support to help identify and begin closing opportunity gaps.
- Decouples high stakes associated with standardized tests, so students have more time to learn and teachers have more time to teach.
- Provides educators with a greater voice in educational and instructional decisions.

This month, House and Senate committee staff members are working to reconcile the two chambers' bills. We expect both chambers will name members to the Conference Committee as soon as September. The committee will meet to finalize a bill that the House and Senate will then vote on and ultimately send to the President's desk. As work commences at the congressional level, we will keep you posted about additional opportunities to contact your congressional leaders. Thanks for all you have done so far.

# Q & A on opting out



Raschelle Holland

Raschelle Holland says standardized testing and what is happening in Washington's public schools prompted her to become an activist for the first time in her life. The 25-year accomplished educator currently is a math specialist and a K-6 instructional math coach in Spokane. She writes to her legislators often and recently served on an expert panel in a Senate hearing on standardized testing. Holland submitted an opt-out letter to her son's principal, excusing him from taking the state's standardized tests. The tests, she says, "are only profiting the testing industry. If our state did away with the tests that do nothing to close the achievement gap, there would be plenty of money to fully fund education."

### **We2.0: Why did you decide to opt your son out from testing?**

Holland: My son will be a third-grader ... the first year he will be subject to the Smarter Balance Assessment (SBA). I have made the choice to opt him out of this assessment because I believe it to be an invalid and unreliable test. I also consider it to be developmentally inappropriate. The portion of the brain that reasons is not solidified for most children until around 12 years old. Children are developing the capacity to reason, compare, and analyze through life experiences and solid instruction. However, to be measured for mastery on these things too early is inappropriate and setting children up for failure.

### **We2.0: Is your decision to opt out influenced by your role as an educator and what you see in your own classroom?**

Holland: I feel I have an ethical obligation to make a courageous stand for all children throughout our country. This is where I put on my educator hat. I have spent 25 years teaching young children how to learn and understand mathematics. Did the people who wrote the mathematics portion of the Common Core Standards have any early childhood education under their

belts? Nope. Three of them had "some" secondary experience, and the others? Drum roll please ... business men and women who work for educational businesses and the testing industry.

### **We2.0: The purpose of mandated tests is to provide a snapshot of student performance. By opting out, are you concerned that you will not get an accurate picture of how well your child is doing in school?**

Holland: I am all for the use of appropriate data to inform instruction; data that comes from the classroom and can be used immediately by the teacher to enhance learning. However, this wave of data addiction has children taking so many tests ... "desktops" are piled high with spreadsheets collecting "dust." We have begun to collect data just for the sake of collecting data.

My son has had a wonderful experience with both of his teachers. Their ability to communicate with me about my son's progress has been consistent, clear, and based on classroom evidence. This classroom-based evidence is the most critical component in showing me the strengths of my child as well as the areas to focus upon for future improvement. Computerized assessments at young ages do not typically show what a child truly knows and understands. I trust his teacher completely to share his academic growth.

My son is a bright, intelligent, curious boy. What I value most in education for his age group happens within the walls of his classroom. His teacher is the expert and knows him extremely well. I honor her expertise above any mandate, policy, flawed curricular materials, and especially a standardized test ... a standardized test with cut scores set to fail nearly 70% of our children.

Follow Raschelle Holland's blog at [www.divinesparkignites.com](http://www.divinesparkignites.com)

# Washington's own Hall of Famer

*Redmond teacher Brigitte Tennis' summer has been filled with a whirlwind of activities, jump started early with a surprise announcement naming her as an inductee to the National Teachers Hall of Fame. Tennis traveled to Washington D.C., in April, to meet with President Barack Obama and Education Secretary Arne Duncan, and spend time at NEA headquarters with NEA President Lily Eskelsen Garcia. In June, the founder and head teacher at Stella Schola Middle School traveled to Emporia, Kan., for the induction ceremonies. During that visit, the inductees also helped re-dedicate the Memorial to Fallen Educators, which is located on the Emporia State University campus. We 2.0 asked Tennis to share some of her impressions of the national honor and recent visits.*



“For me, teaching is a vocation and a call from my inner core. This spark was ignited by my 3rd-grade teacher, Mrs. Hunt, who was compassionate but firm and full of creative ways to keep me in continual wonder, a legacy that I want to leave for my own students. Teaching calls me to be a part of the pulse of life, and I want to help others see the excitement of learning. Showing students that I care about them and that I believe in them helps kids begin to believe in themselves.

Meeting President Obama in the Oval Office in the White House was a highlight for sure! The Oval Office is awe inspiring, but one of the things that impressed me most was that we were given a few minutes to speak with the President about education in America. I told him that my biggest concern for the future of education is retaining quality teachers beyond their fifth and seventh year in the profession. Too many new teachers don't feel respected, they are burning out with the demands of the job, and most cannot make a living and raise a family on the basic teacher's salary. The salary scale across the nation must be competitive with other jobs requiring a master's degree, must have good benefits and regular cost of living adjustments, and ought not to be tied to test scores. After all, how many doctor's salaries are tied to the number of patients they cure?

To attract and retain the energetic and brilliant young teachers that our children deserve, I told Mr. Obama that it would be awesome if he could express his appreciation for America's fine educators via a shout out in his next State of the Union Address. I realize the country cannot afford an across-the-board raise for new teachers, but I proposed teacher loans could be forgiven if an educator teaches for at least seven years with satisfactory evaluations. This idea would help attract, but also retain, young teachers. New teachers also need support from experienced teachers and that's a job that all of us need to reach out and do.

In our discussion with Education Secretary Arne Duncan, all five of the inductees agreed reducing class size, especially in the elementary schools, is a significant issue. Imagine the teacher who is trying to teach 30 little ones the fundamentals of reading, writing and mathematics frantically trying to catch mistakes before they are repeated over and over again! It's hard to make a difference and to set students up for success when there are so many needing immediate attention! If primary teachers were able to work with fewer students per class, time could be devoted to supervising each student's creation of proper letters, more personalized care could be spent on reading strategies, and math facts could be practiced with each child individually to ensure mastery. If attention

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From HALL OF FAME, page 7

is paid to the class size and availability of solid education at the pre-kindergarten and elementary grades, students will experience more success because they have the basic foundational tools to build on. Not only did Mr. Duncan's staff take notes, but I hope that we will see some movement to support our elementary colleagues soon.



Brigitte Tennis is one of five educators in the United States inducted in the National Teacher Hall of Fame for 2015.

Being part of the National Teachers Hall of Fame is an honor I take very seriously. It's not that I am the 'best' teacher; there are thousands of inspirational teachers working in classrooms

all over the United States! The other inductees and I have been chosen to represent all the good things that are going on in public education today. The NTHF has given me a platform to bring what educators do to light. Yes, there are problems, but there are problems in every profession. Lawmakers need to make a communal effort to listen to the teachers in the classroom, and to work collegially to do our best for children.

One way that I help create understanding about what's really going on in the American classroom today is to invite local legislators into the classroom to teach with me. I have found legislators are eager to learn and can learn a lot by spending time co-teaching with me. I send my legislators lesson plans for the morning, and assure them that we will teach together, each contributing to the lesson as a team. This is also a way for me to highlight that I am a National Board Certified Teacher and that what I do takes skill and preparation. It's important, though, that legislators spend more than an hour with students so they can get a good picture of the ups and downs of a day. This allows legislators to see how diverse the needs to a classroom can be. We must open our doors and invite people in so they can see what amazing things we are doing with limited resources! Forging these kinds of relationships takes time and effort, but the payoff is huge because decisions can be based on being *in* a classroom rather than just based on hearsay.” ”

*The NEA has a longstanding relationship with the National Teacher Hall of Fame, serving as a partner, sponsor, and supporter of the Hall's efforts to spotlight the heroes in education. For more information, visit the website at: <http://www.nthf.org/>*

From LEGISLATURE, page 3

## How higher education fared ...

On compensation, higher education faculty and staff will receive a 4.8 percent COLA over the biennium. Community and technical college employees can still bargain the distribution of COLA on their salary schedules. UFWS faculty at the regional universities also can bargain salary above state allocated increases.

The budget notably allows two-year colleges to use local funds to provide increment funding during this biennium. The Legislature, however, will need to authorize this new option to continue in the future. Higher education employees also will continue to pay a 15 percent share of the monthly health care premium, as negotiated in the state employee coalition bargaining agreement. There are no increases to the limitations on spousal coverage that had been proposed earlier by the Senate.

On college tuition, the higher education budget lowers undergraduate tuition and provides \$160 million in state funds to cover the lost revenue to the institutions. Tuition will be reduced 5 percent next year, and grows to 20 percent at regional schools, and 15 percent at the UW and WSU.

While change provides relief for students and families who faced double digit tuition increases during the height of the recession, it does not make progress toward amply funding our two- and four-year institutions. Further, the budget reduces the State Need Grant (SNG) to reflect the reduced tuition instead of taking the opportunity to serve more eligible SNG students with the savings.

Other major changes within higher education:

- \$110 million for ongoing compensation increases, which are funded based on a 4.8 percent increase for all higher education employees, including community and technical college faculty and staff covered by the I-732 COLA.
- \$41 million to fund Opportunity Scholarships for low-income middle school students who commit to earning a bachelor's degree in high demand fields in STEM and health care.
- \$13.7 million targeted to STEM programs, including computer science and aerospace.
- \$19.5 million to develop a medical school at WSU and for medical programs at UW.