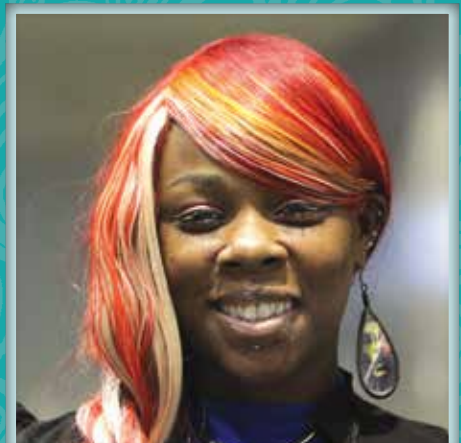


we2.0

Washington Education Association
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WE Are WEA

Individual voices unite to form a powerful story.

News you can use

It's that time again ... welcome back to school! In addition to the usual preparations, there is a lot of news going on about education as the first bell of the year rings.

Class Size Initiative — 1351

Since you left for summer break, we collectively turned in more than 348,000 signatures to place the lower class size Initiative 1351 on the Nov. 4 ballot. That was the first step. Now we have to win in November, and we are counting on your help. Talk with your family friends and neighbors. Remind them that smaller class sizes help provide all students with the individual attention they need, whether they are in elementary school, secondary math or science, or are just struggling to keep up. Lower class sizes are good for students and that's the message we must convey.

Education funding

Our state has grossly underfunded public education for decades. As we know, correcting this means the Legislature must take action. We are not alone in recognizing this. Just as we are opening doors to a new school year, the state Supreme Court is holding a hearing on whether to hold the Legislature in contempt for failure to meet the

state's paramount duty to fund public education. WEA is hitting the airwaves soon with a pro-public education radio spot, and I encourage you to visit our website at www.WashingtonEA.org to give it a listen, in case you don't hear it on your favorite radio station.

"Failing schools" letters

I expect you already might be hearing from parents who want to know more about the Arne Duncan "failing schools" letters that nearly every parent of nearly every public school student in Washington state received. A few weeks ago, we sent out a message on how to talk to parents about these letters. You can find that Q-and-A at www.WashingtonEA.org/letters.

As your union, WEA is working with and for you to bring about positive change for public education, our students and our profession. Together, we can be successful.

Best wishes for a great year ahead. Please stay in touch.



Kim Mead
WEA President

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Voters have a chance to dramatically reduce class sizes in Washington's K-12 public schools. Initiative 1351 is on the Nov. 4 ballot.



Union. Professional. Amid the growing attacks on educators, WEA members are standing proud to be called union.

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This I believe

I believe that being a teacher is a calling. It is our calling.

It calls us up out of sleep with alarm clocks set for 5 a.m. and with teacher dreams.

And I believe that what we are called to do is not just to “prepare students for life” but to engage with students in life right now. To celebrate the little daily bits and pieces of their lives with them, all of it flowing into the stream of their life now and their life beyond now, all of which is the same stream.

I believe in first-day-of-school clothes, kids looking ready for their close-up.

In kindergarten and first-grade school pictures of kids wearing smiles that look like Bill the Cat tasting a new vegetable.

I believe in feeding kids new vegetables by helping them grow vegetables in the school garden. Crispy kale chips, tangy sorrel, R.J. who wouldn't eat celery at first saying, “I love me some snap peas!” Especially when those snap peas are in a salad we made ourselves.

I believe in science experiments — soda and vinegar volcanoes, magnets, balls, ramps, catapults, snail races, and always, always the fair test.

See WE Are WEA, pg. 6



We belong. We are connected. We care about students, families, public schools and one another. Though each individual brings unique skills, talents and passion to the work, together we are stronger. We have shared values and we are united in our dedication to our students across our state.

In the coming months, we have the opportunity to be a part of this campaign which celebrates and recognizes our work both individually and collectively. We may ask you to talk about what keeps your energy level high; we may ask to hear why you love your work; we may ask you to share a story that illustrates why you are committed to being a part of the cause.

Sometimes, it feels as if we are engulfed by chronic underfunding. Often we feel overloaded by the latest mandates. There are times when we feel baffled by all we contend with day after day. Still, we are hard working. We are smart. We are rock solid and we are proud union members. We Are WEA.



Students considering a career in teaching participated in classroom observations at the Muckleshoot Tribal School in southeast Auburn during a two-day Wisdom Seekers conference earlier this summer. The conference is part of the Future Native Teachers Initiative, which aims to inspire a new generation of Native teachers to better reflect the students already in Washington's schools.

WEA partners with tribes to help Native students see future in teaching

Educators across Washington understand how critically important it is to close the opportunity gap that has led to dramatically different levels of success among students. But how?

Research shows that relationships create a critical foundation for learning, and that student success rises significantly when students can

see themselves and their culture among the educators in their schools. For Native American students in Washington, that opportunity is rare. Only 1 percent of our state's teachers are Native American/Alaska Native, and they are dramatically under-represented when compared to Native students in our schools.

"That needs to change," says Randy Paddock, a WEA UniServ Director in the WEA Olympic Council. "It's vital that we get more Native Americans into teaching. We need to be the leaders in our communities. We've been pushed far too much into the background. Kids have been falling through the cracks."

WEA partnered with regional tribes, plus Native education leaders at schools, colleges and the state superintendent's office to create the Future Native Teachers Initiative. The result: a two-day Wisdom Seekers conference before classes

dismissed for the summer that encourages Native students to consider education as a career.

"We always say, 'Relationship precedes



WE Are WEA, from pg. 3

I believe in the power of sharks and dinosaurs to make little kids into biologists, to lead us searching through tide pools for smaller fish and through the school greenbelt for those dinosaur ancestors, redwing blackbirds. I believe in the magic of that first day we're quiet enough in the greenbelt to hear the redwing blackbirds' songs.

I believe in the kindness of little children, whether moving a snail from the walking path or making a space in circle for a classmate. I believe that kindness can be taught by teachers who hand a wiggly kid something to wiggle through their fingers so they can stay in the circle.

I believe that "fair" does not mean "the same" and that kindergartners and first-graders can figure this out.

I believe in the power of children's writing when they write the stories of their lives, their inspiration to form the ABCs in the telling of what they love. In their ability to write a poem that will make you cry or take you on a roller coaster drop, starting with "So Much Depends on." In letting them see their teacher struggle with her own "So Much Depends on" writing.

I believe in tooth charts. Nothing moves a kid's counting or graphing skills faster than checking their progress on the classroom tooth chart. Unless it's counting the squares for "Sorry!" or "Pretty Pretty Princess" (where the boys want to wear that crown, too). I believe in figuring out the hard math problem, and showing lots and lots of ways we did it.

I believe we show our children how we value them and their families by what we eat, what we invite them to bring to class. Hand-formed tortillas, hummus, apples with honey and cinnamon, fried rice and sometimes even fried pork rinds (with a vegetarian and kosher option, of course). Your family and food are welcome here. Teach us the way to say this food.

I believe that I will never read *Charlotte's Web* without crying at the end. That I will never read *Short Cut* without having all of our hearts race as the kids dive off the tracks to make way for the train. That we will all learn to *Whistle for Willie*. And that Mo Willems read our teacher minds about reading instruction before he introduced us all to *Elephant and Piggie*.

I believe in recess. We come back from stretching ourselves on the monkey bars ready to stretch our brains. I believe in P.E. If I want my children to jump through some of my hoops I should jump through

hula hoops with them now and then. And help make paper hoop chains at Project Time. And paper shoes, paper hats, paper vests, shawls, scabbards.

I believe in celebrations. Taking recess not at the usual time if it snows (and if you're from a place where snow is especially a miracle). Dance parties of kids stretchy as Gumby, making their moves in the Writers' Workshop celebration circle. Wearing the fake diamond rings we get for Teacher Appreciation Week. Cheers when we free the contents of "The June Box" in the last week of school, releasing Pokemon, Legos and Mutant Ninjas.

I believe that the friendships we make in kindergarten and first grade will stay with us forever, even if we don't see one another after grade school. I still remember the kid who gave me a trinket from her pocket when I was sad over my missing cat at age 7, don't you?

I believe in always accepting help when one of my little girls says, "Poo-haps I can help." I believe I really need their help, as much as they need mine. I believe we're in this together. And I believe it's almost time to go back to school, because we teachers and kids miss each other. I'm going back to First Grade. You come, too.

— Kelly Riggle Hower

Kelly Riggle Hower teaches first grade at Seattle's Pathfinder K-8. WEA asked her to share thoughts on the core beliefs that guide her daily work life. It is based on a national project of the same title.



Kelly Riggle Hower

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Federal policy fails schools

Virtually every parent with a child in Washington's public schools received a letter recently notifying them that their child's school is failing. Superintendents, principals and educators are not shy about discussing the absurdity of the notion that nearly every public school in the state is considered "failing."

What is this about? Last spring, U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan tried to force Washington state to tie student standardized test scores to teacher evaluations. While our current law allows scores to be used along with several other factors, it is certainly not required. Duncan threatened to take away Washington's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) waiver if we didn't make the change.

WEA members pushed the Legislature to leave our evaluation system alone. A bi-partisan Senate coalition opposed the bill, defeating the effort, leaving our teacher evaluation program intact and triggering Duncan to pull our state's waiver. Under NCLB, every student must perform at grade level, according to standardized test results -- whether arriving from a different country, having special needs, working at night to help support her family or simply waking up on the wrong side of the bed on the days the tests were given.

Superintendents, principals and educators are not shy about discussing the absurdity of the notion that every public school in the state is considered "failing."

If one student at a school is not proficient, the whole school is labeled as failing, or, as the feds put it, the school has not made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

We think the failure is in federal policy, not in our schools. Here are just a few reasons we're proud to disagree with Duncan:

- Measuring teacher performance was never intended in the development of the standardized tests. They were developed to measure one aspect of student learning and researchers have proven that there is no correlation between student test scores on these kinds of standardized tests and teaching ability.
- Opposition to the use and number of standardized tests is growing. These tests assume that each student learns the same material at the same rate. The growing number of tests means that we have to spend more time teaching students how to take the test, or teaching to the content of narrow tests, at the expense of valuable learning time.
- Imposing such a broad and ineffective requirement across the board is senseless. The tests are not given to all students in all grades, and only affect about 20 percent of all teachers -- those who teach math or language arts in grades 3-8 and 11.

State Supreme Court kills pension increases

After a seven-year legal fight led by WEA, the state Supreme Court has upheld cuts in retirement benefits for K-12 educators in retirement Plans 1 and 3.

On Aug. 14, the Supreme Court upheld the Legislature's 2007 decision to eliminate gainsharing for WEA members in retirement Plans 1 and 3. The Court also upheld the elimination of uniform cost-of-living adjustments for current and future retired educators in Plan 1. Read details at www.WashingtonEA.org

The decision will not reduce any current retirement payments; what it reduces is the growth over time or members' lifetime earnings.

Summary of court ruling for each plan

Plan	Uniform COLA	Gain Sharing	Early Retirement Factors
Plan 1	Court ruling upheld the Legislature's repeal of the UCOLA. This annual increase will not occur in future years. Upon retirement, members can select an optional COLA that will reduce their initial benefit payment, but provide for a COLA over time. More information about the optional COLA can be found at www.drs.wa.gov	Court ruling upheld the Legislature's repeal of gain sharing provisions. When gain sharing was in place, portions of high investment returns were distributed to Plan 1 members through an increase to the uniform COLA. This occurred at times when annual investment returns were 10% or more over four years.	N/A
Plan 2	N/A (Base COLA for Plan 2 is not impacted by this ruling.)	N/A	Because the repeal of gain sharing was upheld, the early retirement factors enacted in 2008 remain in effect for individuals with 30 years of service and who were hired before May 1, 2013.
Plan 3	N/A (Base COLA for the defined benefit portion of Plan 3 is not impacted by this ruling.)	Court ruling upheld the Legislature's repeal of gain sharing provisions. When gain sharing was in place, portions of high investment returns were distributed to Plan 3 members through their defined contribution accounts. This occurred at times when annual investment returns were 10% or more over four years.	Because the repeal of gain sharing was upheld, the early retirement factors enacted in 2008 remain in effect for individuals with 30 years of service and who were hired before May 1, 2013.

More information available at the Department of Retirement Systems website: www.drs.wa.gov



Yes on 1351!

I-1351 for smaller class sizes make the November ballot



Thanks to the hard work and commitment of thousands of WEA members across the state, voters will have a chance to dramatically reduce class sizes in Washington's K-12 public schools. WEA members and other public school supporters collected nearly 350,000 voter signatures for Initiative 1351, more than enough to qualify it for the Nov. 4 ballot.

I-1351 is our chance to make history — and make a difference for our students that will last a lifetime. We know that smaller class sizes are especially helpful for kids in math and science, and for struggling students, who benefit from more individual attention from their teachers.

"When I was out gathering signatures, I heard from many people who were shocked to learn that Washington ranks 47th in the nation in class sizes," WEA President Kim Mead said. "We can do better. The promise of Initiative 1351 is that we will do better. And our students deserve it."

I-1351 is based on the Legislature's own Quality Education Council recommendations for class size allocations. These numbers were determined by the Legislature itself:

- For most schools, class sizes in K-3 would be capped at 17 students, with all other grades limited to 25 students.

- For high-poverty schools, K-3 would be capped at 15 students and grades 4-12 would be either 22 or 23 students.
- The initiative also adds other staff in schools, including paraprofessionals such as reading

and math assistants, librarians and school counselors, thus increasing the number of caring adults available to assist students throughout their school day.

I-1351 is consistent with the Supreme Court's McCleary decision, which already ordered the Legislature to increase funding for public education, including smaller class sizes. WEA leaders and staff are meeting later this month to finalize internal strategies for passing I-1351 now that it's on the ballot. Class Size Counts, the community organization

sponsoring I-1351, is running the public voter campaign.

"We worked hard to collect signatures for I-1351, and we succeeded," Mead said. "In the next few weeks, I hope every WEA member and educator in Washington will step up and help pass this historic measure."

"I'm proud to be part of a union that has the power and courage to advocate for what our students need — like smaller class sizes."

