



we2.0

Washington Education Association  
Volume 53, Number 2 – Spring 2015

It's Time...  
It's Past Time.





# Long overdue



*WEA President Kim Mead: "I've never been so encouraged, so thrilled, with the fact that we are all standing here together saying 'It's Time' for the future of our kids and our state."*

**I** am so proud to be a member of our union. Nearly every day, I pre-set the map on my phone and head out the door to spend time with members from around the state who are walking out for the day to protest the Legislature's inaction toward properly funding our schools.

Just as our annual Representative Assembly got underway in Bellevue last month, members from Lakewood, Sedro-Woolley and Stanwood — in a grassroots effort — walked out to protest the Legislature's budget proposals. They were the first to take a day of action. While we were discussing new business items on the RA floor, we took a few minutes to stream video from Bellingham where some 1,000 Whatcom County teachers and school employees had gathered for their action. It was energizing, and contagious: Those brave first few set in motion rolling walkouts that continue to rock the state. As *We2.0* went to press, more than 60 locals representing over 35,000 members have taken to the streets to say: It's Time for

smaller classes, better pay, and putting an end to testing madness.

Those themes also permeated the RA, as delegates debated and passed numerous business items to reduce the role of testing in Washington so that we can teach more and test less. Delegates also considered how to keep the actions alive should the Legislature fail to get our message.

The show of support from students, parents, our labor brothers and sisters — and even some legislators — with us on the picket lines and at rallies — gives all of us confidence knowing we are standing up for what is right. I look forward each day to finding a new rally destination, sometimes after a few wrong turns, because I can't wait to see the next group in red. Like you, I believe our students deserve smaller class sizes in all grades, fewer standardized tests, and educators deserve not only a COLA but increased compensation and stronger health care funding. It's Time. It's PAST time.

— Kim Mead, WEA president

## contents



- 3 WEA RA: Sights and sounds from 2015 WEA Representative Assembly
- 4 Day of Actions: Thousands of educators are holding one-day strikes against the Legislature over school funding. Many locals have voted and will hold rolling walkouts into June.
- 6 Toxic Testing: Parents, students and educators join growing movement to opt kids out of testing
- 8 Congratulations to Puyallup's Jan Olmstead, WEA's 2015 ESP of the Year

*It's TIME: More than a 1,000 WEA members and supporters turned the Capitol steps in Olympia into a sea of red April 25 to rally for state funding for smaller class sizes and compensation.*





# It's TIME...

## Year of the test and full funding top issues at 2015 WEA Representative Assembly

**M**ore than 1,000 members from across the state gathered for the 2015 WEA Representative Assembly in Bellevue last month to identify key issues for their Association to tackle in the upcoming year. The key takeaway: It's TIME. It's time to fully fund smaller K-12 class sizes. It's time for professional pay and benefits. It's time to take a stand on the endless amount of high-stakes tests.

The 2015 WEA RA was the year of the test. Delegates considered, debated and voted on all facets of testing — from the amount of time taken away from class time

to prepare students to reliability of the new state tests to test scores linked to teacher evaluations. They texted, tweeted and emailed their congressional leaders about the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act currently being considered in Washington, D.C. Closer to home, members spoke passionately about their experiences with the testing impact on students and their own children. (See *OPTOUT* story on page 6.)

In case the Legislature needed a reminder that educators, parents and allies, are watching, delegates also traveled to Olympia

*See WEA RA, page 7*

## WEA Officers

Delegates at the 2015 WEA Representative Assembly re-elected Kim Mead and Stephen Miller to another two-year term as president and vice president, respectively.

Ted Raihl, a Mabton social studies teacher, and Martha Patterson, a Bremerton special education teacher, were both elected as NEA State Directors. They each will serve a three-year term.







# Fed up, WEA members walk out to support their students

**F**ed up with the state's failure to reduce class sizes and improve compensation, WEA members in more than 60 school districts have approved one-day strikes and walkouts against the state Legislature. It's the first time since 1999 that WEA members have staged rolling walkouts over issues such as pay.

"We expect the Legislature to fully fund smaller class sizes in every grade level as required by voter-approved I-1351," says Randy Davis, Marysville Education Association president. "And we need the state to fund competitive, professional salaries and benefits so we can continue attracting and keeping qualified, caring teachers for our kids."

The walkouts began April 22. Three days later, some 1,000 Whatcom County teachers and school employees plus supporters rallied in downtown Bellingham. After that, it was only a matter of time before







locals across the state began organizing their own Day of Action. It was clear that educators were speaking with one voice when the votes jumped the Cascades and the first Eastern Washington locals announced their walkout plans. An estimated 6,000 Seattle, Issaquah and Mercer Island educators marched from the Space Needle to downtown Seattle with their message. Community support has been solid. Parents, labor groups, and elected officials have joined us on the picket lines and at the rallies in every neighborhood.

For a current picture, check out the interactive walkout map on OurVoice at [www.OurVoiceWashingtonEA.org/walk-outs](http://www.OurVoiceWashingtonEA.org/walk-outs).

As of press time, educators in more than 50 school districts — representing more than 35,000 members — across the state have approved one-day strikes against the Legislature over school funding. The protests have spread to all parts of the state, from Blaine to Camas to Eastern Washington.

Teachers are walking out to protest budget plans that fail to fully fund smaller class sizes in all grade levels and that fall far short of funding the professional pay and benefits needed to attract and keep qualified educators for our students.





# Not an isolated incident

*Growing number of parents and students joining opt-out movement*

It's an easy answer, really.

Teachers work with students every day. They know where their students are, as well as their areas of strengths and weaknesses. They know how to address focus areas. And, they know that every minute they spend on testing takes away time from actual learning.

That's what Shannon Ergun, mom of two, and a teacher at Lincoln High School in Tacoma, knows in her heart — and why she is part of a movement gaining momentum across the country: Parents who refuse to let their children take state and other standardized tests.

"I choose to opt my kids out of all of these simply because as Montessori students they should be moving at their own pace in their own direction," Ergun says. "I trust their teachers to assess my children and determine next steps for them."

Last September, Ergun submitted letters to her school district saying she doesn't want her kindergartner or second-grader taking tests not written by their teachers. That means her youngest is not to take the WaKIDS (Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developmental Skills), or the Developmental Reading Assessment for her oldest. These standardized tests are among the two dozen plus — both state- and district-mandated — that Tacoma Public Schools will administer at various grade levels this year.

"I'm not opposed to using standardized tools to determine next steps for my kids but I have found that all too often it becomes complete reliance on the test rather than one tool of many," Ergun says. "If a standardized assessment were used to help with academic decisions for my children, I would want to know that it was one of multiple measures, that the teacher got the data quickly, and that the data were used effectively rather than just as a score."

As an English Language Learner teacher, she gives the Scholastic Reading Inventory to her students by district requirement — not by choice.

"This test is not designed for ESL students so for the most

part they are rated as Below Reading or Kindergarten level. If I were to use only this assessment, I'd think they had some sort of disability or had no literacy skills. Instead, I use this as one measure that tells me how well the students are doing and whether in comparison to the previous administration they have improved. All of my students can read, and most of them well, in their home languages. The test isn't measuring them correctly. I don't want my own children to be misjudged based on a test."

Ergun isn't alone in her thinking.

Last month, delegates at WEA's annual Representative Assembly overwhelmingly passed New Business Item No. 4, saying "when educators make a strong statement that the toxic tests are not appropriate for their own children, other parents will listen." NBI 4, which Ergun sponsored, calls on WEA to educate and encourage members to exercise their rights to refuse the state-mandated assessment for their own children and promote their choice to exercise those rights through existing forms of communication. One after another, delegates shared their story on why they allowed their children to not participate in this year's testing frenzy.

Reports in the number of high-school students refusing to take the state tests also continue to grow across the state. According to Seattle Public Schools, not a single junior took the Smarter Balanced exams at Nathan Hale High this spring, while 95 percent of juniors at Garfield and Ballard High and 80 percent at Roosevelt and Ingraham High refused to take the tests.

Ergun says her daughter's teacher told her she couldn't opt her child out of the tests. Under state law, parents have a right to exempt their child from state tests.

"If our teachers don't know that parents have these rights, how are the parents supposed to know? If teachers tell them they are wrong, many parents won't push back," she says. "We also need to show by our own actions that these tests are not appropriate. If we refuse the tests and are open about that refusal as parents, even as we teach in public schools and administer these tests when mandated, then other parents will become more aware of their rights."

*According to Seattle Public Schools, not a single junior took the Smarter Balanced exams at Nathan Hale High, while 95 percent of juniors at Garfield and Ballard High and 80 percent at Roosevelt and Ingraham High refused to take the tests.*

## Legislature 2015, to be continued ...

To the surprise of no one, the regular 105-day legislative session ended with no agreements between the House and Senate regarding education budgets or revenues. Special sessions have a much different rhythm and feel than regular sessions — gone are the daily hearings and committee meetings that define the schedule. A few topics have had hearings — McCleary implementation plans, capital gains and carbon taxes — but overall the climate during special session is much quieter than the regular session.

As of *We2.0* press time, five key issues remain undecided and at stake for our members. For the latest updates on what is happening in Olympia, be sure to visit [www.OurVoiceWashingtonEA.org](http://www.OurVoiceWashingtonEA.org).

### Compensation

The House budget provides \$154 million more than the Senate Republicans for educator salary increases. The House proposal is 4.8 percent and the Senate's is 3 percent over two years. Meanwhile, the independent salary commission approved an 11.2 percent pay raise for legislators.

### Health Care

The House budget provides over \$200 million more than the Senate Republicans for health care costs, or about \$170 per person per month over two years. In fact, the Senate doesn't provide any increase at all — and they propose a state takeover of health care that would eliminate health care coverage for many part-time workers.

### Funding Class Size and Support Staff

Both the Senate and the House propose to ignore the will of the voters, funding only class-size reductions in K-3. That means students in high poverty schools, or in grades 4-12 remain jammed into some of the most crowded classrooms in the nation. Neither chamber funds the additional support staff necessary to serve our students.

### Misuse of Testing

Standardized testing is out of control. Educators know it. Parents know it. Students know it. Why don't legislators see it? Many legislators actually want to increase the ways we misuse tests — increasing the stakes and using results to place blame. Tests are supposed to help us help students — and we need lawmakers to stop misusing tests for inappropriate purposes.

### Local Decision Making

The best decisions that are made about education are made closest to the student — at the local level. We also know that our collective voices — through local bargaining for issues such as improved pay and working conditions — lead to better outcomes for students and better ability to attract and retain quality educators. Some legislators believe they know better and want to institute a one-size-fits-all approach. We know education. We live education. Our voices need to be included in local educational decisions.

### WEA RA, page 3

to rally at the state Capitol's legislative building. The Capitol steps turned into a sea of red on April 25, the day the legislative session was scheduled to end. Our legislators' reaction? They cancelled the last day of session, leaving town a day early so they wouldn't have to face our concerns. For sights and sounds of the Olympia rally, visit [www.WashingtonEA.org/rally2015](http://www.WashingtonEA.org/rally2015). A complete list of action items from this year's RA is available at [www.WashingtonEA.org](http://www.WashingtonEA.org). Read the governance documents under the "We Are WEA" dropdown.

In the midst of this year's RA, locals starting with Arlington, Sedro-Woolley and Stanwood, went on strike in protest of the Legislature's inaction toward properly funding



our schools. Members elsewhere soon followed with votes to take similar one-day actions. These votes and actions are still ongoing. (See *WALKOUTS*, page 4) Delegates also directed the Association to support local strikes throughout the state beginning with the 2015-16 school year, if the Legislature fails to make adequate progress toward full funding of educator pay and class size reduction this legislative session.

## we2.0

Washington  
Education  
Association

### 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, 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](mailto:lwoo@washingtonea.org), by mail at P.O. Box 9100, Federal Way, WA 98063-9100, or 253-765-7027.

*We 2.0* (ISSN 1544-5283) is published quarterly by the Washington Education Association, 32032 Weyerhaeuser Way S., Federal Way, WA 98001-9687. Subscription cost of \$0.80 is included in annual membership dues. Separate subscription price: \$15.50 annually.

Copyright 2015 by the Washington Education Association.

Periodical nonprofit postage paid at Auburn, WA, and additional mailing offices.  
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to  
*We 2.0*, P.O. Box 9100, Federal Way, WA 98063-9100.



Scan with your smartphone to stay connected to WEA.



*Brouillet Elementary School students celebrate and share thank yous with "Mrs. Jan," WEA's 2015 ESP of the Year Jan Olmstead.*

"Our members are not 'just-a.' I have always believed in fighting for the underdog and fighting for what's right. I constantly tell my special education students that they can be anything they want to be and that they need to believe in themselves every day," says WEA's 2015 Education Support Professional of the Year Jan Olmstead.

As a 27-year veteran paraeducator, Olmstead has had a long time to hone her skills in working with both students and adults. She has worked with secondary students in middle school for many of those years, but recently switched to working with students at Brouillet Elementary School in Puyallup.

"In my younger years, I was not very tactful. I was getting in trouble from my Dad. That took some learning," she says.

She must have taken her father's lessons to heart because Brouillet's principal, Nancy Strobel, says Olmstead is the gold standard. She says that Olmstead is great with her students because she can really read what is going on with them. But it is in Strobel's work with Olmstead in the role of Puyallup Education Support Professional Association president where Strobel is consistently blown away.

"Over the years, I have had several opportunities to work with Jan in contract negotiations . . . Bargaining sessions can easily become adversarial in tone, but that

## Beloved Puyallup paraeducator is the 'gold standard' in dedication to students' academic and personal success

*Jan Olmstead is WEA's 2015 Education Support Professional of the Year*

has never been the case in my experiences with Jan. She leads her negotiations team in positive and productive bargaining sessions. While she is a strong advocate for her members (and will persevere with a topic in which she believes) she always maintains a problem-solving demeanor at the bargaining table," Strobel says.

"We matter," Olmstead says about all ESP members. "I think that I get to form stronger relationships with students because I work in smaller groups — even in the junior high, the kids could open up to me and tell me things they wouldn't tell their six teachers during the day."

She says that students who might be "placed" with a custodian as a punitive measure end up forming relationships with them that lead to service projects and stronger self-esteem. She believes that all ESP members are teachers one way or another.

Special education teacher Jenna Buswell calls "Mrs. Jan" a breath of fresh air. She calls her work with students distinguished, professional and exemplary. She says the students are disappointed each day when Olmstead heads to Summit UniServ for her duties as PESPA president.

"In a way," Buswell says, "the award is for the students, too. Some of the kids don't get awarded so to see their teacher get awarded in such a way brought them so much joy."

"You can never give up on a kid," says Olmstead. "You must persevere and you must always advocate for your fellow workers, too."

*Watch WEA's 2015 Education Support Professional Jan Olmstead at work online at [www.WashingtonEA.org/ESP2015](http://www.WashingtonEA.org/ESP2015)*