

A close-up, high-angle portrait of a Black man with a short beard and mustache, looking slightly to the right with a thoughtful expression. He is wearing a blue and white checkered shirt under a dark sweater. His hand is visible in the lower right corner, with fingers slightly curled.

we2.0

Washington Education Association
Volume 54, Number 1 – Winter 2016

Teacher of the Year

Tacoma's Nathan Gibbs-Bowling brings an intense, powerful and compassionate voice to education

Taking Back the Profession

We have an educator shortage in our state. After decades of increased testing, loss of professional judgement and loss of creative opportunities, the public now sees the effects. Education employment opportunities are not being sought.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) offers hope to address some of the detractors. If there was something good in No Child Left Behind (NCLB), it was that we learned without question that the promise of public schools isn't being delivered equitably to all kids. There are many reasons for that. The old law was punitive. It helped identify struggling students and schools, but did little to lift them up.

In our state, funding has fallen short for over 30 years.

ESSA won't solve all our problems. But many of the old restrictions are gone and much of the interpretation is left to us to decide, as a state and in our locals. That means we need to make sure that our educator voices are heard. We need to be engaged, and influence the decisions

made at both the local and state level. The next set of decisions may be more critical than what we saw emerge from NCLB. Our students depend on us.

Diving deep into the new law, we will provide information to you to use to positively influence decisions at all levels. We will be able to bargain many topics that affect us and our students. Imagine the return of recess and art. Imagine assessing student learning to inform instruction rather than a high-stakes hammer-like test.

I am hopeful. The punitive elements of NCLB are history, creating an opening for us to take back our profession. We owe it to our students and we owe it to the education profession. We are the educators who inspire creativity and a love of learning. We partner with our parents, guardians and communities to create opportunities, to make schools stronger, to foster the joy that comes from the discovery and mastery of a new subject.

How will you take back your profession? Membership matters. Be a part of the positive change our union will create.

*Kim Mead
WEA President*



contents



Washington State Teacher of the Year Nathan Gibbs-Bowling insists he's not the best teacher – even in his own household – but the Tacoma native has exceeded expectations as an educator who has become known as the “cheerleader, college professor, and drill sergeant” for Lincoln High's students. His dedication to his craft and his students' successes has set him apart more than once in recent years. Page 6

- 3 Legislature 2016:** Highlights into the halfway point of the legislative session.
- 4 Union Strong:** An update on WE Are WEA: Membership Matters, our statewide effort to expose the political groups behind the attacks, engage WEA members, protect our rights and maintain a strong union at the local, state and national level.
- 8 Certification 101:** Is your certificate up to date? Read about the changes in certificate renewal and how to maintain your teaching certificate.
- 12 Opt Out:** Shorewood High senior opts out of new state test and inadvertently leads a mini revolution.

Legislature 2016



Dozens of WEA members from across the state recently participated in a statewide PoliSparks, a program designed to give members hands-on training and political action experiences.

When the session began this year, politicians and pundits were lowballing expectations. “A lot of little things,” is how House Appropriations Chair Hans Dunshee described what he thought they’d achieve.

Boom. About halfway into session, Republicans on the Senate Ways and Means Committee took aim at us — amending their so-called McCleary bill to severely limit our ability to bargain for TRI pay. Members immediately responded to calls to contact their senators to put a stop to this and to focus on fully funding basic education for our state’s public school students.

As of press time, this is still playing out. Hopefully partisan gridlock will be our friend and this bill will die, for now. It serves as an urgent reminder that threats to our union come from many corners and we need to be active and engaged to push them back.

Pivot to charters schools. The Senate approved a bill, attempting to make them constitutional. As of press time, the House hadn’t taken action. It’s ludicrous that some lawmakers are fixated on a bill to make charters legal for fewer than 1,000 students, while being held in contempt for failing to meet their obligation to the 1.1 million students in our public schools.

The best bill to address the emerging teacher shortage was offered by Gov. Jay Inslee: to improve starting teacher pay to \$40,000, give a 1 percent raise to all other school staff, and double funds for the mentoring program. This is a modest first step, and we all know that much more needs to be done. We appreciate that the governor made starting pay a priority in a non-budget year. While there are legislative and administrative fixes that can address the teacher shortage,

we think those changes should be done in the context of restoring pay and respect for the profession.

In higher education, a WEA/AFT-supported bill to convert part-time positions to full time and to improve pay at two-year colleges has a good chance of moving forward.

The para professional development bill (SB 6408) is back. If properly funded, it provides PD for para educators, but would also impose a licensure system.

Track these and other bills at www.washingtonnea.org/ourvoice.

In the meantime, don’t forget that the Legislature did approve about \$1.3 billion for this year in K-3 class size reductions and Materials, Supplies and Operating Costs (MSOC) funds. MSOC money can be used in many ways. Last year, smart local bargainers parlayed those funds into TRI pay and other local priorities. If your contract is up this year, make sure your bargaining team is aware of the funds available to your local district.

In addition to fighting off threats from the Legislature, we are directing our political energies to electing pro-education candidates in the fall. In March WEA-PAC will hold a nominating convention where WEA-PAC delegates will decide who to endorse for governor, lieutenant governor and superintendent of public instruction. We are inviting the major candidates to speak and look forward to an engaging day of debate. Who we elect, in statewide and legislative district races, will be critical to addressing the issues queuing up for 2017: pay, testing, class sizes and revenues.

“Membership matters for me, personally, because they (the union) were there. They helped me. They backed me. They supported me and so many times you have a job and you really don’t know what your job encompasses and the union was right there — they showed me my contract. I had something to hold on to that helped me to be able to say, ‘This isn’t right.’”

*Marisa Mackin
Special education instructional assistant
Willard Elementary, Spokane*



MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

“I revel in the freedom ... that comes with a collective bargaining agreement.”

Extremist political groups are attacking our union rights, and Spokane teacher Angela Bina says it’s time for WEA members to stand up and fight back.

“I know what it’s like to lose collective bargaining rights,” Bina says. “It’s gut-wrenching and frustrating. I also know what it’s like to gain them back. And I know this fight MATTERS. There is far too much at stake.”

Bina taught in Wisconsin until 2014. She moved to Washington after Gov. Scott Walker and the Wisconsin legislature decimated the collective bargaining and union representation rights of

educators and other public workers. Educators lost their professional autonomy and their collective voice, and students stopped getting the resources they needed.

Here in Washington, Gov. Jay Inslee and the current pro-education House majority support union rights. But a case before the U.S. Supreme Court could hurt public sector unions in every state. *Friedrichs vs. California Teacher Association* seeks to prohibit unions from collecting representation, or “fair share,” fees from non-members who benefit from the union contract. *Friedrichs* is a direct attack on the core principle that everyone who benefits should pay their fair share of the cost, and it’s part of a well-organized campaign to weaken public-sector unions.

In December, a corporate-backed political group contacted WEA members and urged them to quit the union. Few did, and many of them rescinded their resignations once they learned what they would lose.

WE Are WEA: MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

These attacks on educators and other public-sector professionals are coordinated,

and they're not going to stop. WE Are WEA: Membership Matters, is our statewide effort to expose the political groups behind the attacks, engage WEA members, protect our rights and maintain a strong union at the local, state and national level.

Bina says being part of a strong union allows educators to advocate for their profession, their families and their students.

"Now here I am in Washington state, relieved to have all the rights that I lost in Wisconsin restored to me. I revel in the freedom and strength that comes with a collective bargaining agreement.

"And now I face the possibility of losing my voice again. I will not let that happen."

"If we have an absence of one voice or two voices or five voices, we're missing those voices that help guide us to being a stronger association. Every voice matters. Every voice counts. Every time."

*Gabrielle Wright, teacher
Bonney Lake High School, Sumner*



"When I moved to this country, I wanted to choose a profession that I felt passionate about. Being a member of SEA and WEA have given me a sense of excitement in my new profession. One of the things that is different is to feel I am part of the association. I am SEA. I am WEA."

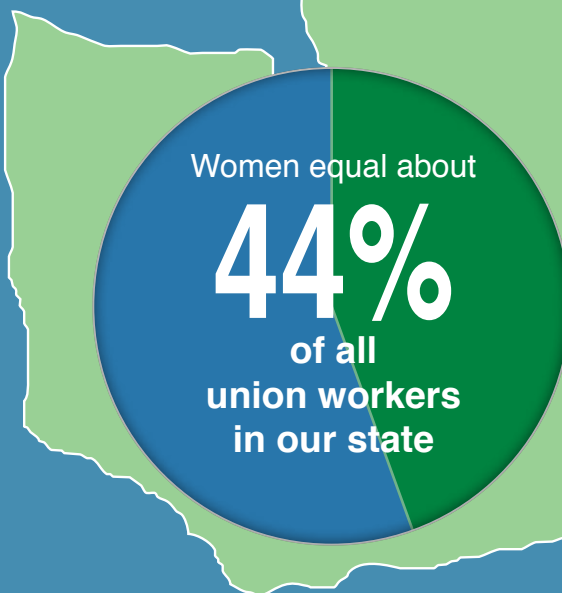
*Maria Zamora, Spanish/ELL teacher
Shadle Park High School, Spokane*

WOMEN and UNIONS

Did you know ...

In Washington
18.4%
of women
are in unions

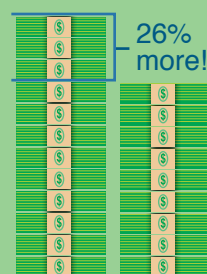
*(New York, California,
Hawaii and Alaska
are the only states
with higher numbers)*



Women in unions in
Washington make about
\$197 more
per week
(over \$10,000 a year)

than non-union
women, a
difference of

26%



Source: Status of Women in the States

Washington Teacher of the Year
Nathan Gibbs-Bowling on
teaching: "I believe in the
transformational and liberatory
power of education — especially
public education — to change
the trajectories of not only
individual lives, but
entire communities."



State Teacher of the Year Nathan Gibbs-Bowling speaks his brand of truth; gives teachers a voice

Tacoma educator in the running for national honors

There is an intensity one feels immediately in talking with 2015 Washington Teacher of the Year Nathan (Nate) Gibbs-Bowling. The intensity is not uncomfortable but rather, a penetrating focus he has about educating his students at Tacoma's Lincoln High School.

Though there is an urgency in his work to prepare his students for college, it is coupled with a casual almost laid-back teaching style he uses in his Advanced Placement (AP) Government and World Geography classes.

"I fundamentally believe that if we put kids in rigorous classrooms and we show we believe in them, they can achieve," Gibbs-Bowling says. And accomplishing their goals they do. Lincoln High students, a vast majority living in poverty, achieve an 88 percent graduation rate with 75 percent of them going to college. Recent graduates have received more than \$3 million in scholarships.

Gibbs-Bowling and a group of colleagues stay after school to provide their students with tutoring, mentoring and excellent teaching. And the support doesn't end at graduation. Three teachers do a 500-mile tour each fall to visit with students in universities in Spokane, Ellensburg, Bellingham and Seattle.

"This isn't rocket science. If you take kids in poverty and give them the supports that middle class students have, they achieve," he says. "The reason I stay at Lincoln is because it's the best place in the nation to work. I have a group of high-functioning colleagues who believe in each other and

who believe in students; I have an administrator who doesn't micromanage. He basically hires well and then leaves us alone. I have autonomy and autonomy is something teachers really, really need in today's policy climate."



Nathan Gibbs-Bowling

Gibbs-Bowling grew up in the same neighborhood where he teaches. His entire adult life is centered in the 2.5-mile circle around his high school. Embedding himself in the neighborhood, he says, is an act of service. He goes to the grocery where his students and their families shop. He is an announcer at Lincoln's football games and wrestling matches. He says teaching is community building.

"Walking into Mr. Bowling's room is like walking into a cognitively demanding environment with ALL kids working ...," Lincoln High School Principal Patrick

Erwin says. "The routines are key for him because he does not want confusion over routines to get in the way of student discourse, whether that is when students are debating the great Supreme Court cases or studying demographic patterns of Tacoma in the 1960s. It is his systemic approach to work that allows his and his students' intellects to blossom."

Activities move at a fast clip in Gibbs-Bowling's classes. Students take time to reflect on their own, discuss issues at their tables and participate in large group discussions. Everyone is engaged. Some are assisting others. Gibbs-Bowling checks in with small groups probing them to think

deeper. As he's giving out vocabulary words, he is welcoming someone back from a day out or reminding them not to worry about the upcoming final since there is classroom work that needs completing first.

"One of the things I've been thinking about in my teaching recently," he says, "is counterinsurgency. With counterinsurgency, you win hearts and then minds. Basically, the students are going to buy into the teacher before they buy into the content. Once I get them bought in and believing in me and I show that I believe and care in them, then we can go and I can teach them anything."

While he believes that the way to close the achievement gap is to replicate the conditions of middle-class families in kids of poverty, his concern is for each and every student no matter where they are when they arrive in his classroom.

Gonzaga University student Trang Tran says Gibbs-Bowling's teaching is what truly motivated her to go to school every day. Though Tran was an independent student who was second in her senior class ranking, she says it was easy to be lazier in class because she was doing well.

"No other teacher has ever challenged this apathy aside from Mr. Bowling," Tran says. "Even if I aced the test, he always saw room where I could do better. He continuously pushed me to my limits, never allowing me to settle with what was good. He wanted great."

She says he creates a sense of community where students can draw upon one another's strengths to allow growth and create opportunities where students can rely upon one another for help.

"He constantly challenges his students to connect the past to the present, drawing from what is going on today to see that history is constantly repeating itself. Through his teaching, Nathan creates aware and active students who see the injustice in the world and students who want to make a difference," Tran says.

A proud and active union member, says he can't imagine working in a so-call "right-to-work" state because he appreciates the union not just for pay and benefits but, even more, for due process and the support he would receive if there was any kind of accusation about the way he teaches.

Gibbs-Bowling is one of four finalists for the National Teacher of the Year. He is using his current visibility to

spotlight his belief that American society is creating policy that is diametrically opposed to transforming the lives of high-poverty students. Policies such as tying teacher evaluation to student test scores are pushing people out of teaching in high-poverty school into more affluent and more suburban schools.

"We see it every day. We see it in the conditions in schools. We see it in neighborhood patterns. We see it in school segregation. The things that are allowed to happen in South Seattle – the things that are allowed to happen here in East Tacoma – they wouldn't be allowed to happen in Issaquah and Bellevue," he says.

This isn't a statement made with malice – it's just stating a fact he sees with his own eyes every day.

"I don't think that the average American knows the lack of predictability and the lack of stability that exists in an average high-poverty family's life. If they understood those circumstances like a teacher does, then they wouldn't create the policies they do. We (teachers) have to tell our stories," he says.

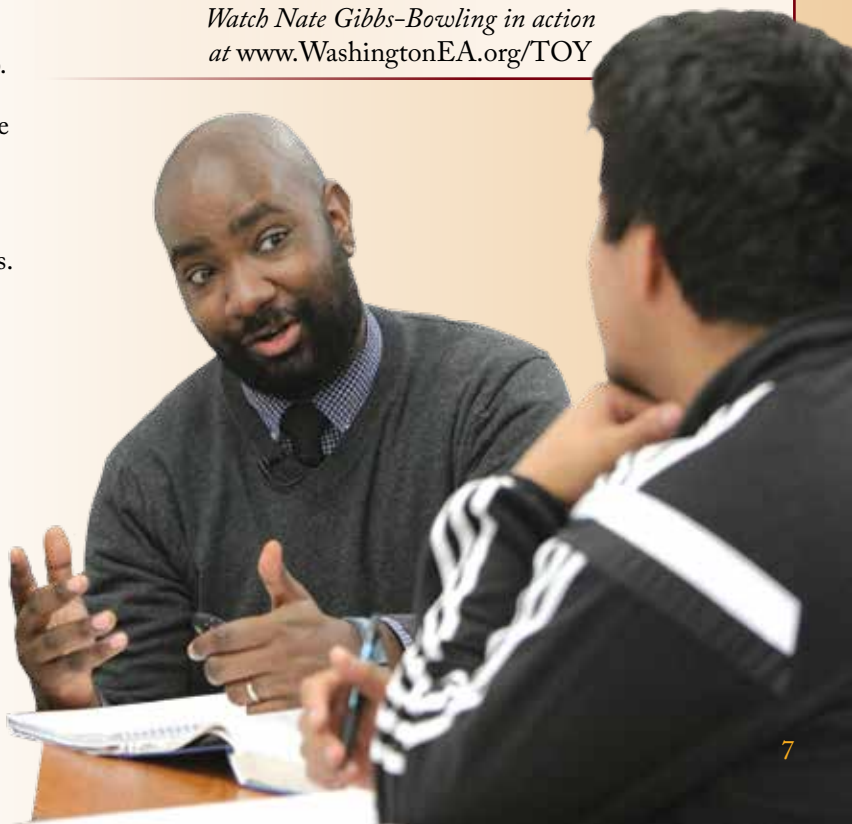
His urgency and his deep devotion to his work, he says, is because teaching and learning particularly at high-poverty schools is a matter of life and death.

Gibbs-Bowling is speaking the truth he sees. He believes to his core being that teaching has saved and transformed more lives than anything else except for modern medicine. He stays positive about his work, he says, as long as he stays focused on his students.

Read more: Nathan Gibbs-Bowling's blog, "A Teacher's Evolving Mind," www.natebowling.com

Watch Nate Gibbs-Bowling in action at www.WashingtonEA.org/TOY

Gibbs-Bowling wants to inspire Tacoma's future lawyers, entrepreneurs, social workers, and hopefully teachers to be thoughtful contributors to society.



Navigate Your Certification Pathway



Professional development required for certification can help members develop as educators, and implement positive practices to promote student learning. However, navigating certification is not always easy! There are choices to make, and the timelines can sometimes be confusing — often it feels cumbersome.

In Washington state, certification marks key points along the educator career continuum, points at which educators can reflect on their work to date and then embark on new avenues for growth.

Members are justifiably proud of being certified professionals. Whether they choose ProTeach or National Board Certification, the certification process can be empowering. Seattle EA member Takiyah Jackson, counselor at Washington Middle School, said, “What Board Certification did for me was to take my scope from outside my school all the way into my district, then all the way into my state and really focus on equitable practices that would ensure opportunities for all students.”

This information is just an overview and is current as of February 2016. Educators themselves are responsible for maintaining their own certificates and being knowledgeable about current requirements. Certification requirements are subject to change. Please consult the OSPI Certification website at www.k12.wa.us/certification/ for more information.

“After being certified for several years, I’m willing to take on new challenges. I see myself differently. I see the curriculum differently.”

Tanya King, Edmonds EA

What’s new in certificate renewal? Professional Growth Plans

There have been significant changes to certificate renewal procedures. Teachers who first earned a professional certificate after Sept. 1, 2014, are now required to renew those certificates by completing four Professional Growth Plans (PGPs) in five years. **These teachers will not be able to renew their certificates with clock hours.** However, each completed PGP can be used to earn 30 clock hours for salary advancement.

National Board Certified Teachers may continue to renew their Washington state professional certificates by maintaining a valid National Board certificate, and they may use clock hours for salary advancement.

Those with older certificates have a choice. Teachers, school counselors and school psychologists who hold a continuing certificate, or received a professional certificate prior to Sept. 1, 2014, may continue to use 150 clock hours or the equivalent in credits for certificate renewal. They also may choose to complete four professional growth plans, or they may use a combination of professional growth plans and clock hours to total 150 clock hours, with each PGP being worth 30 clock hours.

Professional growth plans are educator-driven certification renewal. Teachers can now use that work they do in their classrooms and schools as the foundation for renewing their teacher certificate. Teachers in rural and remote schools can now renew their certificates and earn clock hours by completing PGPs without having to travel.

So what is a PGP? Educators set professional growth goals for the year, create an action plan, gather evidence, and reflect on their work. They document this information on a template available at <https://goo.gl/RRY0qm>. An educator records their completion of a PGP through OSPI E-Certification. A separate form may be returned to the district in order to earn clock hours for salary advancement.

In Washington state, certification and evaluation are separate. This means that PGPs for certificate renewal are also separate from your annual TPEP evaluation. Any Washington state certificated educator may sign off as being a reviewer on your PGP — your reviewer does not have to be your evaluator. You may, however, use material from your focused evaluation for your PGP if you choose. Again, as before, your PGP reviewer does not have to be your evaluator — it could be any certificated colleague.

Pathways to a Professional Certificate

Teachers have two options to move from a residency to a professional certificate: ProTeach or National Board Certification. School counselors may choose ProCert for School Counselors, or National Board Certification. If an educator chooses ProTeach or ProCert, they can always complete National Board Certification later in their career.

Most teachers start with an undated residency certificate. This certificate is valid until the teacher has 1.5 FTE (full-time equivalency) and two years of experience, as reported to OSPI by a Washington state school district.

From a Residency to a Professional Certificate for Teachers

Undated Residency Certificate: Valid until teacher has 1.5 FTE experience and at least 2 years, as reported by a Washington school district.

Dated three-year certificate: Must submit ProTeach or National Board portfolio, OR submit affidavit of intent to register for ProTeach or National Board.

1st two-year renewal:

- Teachers **MUST** submit complete ProTeach or National Board portfolio.
- No Break in Service and failed to submit ProTeach or National Board = **LICENSE EXPIRES**

2nd two-year renewal:

- Teachers **MUST** pass ProTeach or National Board
- Failure to pass ProTeach or National Board = **LICENSE EXPIRES**

Renewing a Certificate

Professional Certificate issued AFTER Sept. 1, 2014

- Completing four Professional Growth Plans every five years is required for certificate renewal.
- Clock Hours may not be used for certificate renewal. Clock hours may still be used for salary advancement.

Continuing or Professional Certificate issued PRIOR to Sept. 1, 2014

- Complete 150 Clock Hours in five years
- OR complete four Professional Growth Plans in five years
- OR combine Clock Hours and PGPs. Each PGP is worth 30 Clock Hours.

NBCTs can renew their state certificate by maintaining a valid National Board Certificate

At this point, the teacher is eligible for a three-year residency certificate with an expiration date. This is the first point that teachers might consider ProTeach or National Board Certification.

If a teacher does not successfully complete National Board Certification or ProTeach by the end of the three-year period, or if a teacher has not yet started these programs but plans to, they can submit an application and affidavit saying they plan to complete these and receive a two-year renewal.

By the end of this first two-year renewal, the teacher needs to submit a complete ProTeach or a complete National Board portfolio. If the teacher does not submit a complete portfolio, their license expires.

If a teacher submits a portfolio but does not pass, they are eligible for a second and final two-year renewal. By the end of this final two-year renewal, the teacher must pass ProTeach or achieve National

Board Certification in order to obtain a professional certificate. If they do not pass, their license expires, and no further renewals are available.

You can also contact OSPI, or use OSPI E-Certification, to find out which certificate you have, your certificate's expiration date, or apply for a new certificate or endorsement.

ProTeach

Completing the ProTeach portfolio takes two to 14 months. Candidates complete three written entries, and compile artifacts and evidence demonstrating their effective teaching, professional development, and professional contributions. There are no videos required. For more information, go to www.waproteach.com/.

National Board Certification

"The process gave me the chance to more clearly identify for myself where I could get better."
— *Louann Stalder, NBCT, Steilacoom EA*

Challenge yourself to achieve this high mark of professional accomplishment and consider pursuing National Board Certification. Educators create a portfolio of student work and classroom videos, accompanied by written description, analysis, and reflection. Candidates also complete a series of exercises at an assessment center.

In Washington state, NBCTs receive a \$5,090 annual bonus, and an additional bonus up to \$5,000 in qualifying challenging schools. The bonus is prorated at 60 percent the first year. This bonus is pensionable.

When thinking about National Board Certification, you will want to carefully consider your Washington state certification timeline. National Board Certification can take from one

to five years. You must attempt each of the four components within the first three years of your candidacy, and up to two additional years are allowed for retakes.

Interested in learning more? Schedule a National Board Ambassador presentation for potential candidates in your area by contacting WEA NBCT Intern Rina Paul at rina.yorkpaul@washingtonea.org. Visit www.boardcertifiedteachers.org/ for more information on the National Board process.

WEA Support along the Way: Jump Start, Home Stretch, and Local Cohorts

"I could not imagine going through the ProTeach process without the support of a cohort. We were able to ask valuable questions. Plus it is just fun to get together and meet new people!"

— *Helen Stalsberg
Franklin Pierce EA*

WEA provides support to educators throughout their certification journeys. When teachers are ready to move from a residency to a professional certificate, WEA is there with ProTeach and National Board Jump Start. Jump Start is a four-day summer seminar designed to provide candidates with time to examine portfolio and assessment center

requirements, the opportunity to plan how to meet these requirements, and time to collaborate and gather resources. WEA also offers Renewal Jump Start and teacher leadership opportunities for trainers and facilitators.

STEM Professional Development Requirement for Certificate Renewal

Beginning in 2019, many teacher certificate renewal applicants will need to document 15 clock hours, or one goal from a Professional Growth Plan, in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) professional development. Teachers

"Attending Jump Start and working with a cohort through the ProTeach Portfolio exposed me to approaches used by excellent educators throughout the state. My instructional paradigm shifted from teacher-centric to student-centric."

— *Luke Thomas, Mead EA*

will need to have completed this requirement prior to applying for renewal in 2019.

The requirement is that the professional development integrate at least two out of the four STEM elements (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math), and that the professional development provider, or teacher planning their own Professional Growth Plan (PGP), be able to answer “yes” to all of the following questions:

- Will the STEM activity have an impact on STEM experiences for students?
- Does the STEM activity provide examples or resources to use with students or with other educators?
- Does the STEM activity provide examples or resources about STEM-related career choices to use with students?

Who needs to complete this requirement?

Teachers with professional or continuing certificates who have endorsements in any of the following areas:

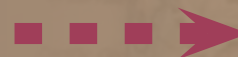
- Elementary Education (K-8)
- Early Childhood Education (P-3)
- Mathematics (5-12)
- Middle Level Math (4-9)
- Middle Level Science (4-9)
- Science (5-12)
- Designated Sciences (5-12): Biology, Chemistry, Earth & Space Science, Physics
- Technology Education
- CTE Teachers

NBCTs who maintain a valid National Board Certificate can use that for certificate renewal, and do not need to complete this STEM requirement.

The WEA provides opportunities which meet this STEM requirement. We offer a Math Common Core training, and an Innovate! Passion and Bravery

WEA has produced a series of videos on educator certification. The videos, available at www.YouTube.com/user/WashingtonEA, cover the timeline for moving from a residency to a professional certificate, program options, certificate renewal and professional growth plans, and E-Certification.

Residency



Professional Certificate

in Teaching course which supports teachers in bringing both English Language Arts and STEM standards to their classrooms in joyful ways.

On the Horizon: TPEP Certificate Renewal Requirement

The state Legislature has adopted a requirement for professional development in TPEP to be part of certificate renewal, and the Professional Educator Standards Board is currently working out the details. As opposed to having to complete a “TPEP 101” course every five years, the way this is envisioned is that trainings, professional development, and PGPs related to one or more of the state TPEP criteria would meet the requirement. It will likely follow the same overall pattern of the STEM professional development requirement, being 15 clock hours, or one goal from a Professional Growth Plan, every five years. More information will be available later this year.

we2.0

Washington
Education
Association

Scan with your
smartphone to stay
connected to WEA.



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.

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 2016 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.

Senseless testing

When opting out of Washington's newest standardized test, my little sister was sent to the library to research the Salem Witch Trials. My parents and I were horrified at the irony that she was being required to write about a time in our country's history when those who did not conform were killed.

I have nothing against taking tests. I like knowing how I am progressing and what I need to study. What I decided to challenge last year was senseless testing.

The Class of 2016 must be the most tested students ever! We've been tested every year since third grade, sometimes for weeks at a time, with three completely different sets of standardized tests.

Last year the state mandated yet another set of tests, the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC), which tested newly adopted Common Core State Standards. My high school was administering it for the first time.

I take my studies seriously, so I was frustrated to learn we would be spending time in our Advanced Placement (AP) Language & Composition class to prepare for the SBAC. This was especially harmful, because we start a month later than schools on the East Coast, giving us significantly less opportunity to cover the curriculum before the national test date. Using precious AP class time to prepare for the SBAC seemed ludicrous.

In addition to measuring our "mastery of standards and concepts" which we hadn't been taught, the SBAC wasn't a graduation requirement for my grade, and our scores weren't going to be used to help us when applying to colleges. It felt like we were being "set up" to fail as individuals, as a school district and as a state. Would politicians who are in favor of privatizing schools use these scores to say public schools were failing?

Students at a nearby high school inspired me to act. Their entire junior class opted out, with the support of the administration. The moment I completed my opt-out form, I felt empowered and liberated.

"Students at a nearby high school inspired me to act. Their entire junior class opted out, with the support of the administration. The moment I completed my opt-out form, I felt empowered and liberated."

Allison Sherry

I decided to let others know they could do the same. While saying they were "neutral" about students opting out, the district made the online opt-out form extraordinarily hard to find. I posted the form on my Facebook and Twitter accounts for easy access.

District administrators issued baseless threats to try to stop students from opting out. Students who attended school in our district on boundary exceptions were led to believe they would be sent back to their home school district if they opted out. Our principal sent an email warning teachers that enrollment decisions for the next year would be based on SBAC scores, although we'd already enrolled. The school office began to refuse the opt-out forms, sending students to the district office several miles away. And, of course, extra assignments such as researching the Salem Witch Trials were given to students who opted out. These deterrents did not stop the wave.

I was surprised when a deluge of students began to ask why I was opting out. Initially, I simply expressed my rationale, but incredibly, my actions started deeper conversations. What began as a personal decision turned into a mini-revolution!

My best friend attends our school on a boundary exception like me, and she felt coerced. She was skeptical about my research, so I helped her draft an email to the superintendent. When she received direct confirmation that there would be no negative consequences, I was astounded and inspired by my own influence! Teachers started telling me they were proud of me, and secretly cheering me on. The superintendent must have wondered what prompted so many identical emails in the following weeks.

I wouldn't change anything about what I did last year. My decision reduced my stress about the test, and allowed me to be a leader. My experience taught me to proactively stand up against popular opinion when fighting for what is right.

Allison Sherry, senior
Shorewood High School, Shoreline

Allison is one of a growing number of students in Washington who have opted out from state-mandated tests. She is the daughter of Shoreline ESPA member Mike Sherry.

