



Cultivating Connections

State Teacher of the Year Robert Hand focuses on nurturing student connections and diversifying the teaching force. 4



Small steps in eradicating institutional racism a start — let's continue moving forward



Kim Mead

WEA members and our union as an organization are experiencing an awakening as we work to eradicate institutional racism from our union and our public schools. It is a new, sometimes awkward, often painful experience. I would compare it to watching a toddler learning to walk. At times we are clumsy trying to take those first steps, tittering back and forth. That makes us excited to try again. Some of us run, leaning forward in our haste, tripping and falling face down. That can make us hesitant to keep trying. We must learn to pay attention to our mis-steps so we don't repeat the mistakes of the past. Those that have been impacted by institutional racism and are waiting become frustrated with the amount of time it takes for a "first step" to happen.

Letting go of assumptions, learning the inequities that so many of us have faced, and struggling to convey our feelings take time. Sharing perspectives and really listening to each other so we can improve is not a "one and done" activity. It is, instead, a lifetime commitment.

Shame and blame are not the answer. But not taking responsibility for the past isn't the answer either. This journey is both individually personal and

institutionally cyclical. We can't be afraid to explore our own history, beliefs and lack of understanding as well as our lack of action to end inequalities. We can't be afraid to move forward and stumble. We should only be afraid of doing nothing. We can't let our commitment to this change be akin to the workshops and materials delivered during mandatory in-service which often go up on a shelf never to be viewed again. As a union, we owe it to each other to continue the work of eradicating institutional racism and celebrating our diversity daily.

Imagine a place where our differences are valued, our dreams become possibilities, and each day is one we gain knowledge and personal power. It's what our students deserve, and we need to deliver for them. They deserve our best ... and we deserve our best for and from each other.

Union Strong is our theme for RA this year. We are stronger together, standing up for each other and for our students.

Union Strong ... for our students.

Kim Mead, WEA President

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Education Support Professionals from Spokane's high schools identified students to receive books of their choosing in March as part of this year's Read Across America. Some 100 Spokane students were able to select books, worth up to \$50, at independent book store Auntie's. Rogers High's Trendon Phothisongsa shows off his book selections. The event was sponsored by NEA, WEA and Auntie's.

TOP PRIORITY

Restoring local school levies is a top WEA priority in Olympia

When legislators approved the McCleary school funding increases in 2017-18, overall funding for K-12 public schools rose by billions of dollars.

That huge increase in state funding was — and continues to be — a historic victory for educators and our students. WEA members helped pay for and lead the McCleary court case that forced the state to increase funding for basic education.

At the same time, WEA told lawmakers they went too far when they also voted to dramatically restrict local voter-approved school levies. Under the new levy limits, some school districts' levy revenue has been cut by more than half.

When they voted to limit levies, some legislators promised to fix those shortcomings in future years. Now, as legislators in Olympia write the new two-year state budget, restoring levy flexibility is a top WEA priority.

"Voters need the flexibility to invest in their community's students' needs beyond state-funded basic education," said Kim Mead, WEA president.

Voter-approved school levies fund additional teachers, librarians, school nurses, early learning, music, art, special education and many other student needs.

Even with the increase in state funding for basic education, levies remain a crucial source of funding for our public schools.

"Local levies give our school districts the autonomy and freedom to tailor our programs and services to fit the needs of our students, including attracting and keeping qualified, caring teachers and support staff," said Vicky Jensen, president of WEA-Eastern Washington and a teacher in Central Valley.



WEA members have been visiting the state Capitol to lobby their legislators and testify on bills that matter most to them and their students. Above, Carrie Suchy, a school psychologist in Franklin Pierce, testifies before a legislative work committee. Below, members from Evergreen EA take a quick break in between their meetings with elected officials.

negotiations, which means legislators won't be making a final decision on this issue until the end of April at the earliest. Various levy proposals have been floated, some better than others. In the end, Mead said making sure communities have the flexibility and funding to meet their students' needs is WEA's most important goal.

"Local levies give our school districts the autonomy and freedom to tailor our programs and services to fit the needs of our students, including attracting and keeping qualified, caring teachers and support staff."

Vicky Jensen
Council President
WEA-Eastern Washington

Putting STUDENTS FIRST every day

*Mount Vernon's
Robert Hand is
Washington's 2019
Teacher of the Year*



Robert Hand, a family and consumer sciences teacher at Mount Vernon High School, says his philosophy about teaching is simple: "People first, content second. It's really hard for students to learn things when you haven't built a relationship with them."

It's easy to step away from the bustle of a busy high school as you enter the classroom of Washington's 2019 Teacher of the Year Robert Hand.

Polka-dot curtains mask the windows on his steel classroom doors. Warm flames dance inside a fireplace projected on screen above his whiteboard. Dozens of lamps around the room cast a soft glow, replacing the harsh overhead fluorescents. The jazzy trumpet of Wynton Marsalis drifts up softly from desktop speakers.

Nothing here is happenstance.

"Creating a welcoming space at school is really important to me," Hand says. "This room was designed to be a lab, so tile floors, high industrial ceilings: That's not a place that I want to be. ... And if it's a space that I don't even feel comfortable in, I don't know how I'm going to ask them to come in and be comfortable, and alert, and awake and ready to learn."

Hand has taken a circuitous path to teaching, delaying community college until his early 20s, then graduating with degrees focused on digital music production, communications and sociology before starting teaching at age 33. Now in his sixth year, Hand teaches family and consumer sciences, and leadership, at Mount Vernon High School.

His philosophy of putting students first permeates his habits. The maxim, "Kids don't care how much you know until they know how much you care," isn't just a trite cliché for Hand. Relationships are essential to learning, he says. Even amid pacing guides and standardized-test deadlines, investing time up front to build relationships more than pays off in the dividends of additional learning.

"It seems as though it would take time away, in that we wouldn't get to cover as much, but we actually get to cover a lot more because kids participate more, and have a lot more in-depth and real discussions," Hand says. "Performance on tests

is going to be better. Discipline is going to be a lot less. I think that kids, if they feel disconnected, if they don't feel loved, if they don't feel supported, a lot of times it's, 'Why should I do this? Why should I try?' Because you just kind of feel like a cog in the system."

Using content as the sole yardstick misses the measure of a good education, Hand believes.

"It's continuing to think about kids first, and content second," Hand says. "We want to make sure that they have content knowledge, but also that they've developed as a whole person, and really worked on that character and communication piece."

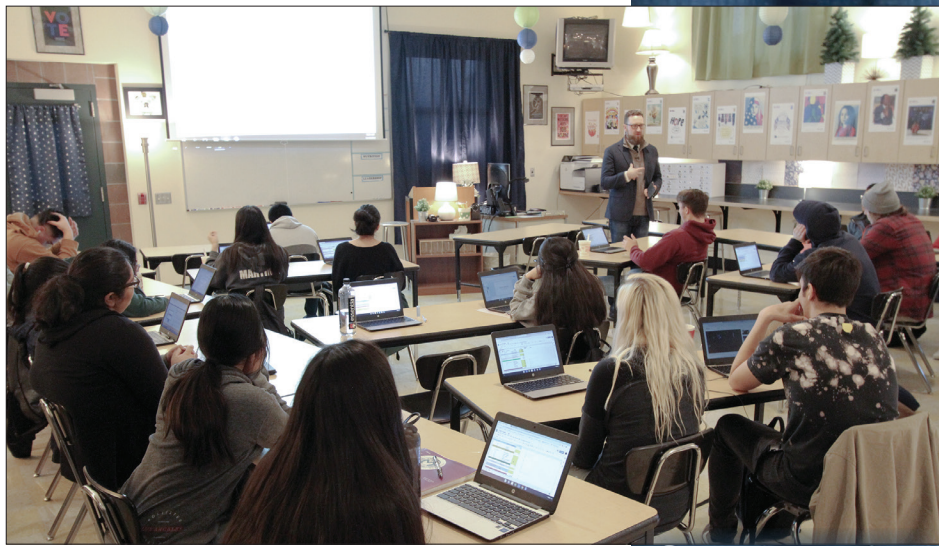
That's why Hand hopes that is the one systematic change he could influence as Washington's teacher of the year.

"Our order of priorities is a little bit out of whack sometimes where we're thinking of content, of knowledge, of standards and all of that, and then — if we have time — to support the kids as people," Hand says. "That's backwards to me. If I were to change anything, I think every school, every day, needs to have a carved-out time (for relationships), because it is a priority. Because it is the most important thing for students to be able to have an environment where they can connect with their teacher, where they can connect with each other, where they can explore and connect with themselves, and develop into better people."

In Hand's classroom, that means taking time to fist-bump each student before each class. Saying hello. Offering snippets of life experience as students begin navigating their own adult worlds. Intentionally noticing when they are present, and if they aren't. Not for attendance, but to check in, to see how they're doing, whether something in life is interfering with school.

It also includes the food pantry he stocks from Costco.

"I would love to see community supports that take that on so that teachers don't have to do that, but the reality is, I spend a lot of money on buying food for the classroom, and buying supplies for students," Hand says. "I don't think people realize how much support our kids really need, and how little they're actually receiving. ... So, we take it upon ourselves to do whatever we have to support those kids in any way that we can."



Hand believes a strong union is essential to increasing that support.

"I am a proud member of the WEA, a proud member of the Mount Vernon Education Association," Hand says. "Being a member of the union gives us the ability to band together, and to have a strong and unified voice that is there to advocate for education in our state ... to fight for and advocate those things that we need for our kids."

Looking toward the future, Hand is keenly focused on the next generation of educators, and our profession's lack of diversity.

Hand is part of the pilot for Recruiting Washington Teachers, a Professional Educator Standards Board program intended to "grow our own" diverse workforce.

"The long-term impacts of (even) one teacher of color on a student of color are great," Hand says. "And so my goal with my program is to look at my kids here and say, 'You would be an amazing teacher! And we need teachers like you in the profession.'"

One of Hand's focus is diversifying the educator workforce so that all students have the chance to learn from educators who share their experiences and cultures.





State likely to take over school employee health care plans

Changes are very likely coming to our health care benefits. As part of the McCleary funding package, the Legislature approved a state-run insurance program. Though WEA was opposed to it at the time, we now endorse the program. This is because of the great collective bargaining agreements that union representatives were able to bargain for our members. Here are some of the reasons why:

- The state would add about \$750 million in new funding for health care.
- Part-time employees would have the same benefits as everyone else, thus expanding health care opportunities to many of our lowest paid colleagues for the first time.
- Average per person funding is increasing significantly, from \$844 per month to about \$1,100 per month for eligible individuals beginning in January 2020. The state funding increase will ease cost burdens for employees.

The Legislature still needs to provide final approval and funding, which is likely to occur. Assuming that happens, all school employees will be part of the program — called SEBB for School Employees Benefits Board – effective Jan. 1, 2020. We know there are questions. Here are some common ones we are hearing. We also encourage you visit our web page for new information as it becomes available.

www.washingtonea.org/ourvoice/health-benefits/

Can I keep my doctor?

If your doctor is connected with any of these vendors, you should be able to keep him or her.

Aetna, Kaiser Permanente NW, Kaiser Permanente WA, Premera, Providence or UMP (Self-insured program administered by Regence). We'll know more about which providers will be operating in which counties this summer.

Have the premium rates been set yet for the plans?

We will know rates this summer.

Will I be able to opt out of medical coverage?

Eligible employees will be able to opt out of medical coverage if they are enrolled in other employer group medical insurance, TriCARE, or Medicare.

Will districts be required to provide health care for part-time staff and substitutes?

Districts will be required to provide health care for all employees, including substitutes, who are anticipated to work at least 630 hours. All eligible employees will have access to the same benefits, at the same costs, regardless of position.

- If your district anticipates you will work 630 hours at the beginning of the next school year, then you will receive continual benefits.
- If your district does not anticipate you will work 630 hours at the beginning of the next school year, then your employer benefits will end at the end of December 2019. But, you will have the ability to opt into SEBB at your own cost for a transitional time.
- If you end up working 630 hours two years in a row, and you're returning to the same type of position in the same district, you will continue to receive benefits in the third school year.
- If your district does not anticipate you will be eligible in the third year, they must notify you of the specific reason in writing and you would have the right to appeal that decision.

Will districts reduce the number of part time employees to avoid paying for health care?

We have heard about some districts considering if they should reduce the number of part-time employees and hire more full-time employees. These decisions depend on a number of factors, including collective bargaining language.

If you hear that your job may be impacted, contact your union representative to ensure the district follows your contract.

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TwiceTwice the power

They share parents and were born four minutes apart, the second and third children in a family of seven kids. They have identical DNA. They currently live in homes 112 steps apart (according to the app on their cell phones) — not exactly next-door neighbors since there is one house in between them but close enough. Then there's the alliteration not to be overlooked — identical twins Sheila and Sheryl both live in Shelton. But what really takes the cake is that they serve as president and vice president of their local Shelton ESP.

Sheryl Cannon-White, a library tech at Olympia Middle School, moved to Shelton more than 10 years ago from a less affordable King County address.

"We ended up in a beautiful home in Shelton," Shelton ESP Vice President Cannon-White says. "Sheila would come over and look at our water view. When a home became available, she bought it."

Moving homes was not new to either twin sister. Born at Fairchild Airforce Base in Spokane and raised in a military family, they attended 13 separate schools on both the East and West Coast over the years.

"Though we're identical," Shelton ESP President Sheila Iversen, who is a special education IEP/504 coordinator, says, "we've lived different lives. One of us is happily married with no kids and the other was unhappily married with two kids." They both laugh.

"We were raised union," Cannon-White says of their family upbringing. Their stepfather was a longtime union member.

"He was an electrician and had his union pin," Iversen says.

"He had his union book and paid union dues. He was a proud teamster," Cannon-White says. The twins tend to finish one another's sentences. It's not that easy to figure out who says what in between the sharing of stories and laughter as they discuss their upbringing. "He was our third dad," one says.

So, it was natural that Cannon-White served as an officer in her local many years back. "There is nothing better than seeing the relief on the face of someone when we can help maintain contractual rights." She took a long break from union leadership but thought Iversen would make a solid president when the opportunity arose.

"I thought she'd be great," Cannon-White says. "Sheila's more organized while I'm more off the cuff. She is strong, intelligent and looks at things from all the angles. I just thought you'd do a great job," she says turning to her twin.

Then there is Iversen's stronger background in civics and history. After all, she attended high school history classes twice a day while Cannon-White covered both twins in math. Yes, their mother made them wear the same clothes all the way through

high school so why not, after all, take advantage of the fact that one would get both better grades in math while the other could ace history tests twice a day?

Iversen agreed to run for president on the one condition that her twin run for vice president. "I really believe the union is the voice of the common people," Iversen says, "and we really believe it should protect and support our co-workers . . ."

"And we want to leave it in better shape," Cannon-White says, once more, completing Iversen's sentence.



Sister Power! Sheila Iversen (left) and Sheryl Cannon-White (right) share a laugh.

Though they live the aforementioned 112 steps apart, they work in different schools and sometimes only see one another once a month. And, they are the first to tell you they set boundaries. Cannon-White says she told Iversen not to text before 5 a.m.

"But at 5:01, I am on it," Iversen says. "And sometimes I'm doing it for union business."

The two leaders agree they are proud of the 15 percent "across-the-board" raise their 209 classified members received this year. They said that people were ecstatic, and one member told them the extra \$300 a month was all she needed to finally be able to quit her second job and spend more time with her family.

"I'm using my raise for a new windshield and some new towels," Iversen says. In addition to being president, she also serves on the WEA Chinook executive board and on the WEA Action Coordinating Team (ACT). The members in Shelton ESP may sometimes think they are seeing double and they are getting twice the regular dose of leadership from Iversen and Cannon-White.

Yakima ESPs still fighting for their share of McCleary

Seven months into the school year, Yakima support professionals have yet to see a dime of last year's historic McCleary in their paychecks.

That is about to change as members continue to turn up the pressure on administrators who try to delay and deny. Paraeducators recently ratified a new three-year settlement. Negotiations continue for other bargaining units that represent maintenance, food service, secretaries, transportation, technical employees and more.

"This has really drug out for a long time," Yakima Association of Paraeducators President Tiffany Moritz noted. "And ironically this is Classified (Appreciation) Week. It's so hard to feel valued when the district that you work for doesn't want to compensate you."

On March 12, Yakima's ESP members hosted a community forum to publicly shed light on the district's financial deceptions and highlight community support for educators. The event at Yakima's Eisenhower High School attracted more than 250 community members, parents and education staff.

"Hard-working people are having a hard time making ends meet," declared Pastor Harry Sharley of the Yakima Seventh-day Adventist Church. He recounted the story of a district paraeducator who also cleans the church for additional money, and yet still can't afford everyday services like internet. "She does not have the income to make the basic expenses. ... And I hope that our lowest-paid workers will get and receive wage increases comparable to the teaching staff."

Erika Moore, co-president of the Gilbert Elementary PTA, said she was embarrassed by the school board's lack of respect for its staff.

"Classified employees are the backbone and foundation of our schools, and it's a shame that they are having to go to these lengths to be given a fair and honest contract. They aren't asking for anything that wasn't given to the district. They are just asking to be treated with respect."



Pastor Willie F. Pride Jr., of New Jerusalem Missionary Baptist Church, addresses some 250 community members and Yakima educators at a March 12 community forum entitled, "CRISIS BY DESIGN: Why Are Yakima's Schools Going Broke — On Purpose?" The forum, held at Eisenhower High School, focused on the impact of frontline staff on students, the district's financial claims compared to its actual spending patterns, and how district priorities could be better aligned behind schools and students.

WEA Researcher Marie Cañas recapped the historic gains under the WEA McCleary school funding lawsuit, including more money for smaller class sizes, full-day kindergarten, transportation, classroom materials and supplies and, most recently, a \$2 billion influx to increase salaries.

While Yakima is publicly proclaiming a budget crisis and cancelling student field trips, the district's own records show instead that administrators have been stashing away millions of extra dollars in budget reserves since school started in September, and have about \$3 million more tucked away than at this time last year.

Anne Chapman, an elementary music specialist, said all of Yakima's support professionals deserve the salary increase promised by the Legislature.

"We support you and are there for you in your bargaining," Chapman said. "Just know that you are greatly appreciated: We cannot do what we do without you."