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Washington Education Association  
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**WE  
ARE  
ONE**

Washington EA

Organizing for our future.

# Standing for children for 90-plus years

*The following is an excerpt of WEA President Mary Lindquist's speech delivered to delegates at the 2011 WEA Representative Assembly May 12 in Tacoma.*



“Since we assembled in Spokane last year, the turmoil around us has not subsided. We can call the roll of our colleague affiliates around the country who have been battered mercilessly by political and economic forces determined to break and destroy education and public worker unions: Wisconsin. Ohio. Michigan. Idaho. Florida. New Jersey.

Let me be clear. We are not immune from these forces. Already, they are working in the shadows, determined to end what we have fought for over nine long decades. Many of you have already heard me say, ‘We are one election away from becoming Wisconsin or Idaho.’

In the past, the challenges have been cyclical. We have been able to treat them like a campfire or a stove fire momentarily burning out of control, dousing it with a bucket of water or using our feet to stomp it out.

Today, we’re dealing with a wildfire jumping across boundaries that normally provided natural firebreaks, moving quickly from location to location.

We should not fall into the trap of believing these are random acts of willfulness. These are intentional, deliberate, well-organized attacks — and they are being coordinated nationally.

It may appear chaotic. It may feel as though we are surrounded by chaos. It’s not.

Operatives like Karl Rove spend their days surveying the national political landscape, strategizing about where to place pressure with an eye to the next election — and the one after that.

And, with millions and millions of dollars in contributions from billionaires like the Koch brothers, these shadowy operatives are committed to the permanent demise of the labor movement. We are squarely in the sights of those who wish to destroy us and our work.



We are at a defining moment in our history as a union. The challenge confronting us is unique and it is urgent. Never have we been called upon to rise, again and again, to fight for those values we hold most dear:

The value that says every child deserves a quality public education, regardless of their race, their gender, their birthplace or their economic status;

The value that says every student deserves to be in a classroom where he or she is not the 34th child sitting in the back corner;

The value of professional recognition for our members and respect for our collective voice;

The value that states every educator deserves a living wage;

The value that says an opportunity gap for any child, anywhere, is unacceptable,

And the value of our work as educators, rewarding that work with dignity, respect — and the resources to make our schools the best in the nation.

These are the values we defend, now and forever.



For 90 years, we are the ones who have been standing for children — and we will never stop standing for the children of our state.

Others may try and suggest otherwise; they are wrong.

We stand for full funding of public education in our state.

We stand for an education that provides for the whole child.

We stand for smaller class sizes, not to make our work easier, but to provide each child with the opportunity to succeed.

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We stand for dignity and for respect, for every student, for every educator and for every family.

We stand for a public education system that sparks the fire of passion for learning and growth in every student, no matter their background or circumstance.

We stand for the restoration of all that has been taken away from us these past few years. We have endured much, and been rewarded with nothing but additional cuts, larger classes, longer hours and more paperwork.

We stand for accountability, because we know what we do every day in our classrooms, in our libraries, in our cafeterias, in our colleges and at our desks, really makes a difference for our students. But we do not work in isolation, so accountability must extend to administrators, school boards and elected officials.



The present financial crisis that swirls around us was not of our making. It is not the actions of the 82,000 members of the Washington Education Association who sent the American economy into freefall.

It is not the actions of Jamie Downing teaching in an overcrowded classroom in Grandview that sent our state budget spiraling billions of dollars into debt.

It is not Irene Oda and the bus drivers of Clover Park who say, "Let us spend so much on the wealthy — and so little on those who worked to create it."

Look, instead, at those in power who believe it is right to spend \$3 trillion on wars in Iraq and Afghanistan — but refuse to wage war on illiteracy in our nation's public schools.

It is not the actions of Ted Mack and his special education students in Moses Lake that have led to hundreds of our colleagues feeling the deep pain of a layoff notice.

*WEA President  
Mary Lindquist addresses  
delegates at the annual  
WEA Representative  
Assembly in Tacoma.*

And it is not the actions of Alan Yabui, and his higher education colleagues, that have led to thousands of our high school graduates seeing their dreams of a public college education diminished or dashed when tuition escalates out of control.

Look instead, at Tim Eyman and his secretive backers, placing the Legislature in perpetual gridlock, unable to fulfill the paramount duty of our state constitution.

Tonight, the bullying ends. The blame and shame game is over.

It is time for focused, organized action.

It is time for us to speak up in every community. It is time for us to take this fight to the streets of our hometowns, to the parents of the children with whom we work. Not once, not twice, but again and again until those parents, those friends within our communities rise up and join us.

It is time for us to give a voice to the future, while acting in the present.



... I am calling for a day of action.

We are already organizing for this day of action. A day of action in every community so no person in this state can say they didn't hear us say:

We are taking back our power as the voice of education in this state.

We are reclaiming our power as a political force with which to be reckoned.

We are organizing in every town and every district, in every building and on every campus.

We are organizing with parents and community groups, renewing old partnerships and forming new relationships.

We are organizing because we are the Washington Education Association — and we've been standing for children for 90 years!

'We are  
at a  
defining  
moment  
in our  
history  
as a  
union.  
The  
challenge  
confronting  
us is  
unique  
and it is  
urgent.'





## Getting to know you

**A**n early breakfast of fruit, yogurt, Danishes and coffee, with more than 1,000 of your closest friends and colleagues, is an occasion not normally associated with the schedule and rhythm of the WEA Representative Assembly.

Nor is such an early breakfast associated with serious, focused conversations about the present state of public education, along with implications

for the future. Such intense discussions are more regularly a part of the debate taking place on the floor of the RA.

But, on Friday, May 13, 2011, that's exactly what this year's WEA RA delegates were spending their morning doing. Scattered through three levels of the Tacoma Convention Center, and grouped around tables, representatives from across the state were experimenting with

a novel approach: sharing their concerns and interests.

Spearheaded by WEA President Mary Lindquist, and members of the WEA executive committee, the two hours of table discussions provided members of the WEA Board of Directors with an unprecedented

opportunity to hear directly and unfiltered from hundreds of active members during this "Conversation with Colleagues over Coffee" event.

Each group was asked to focus on three main questions:

*"What current public education issues do you feel most engage our members?" "Given the current environment of attacks on teachers and other school employees, and on public schools in general, what steps do you think WEA members are willing to take to create positive change?"*

And finally, *"What power do you believe we have individually, at the local, council and state levels — and how do you think we should use that power to create the change we want for our students, ourselves, and for our schools?"*

The conversations that followed were candid without being confrontational. After the discussions were over, Board members unanimously reported on the frank, honest — and often blunt — assessment of the delegates around public education issues and the role of WEA.

A frequent refrain was the need for coordinated state and local action to bring home to districts and communities, parents and politicians, the public education crisis in Washington. Conversation after conversation clearly identified workload, class





*Delegates at this year's WEA Representative Assembly were randomly placed at tables where they participated in a candid conversation and connection with one another. Common themes: a sense of frustration, a need for positive messaging and strong communications, and a call for direction from WEA.*

size, lack of professional respect, and dwindling resources as being highly detrimental to their students succeeding. Story upon story highlighted the frustration WEA members are feeling as they see a once proud state education system slip into decline.

Each table discussion made it clear, however, that WEA members are looking for positive messaging highlighting what is being achieved — and what is lacking. A need for strong communications from WEA to members at all levels of the organization, as well as to state and regional media, was a recurring request.

# getting to know all about you'

When asked to share what delegates at their tables had shown the most passion around, facilitators reported that action, respect, leadership, local organizing, workload, class size and community engagement were universal themes.

They also reported that, while many delegates were looking to WEA leadership and staff to provide direction, there was widespread recognition of the need for local, focused action to take place — action generated by local members responding to local conditions.

It was an exhausting and energizing two hours of conversation. The facilitators shared how members left their discussions feeling empowered, vigorous, ready-for-action, and with a sense that their voices had been heard. Many of them also left angry. Angry not at WEA or their council or local, but angry at the current circumstances hindering Washington students from receiving a world-class public education intended to equip them for 21st century challenges.

Can that anger be channeled into action? Time will tell. One hopeful sign, however, is that, as the discussions were ending, 639 RA delegates proactively asked to be kept informed on what steps will be taken next.

As their names and contact information are entered into a database — and then sent to locals and councils — the WEA Board, executive committee and council presidents, along with staff, are compiling and reviewing the information and candid feedback gleaned from this first-time event at a Representative Assembly.

The commitment? To listen and to act. There's more to come.

*Snohomish  
Education Association  
President Justin  
Fox-Bailey facilitated  
the discussion at  
his table.*





# ‘Legislators need to recognize we’re doing good work’

Arlington teacher Eric Grant tells legislators how budget cuts will hurt his students at a May meeting organized by members of the Pilchuck UniServ Council.

Eight years ago, more than 25,000 WEA members rallied in Olympia. There was money in the budget. This wasn’t that kind of year.

Instead, with the state facing the worst recession in 80 years, educators embraced a smaller scale, more personal approach to legislative organizing. Teachers, support professionals and higher education faculty from across the state traveled in small groups to Olympia, where they lobbied their legislators in person. One week, local education associations hosted bake sales outside the Capitol dome to highlight overcrowded classes. In April, 200 WEA members delivered 13,000 names on the Resolution to Stop Crowding Our Kids’ Classrooms to House Speaker Frank Chopp’s office.

In May, WEA Chinook UniServ members organized a flash mob, where 125 educators wearing red showed up unannounced on the capitol steps and demonstrated against funding cuts.

Dozens of WEA members testified before legislative committees on school funding and education policy.

In all, nearly 700 WEA members made the trip to Olympia — many of them more than once.

“I think legislators need to recognize we’re doing good work,” said Lynn Wakefield, a Chehalis



*Top: Members in WEA-Cascade, WEA-Sammamish and Rainier Uniserv Councils graded papers, wrote lesson plans and collaborated with colleagues at local malls on recent Saturdays to show the public that their work doesn’t end with the last school dismissal bell. Bottom: During the legislative session, WEA members staged daily bake sales at the Capitol to draw attention to overcrowded classrooms.*

teacher. “Our kids deserve smaller class sizes and quality teachers and support staff.”

For their part, legislators appreciated hearing from their constituents.

“We really do want to hear what you have to say,” said Rep. John McCoy, an Everett Democrat.

Now, the focus turns to local activities. In the Pilchuck UniServ Council, WEA members organized an education meeting that drew 1,200 educators and eight legislators to a high school gymnasium in Everett. Seattle-area members rallied at a bank to protest unfair tax exemptions and school funding cuts. Rainier, Bellevue and Vancouver UniServ members organized a Grade-In at local mall food courts on various Saturdays, and other councils plan similar events.

In the end, legislators listened to WEA members and did not pass legislation that attacked our health care or collective bargaining rights. But they did pass a budget that cuts \$2.5 billion from K-12 and

higher education. That means the next battles over education policy and school funding will take place at local bargaining tables and in local communities this summer.

“We are a labor union,” said Jason Call, a Marysville teacher.

*Left: Laurie Meeker, president of the United Faculty of Evergreen, stands proud at a multi-union solidarity rally. Right: WEA Chinook members organized their first flash mob in Olympia to highlight the importance of adequate school funding.*







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Sharing the power of knowledge.

UNION BUG PPO

Change of address? Mail this label and your new address to: WEA, Membership Dept./Address Changes, P.O. Box 9100, Federal Way, WA, 98063-9100, or e-mail the information to [member.records@washingtonea.org](mailto:member.records@washingtonea.org).

## WEA Education Support Professional of the Year

There is a renewed effort for WEA members to organize to prepare for dealing with the kinds of issues that educators in Wisconsin faced earlier this year.

Some ask if organizing is a worthwhile endeavor? Are the results worth all the time it takes?

WEA Education Support Professional of the Year Debbie Passi gives a resounding “yes,” and she would know. The administrative secretary from Seattle’s Green Lake Elementary School has been advocating for her co-workers for nearly 40 years. While Passi says she has been involved in advocacy her whole career, it was just about a decade ago when she first started understanding the importance of real organizing.

“I fell into my organizing and bargaining role quite by accident,” Passi says. She missed one of her Seattle Association of Educational Office Professionals (SAEOP) meetings and, like so many other members who have done the same, was appointed bargaining representative. Four bargaining teams later, Passi says she really enjoys the hard work of negotiating. But organizing is not bargaining. It takes a whole different set of skills.

Passi says she has learned the fine art of organizing by “doing.” Years ago, when WEA did a local assessment in Seattle, leaders learned how important it was to make personal connections with rank-and-file members.

“I find that the more we talk with our members, the more they are on board with what we are trying to do and it’s just finding the time, making the time and really, really telling them



Debbie Passi  
WEA Education Support  
Professional of the Year

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that we value what they have to say,” Passi says.

She and a team from her local participated in the NEA Pacific Region’s Organizing for Power — an intensive training that occurred in three phases and three different states this year — and while Passi admits that they weren’t so sure what they were getting into when they enrolled, the experiences they had and the things they learned will serve them well and help them strengthen their local.

“Organizing, simply put, is power for WEA members,” Passi says. “It is advocacy plus emotional and financial security for employees so we can concentrate efforts on our students.”

During the training, we were told to do what we already knew we were supposed to do, which is go out and talk to members, Passi says, but we delved into much more specific strategies and we really understood the sense of urgency given the anti-union movement across the country right now.

The participants visited support professionals in Las Vegas, doorbelling their homes and making early morning visits to bus barns.

“Having had that training ... having kind of gotten our feet wet, I think we’re well on our way,” Passi says. “We’re known as SCOT or the Seattle Classified Organizing Team. We have found that the face-to-face contacts have been very meaningful. People are so happy when you say I want to come out and talk to you; I want to hear what you have to say; I want to hear what you think. They are very flattered that we think enough of them to go out and talk to them and we need to do more of it.