



Standing Strong. Standing Together.

Worker voices are under attack.

Imagine if school employees no longer had a voice in class size, extra pay for extra work, professional decisions, how class time should be used, discipline rights, bargaining rights ... pretty much every contract right that has already come under attack nationally could soon be attacked here.



Yakima Association of Building Services member Murray Campbell talks with school employees in Meridian, Idaho.

Organizing: It's about the relationships

Psssstttt!!! Anybody asked you yet why we do this work? ... About our hopes? ... Our worries? ... Our vision for a better future?

WEA locals across Washington are launching a series of one-on-one and small group conversations to find out what's on your mind, what gives you energy, and how your union can make things better.

It's part of a cultural shift across our Association to reconnect to the values that brought us together as an education union, but updated against a 21st century backdrop of new members, tough economic times, decreased education funding, and increasing attacks on workers' rights and our collective voice as education employees.

It's called relational organizing, and it's based on the simple idea that the voices of 82,000 members, woven into the fabric of every community in our state, are much more powerful and authentic than a few hundred local leaders, activists and staff, or a handful of lobbyists in Olympia.

And it simply starts with a conversation. Not a newsletter, not a questionnaire, not an e-mail, but a simple one-on-one conversation to talk about what you value as an educator.

The shift back toward relational organizing is rooted in part in the Organizing for Power trainings for some 200 West Coast education support professionals (ESPs) that kicked off last year. A second series is underway this year. The intensive nine-day training is broken into three segments: It includes a look back at the life-and-death union battles of a century ago, and strategies for even our lowest-paid educators to build power within their locals and their districts today. But the real learning begins when participants step out of the seminar for a hands-on field experience, typically in an anti-union state, where union organizing can be daunting and worker rights are routinely trampled.

Murray Campbell, head custodian at Davis High School and member of Yakima Association of Building Services, is among this year's Organizing for Power participants. He joined other ESP members and staff from Washington, Oregon, California, Idaho, Nevada and Alaska for on-the-ground organizing in Meridian, Idaho, in early October, where he witnessed the power of relational organizing.

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one-on-one conversations are brewing ...

What's the strength in talking to people?

MC: I get to see their immediate reaction to a question, what their body language is, what their eyes are saying. If I'm talking to you face to face, there's an immediate reaction and I'm going to see it right away. I know if I've hit a nerve or if it's a subject that I may need to come back to later.

We all belong to WEA but why is a relationship such an important part to building union power?

MC: If I don't know what my members or what another association is wanting, I can't go forward. I wouldn't know what direction they want to go. I can make a suggestion but I would just be treading water. If that's not what they are needing or wanting, then it's no point.

Why are you committed to doing the organizing work?

MC: Just for that reason I said before. We had so much to learn when we started out under the WEA wing. We need to connect with all of our members, even if they don't want us to. They might not want to talk to us and might want us to go away, but we can't say we didn't try.

At the Organizing for Power training, we heard about 10-10-80. You've got 10 percent who don't care, 10 percent who are really passionate and 80 percent who just kind of waver back and forth. If we're sitting there talking to members and something strikes a chord, you might just get them involved in a little bit. Even if it's just a one-time shot, we're making progress. We are at least strengthening what we have.



Yakima custodian Murray Campbell shares why he believes organizing is crucial to building strong locals.

You've been active in your local (YABS) since its affiliation with WEA five years ago. What "ah-ha" moments have you had?

MC: My "ah-ha" moment was when I realized we were a dysfunctional association, even though I thought we were very functional. The second "ah-ha" moment was when we were down in Boise where we were talking to a lot of teachers and grounds men and realized the complacency and resting on our laurels in Washington state. We could end up like Wisconsin, Ohio and Idaho and we wouldn't even know it. Then, when you come back to talk to your members about getting their help, they're going to say, "Why are you coming to us now? You only come to us when you need our help." That's the way I look at it.

What made you decide to become involved with Yakima Association of Building Services (YABS)? Why are you part of it?

MC: I wasn't involved. They didn't give us any training. That was one of my biggest beef with the Teamsters. I was elected president and I needed to know.

What's your hope for your union?

MC: I want my members to be educated, know their rights and know their contract. I want them to get the training to be their own advocate and to be an advocate for the Association in case they are called upon. My hope for WEA is that it knows that ESPs are part of the WEA. We need to put forth the effort to make things better. WEA needs to listen to what we have to say and what our concerns are. I'm hoping that's what comes of the Organizing for Power.



In September, 34 WEA members and staff attended a New Organizing Institute workshop in Washington, D.C., to explore how engaging people's head and heart moves them to action. NOI trainers stressed that organizing is about turning the resources we have into the power we need to win the change we want. Organizing is a practice — a way of understanding ourselves as actors in the world.

Sharing the power of story and self

When Josh Kaiel was a beginning teacher, he was content to pay his union dues and let the “union people” handle the contract stuff. Then his local, in a district just outside of Portland, ran into a difficult negotiation that nearly sparked a strike.

“A close friend of mine twisted my arm and said, ‘I think it’s time you get involved, because I think you have some things you can offer to this.’”

That one-on-one conversation changed the way he viewed his own role, and it continues to influence him today.

“Because of that person, I’m now a much more active person in our union. And I’m also using the relationships I have with other people to point out that they have something to share for our union as well.”

Kaiel, a third-grade teacher near Spokane, was one of 34 WEA members who took part in a seminar this fall sponsored by the New Organizing Institute, in Washington, D.C.

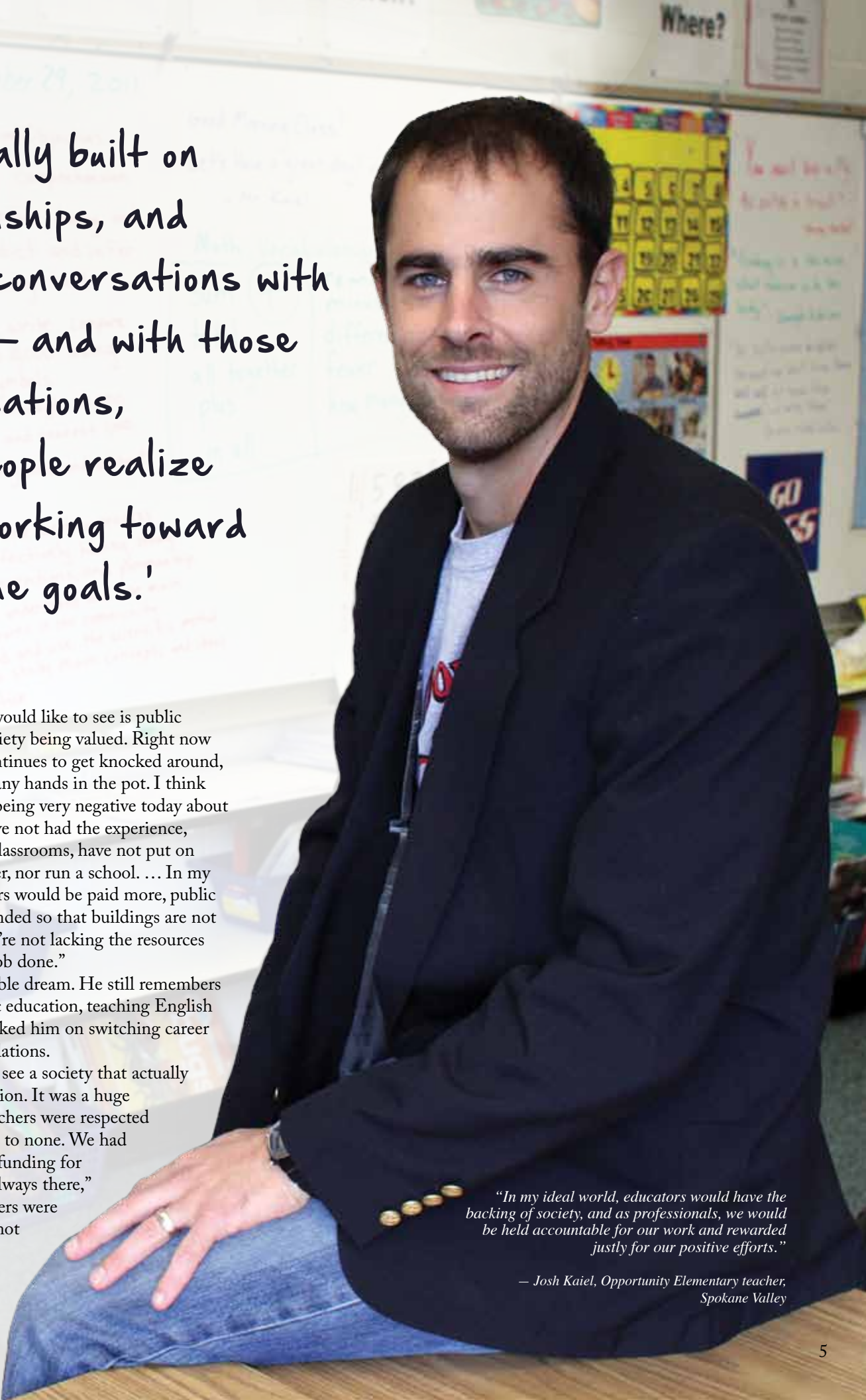
“The NOI conference was really powerful because it showed, in really clear steps, how you can build a network of people to strengthen public education in the state of Washington, and how

simple it really is. It’s really built on relationships, and having conversations with people — and with those conversations, most people realize we’re working toward the same goals.

“We have people (in Central Valley Education Association) who have never been involved in the union at all. People who are Democrats. People who are Republicans. But because of the conversations we’ve had, we’ve been able to identify common goals that we can work on together for public education in our community.”

Kaiel, who earned his degree from Gonzaga in communications and public relations, initially resisted a career in public education. He now teaches at Opportunity Elementary in Spokane Valley, a move prompted in part by a cost of living that’s slightly more manageable on a teacher’s salary.

“I grew up with a family of educators and I saw my parents work very hard and not make a lot of money, but they loved what they did,” he says. Even today, he knows educators do not get the pay or respect they deserve. It’s what continues to drive his activism as his school’s building rep and as his local’s web master.



'It's really built on relationships, and having conversations with people — and with those conversations, most people realize we're working toward the same goals.'

"The first thing I would like to see is public education in our society being valued. Right now public education continues to get knocked around, and there are too many hands in the pot. I think the people who are being very negative today about public education have not had the experience, have not sat in the classrooms, have not put on the shoes of a teacher, nor run a school. ... In my ideal world, educators would be paid more, public schools would be funded so that buildings are not falling down and we're not lacking the resources we need to get the job done."

It's not an impossible dream. He still remembers his first job in public education, teaching English in Korea, which hooked him on switching career plans from public relations.

"In Korea, I got to see a society that actually valued public education. It was a huge priority. The way teachers were respected in Korea was second to none. We had parent support. The funding for public schools was always there," Kaiel recalls. "Teachers were well paid, and were not struggling to make ends meet."

"In my ideal world, educators would have the backing of society, and as professionals, we would be held accountable for our work and rewarded justly for our positive efforts."

— Josh Kaiel, Opportunity Elementary teacher,
Spokane Valley



There's a forest fire, and all of the animals are fleeing, except one little hummingbird. Over and over again, the little hummingbird flies to a creek and dips its beak in the water. Then it flies back to the fire and drops the water. Again and again, until an old owl says, "Little hummingbird! You need to fly away from the forest fire. Go now! What do you think you are doing?"

"I'm doing everything I can," says the little hummingbird.

Doing what they can means getting political

WEA members in Snohomish County are doing everything they can.

At least once a month, members of the Pilchuck UniServ Council gather for Fish 'n' Chips & Politics at a pub in Everett. The idea is simple: Meet for dinner and drinks and discuss how politics affects their work with students. And then make plans for getting engaged in the political process, whether it's elections or the state Legislature.

Everett teacher Jared Kink often shares the story of the little hummingbird at Fish 'n' Chips & Politics. Kink stands on a chair when he speaks to the group about political action, and he hands out hummingbird pins for educators to wear in a show of solidarity. Pilchuck pays the tab for dinner. Kink tracks who attend and recruits other like-minded

WEA members to attend, drawing folks from Everett, Snohomish, Mukilteo, Monroe, Marysville, Lake Stevens, Granite Falls and Sultan. Attendees are encouraged to bring new people next time.

"Fish 'n' Chips & Politics started because we wanted to give our members the opportunity to discuss politics outside of the normal association meeting and make unions more social again," Kink said. "Our purpose is to get politically and non-politically minded people together and have some fun. Our best ideas and strongest organizers are

growing from these events."

At the September meeting at the Fish Tale Pub, Mukilteo teacher Jen Lahti said budget cuts, attacks on union rights and misguided education policy proposals are her motivation for getting active in politics.

"People should listen to what we have to say about their children's education," Lahti said. "I want the respect of being a professional."

Legislators and other elected officials often attend Fish 'n' Chips & Politics, and last spring, Pilchuck members organized a big funding meeting with legislators that drew 1,200 educators, students and parents.

WEA members in surrounding communities are organizing similar political activities.

Rainier and Chinook

UniServ councils, for example, have organized Pizza and Politics meetings. Rainier members also have staged grade-ins, and they have a town hall meeting with legislators planned this month. And with a special legislative session slated Nov. 28, the regular session set for January, and a major gubernatorial, and presidential election a year from now, WEA members across the state are stepping beyond the school building and doing everything they can.

"I really want to make a difference in the world," Lahti said. "I want to make it a better place."



Everett teacher Jared Kink often shares and motivates colleagues with the story of "The Little Hummingbird."

1+2+3+4+5+6

Building a local ... and PAC ... one member at a time

Math teacher Susan Cedar says the reason she first decided to become an organizer wasn't the cause as much as the relationship she had with Mukilteo EA President Cathy Kernan. She was at a meeting and Kernan was talking about the Washington Education Association Political Action Committee (WEA-PAC) drive goals.

"I looked at Mariner High School's involvement (which seemed on the low side) and thought, 'I can do something about that,'" Cedar says. "Honestly, I wasn't 100 percent sure what WEA-PAC was all about, but I trusted Cathy and trusted the goal, so I became involved."

Cedar, a fifth-year teacher who has three children, says she has a lot on her plate already, but she felt helping to find WEA-PAC members seemed like a small contribution that she could handle a little at a time and on her own time. She also uses the opportunity to meet some of the 100 staff members at her high school — some she still doesn't really know. She says it reminds her to get out and talk with people.

"People often tell me to bring forms to the meeting but I always seem to forget (maybe intentionally) because I really think it's best to speak with people face to face," she says. "I tend to learn the most from the people who say they are not interested in joining."

Cedar says one of her colleagues said no to joining WEA-PAC for two years, but he changed his mind after what happened in Wisconsin last year. Since Cedar had spoken with him about joining, he knew to come to her to sign up.

Cedar, herself, is not a political junkie. In fact, she says she isn't really crazy about political action

committees. "I would like to see a lot of changes in the way government decisions are made and whose voices are heard in that process. However, until

those reforms happen, I want to know someone is watching out for the education of our children ... I want to know that someone with great skills is speaking for me."

In Battle Ground, educators Kara Storey and Ted Schelvan have launched "News and Brews" as a way to grow their WEA-PAC membership — and local. They are spreading the word through social media such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as fliers in staff rooms and word of mouth.

"We keep hearing from members about how busy and stressed

they are as budgets decrease and job requirements increase," says Schelvan, a teacher-librarian at Chief Umtuch Middle School. "We figured doing something at our local brewery would be fun."

"While we want to get the word out about some of the political issues that educators are facing and increase involvement in WEA-PAC, we also want to simply increase goodwill between our local and our members," Storey says.

Schelvan agrees. "Initially, we want to increase our membership in WEA-PAC and have some fun. In the long term, we want our members to know that BGEA is there for them not just in times of crisis, but also when they want to talk, vent or just have a beer!"

The two are hoping members walk away feeling supported, relaxed, involved and hopeful.

'While we want to get the word out about some of the political issues that educators are facing and increase involvement in WEA-PAC, we also want to simply increase goodwill between our local and our members.'

*— Kara Storey
Battle Ground educator*

WEA-PAC

Inspiring and fostering future leaders in public education

If you ask people why they choose to engage in an activity or an organization, the simple answer is, “Someone asked me.” Most people become involved because someone they know and trust asked them to come along. Sometimes people think they are joining to get one thing, but end up getting further engaged because they find so much more once they begin. For Student Washington Education Association (SWEA) member Ariel Albrecht, that is what happened.

my students to succeed, and as a teacher, I will do everything I can to make that happen.”

Albrecht is a leader in her SWEA chapter. She is networking with other future educators and engaged in activities that will help her do what she can to help her students succeed. She is preparing to enter public education in very precarious times. No one can say, yet, how Albrecht will work to meet her own goals. She could end up organizing her colleagues to demand adequate funding for all students. She may help her

students succeed through outreach to parents.

SWEA member Stephanie Dilbeck joined SWEA the first day she arrived at Western Washington University. She knew she wanted to teach because she had teachers who inspired her and supported her passion for learning. Through her involvement with SWEA, Dilbeck has engaged in issues, she says, she didn’t ever discuss before.

Dilbeck served as WWU vice president and president, and is currently serving as the SWEA representative on the WEA Board of Directors. She has gone on to serve in one of three student positions



Seven Student WEA (SWEA) members attended the NEA Student Connections Conference in Houston earlier this month to network with other education majors across the country. Participants, including Stephanie Dilbeck and Ariel Albrecht (pictured above) had an opportunity to network, pick up tips for their future classrooms and share ideas on how to build their local chapters. At home, the student-produced “SWEA Times” connects SWEA members with classroom tips, upcoming student-related events and Association news.



“Being an elementary school teacher has always been my dream,” the Central Washington SWEA president says. As a freshman, Albrecht heard a presentation about the Northwest Kiwanis Camp. She had never considered special education, but she needed a job so she applied. What started as a job ended up being an experience that changed her life, she says. Albrecht is now majoring in elementary education and special education.

“I want my students to come into my classroom every day happy to be there and excited to see what we will be learning,” Albrecht says. “I want

on the NEA Board of Directors and she loves it. She shares information with others across the state via the *SWEA Times*, a quarterly newsletter she launched after becoming a WEA Board member. She has attended numerous state and national conferences where she has learned about politics, “an issue that I used to never discuss!”

Through her engagement in SWEA, she says, “this has become more than ‘the association’ to me. It has become ‘our association.’ I feel responsible for the actions we take and I feel ownership and connection to WEA.”



‘My students are currently paying for tax breaks for the 1 percent.’

OCCUPY EDUCATION

Since I first started teaching 11 years ago, respect for the teaching profession has declined greatly. This is based on untrue statements like, “schools are failing.” The reality is that our schools are moving students to higher levels than ever before. The fact that our state has the highest SAT scores in the nation is one piece of evidence which supports the great work teachers are doing.

When I first saw the Occupy Wall Street protestors in New York, I became very excited. These young people were coming out to stand up to the powers that are actually responsible for the recession in this country/world. Nobody was blaming the poor or middle class for being put in a position where they could no longer afford their mortgage. Nobody was blaming the teachers, firefighters or policeman for bankrupting the state. There was no attack on unions for protecting the rights of workers, their pensions or respectable wages. There were only peaceful protesters pointing out the fact that the current economic and political system we have is rigged to disproportionately benefit the wealthiest people in our country. The mainstream media claimed that these protesters have no clear message or demands. I disagreed. I immediately understood their message. They wanted an economic and political system that benefits 100 percent of the people, rather than just the top 1 percent.

After seeing what happened in Wisconsin, I immediately felt that the Occupy Wall Street message was one that every union in the United States must support and echo. That is why many of us who are members of South Kitsap Education Association and WEA Olympic UniServ Council decided to ask members to attend the

Occupy Olympia rally last month. Our message centered around the top 1 percent in this country growing more wealth on the backs of our teachers and students. We carried signs that said, “My students are currently paying for tax breaks for the 1 percent” and “Tax breaks for the 1 percent are breaking public schools.” At the rally, many people came up to us and said, “I like your signs.” People driving by honked in support. A principal from another school district came up to tell us that he was excited to see us at the rally. He said that he felt that cutting the teachers’ pay this year was wrong. The rally had many speakers including an 89-year-old woman who spoke of the importance of unions.

At first, I was not sure what we had accomplished that day. When I got home that night, I did a search for Occupy Olympia on the Internet. A video popped up on YouTube. I watched the video and my wife pointed out that one of the people in it was wearing a WEA Olympic shirt. I found out later it was Michael Siptroth, co-president of North Mason Education Association. He told his story: his students do not have enough to eat; his district has cut librarians and classes are overcrowded. That video has been viewed nearly 400 times.

A couple days later, I read an article that said banks were starting to reopen closed foreclosure cases and create loan modifications because of the pressures of the Occupy Wall Street movement. This gave me hope that with the 400 people at the rally who saw our signs, the many cars that drove by and honked, and the 300-plus people who saw Michael on YouTube, some pressure would start to build on the Legislature to raise some revenue for education.

— John Richardson
teaches fifth grade at
Sidney Glen Elementary
in Port Orchard.

Standing Strong. Standing

WEA members voted at last year's Representative Assembly to have a Week of Action and a Day of Action to build further awareness about the continuous and deep budget cuts on our students and our schools.

On Nov. 28, Gov. Christine Gregoire is calling legislators together for a special session to make more budget cuts across the board and across the

state. WEA members from around the state will gather on that Monday, Nov. 28, at a "Standing Strong. Standing Together," rally scheduled for high noon on the west campus of the capitol in Olympia. While people around the nation are participating in Occupy Wall Street activities, our emphasis is on public education.

Participants will be wearing "Red for Education" at the rally. WEA members around the state are being asked to wear "Red for Education," particularly between noon and 1 p.m. Nov. 28 in solidarity with those attending the rally.

Hundreds of WEA members plan to attend the rally, while other members around

the state will be showing solidarity in a number of ways. For instance, Franklin Pierce Education Association members are wearing red that day, posting messages on social network sites and e-mailing their legislators. WEA Chinook members are planning a "Flash(light) Mob," as dusk descends on the capitol that night. Check the WEA website, www.washingtonea.org/dayofaction, for more information about the rally and related activities and make sure to share what your local is doing to help raise awareness.

Building representatives are being asked to take photographs of members wearing red that day. We ask that they e-mail the photos to legislators with a short message about how cuts hurt our students and schools, and we ask that they be sent to WEA at communications@washingtonea.org for uploading on our website as well. Building reps are not the only ones who may do this. Any WEA member can participate by sending photos.

We ask you to text your legislator with the words, "Budget cuts hurt kids," or "Budget cuts hurt public schools," between noon and 1 p.m. Nov. 28.

For those who are enthusiastic about social media, the hashtag being used to promote the Day of Action is #cutshurtkids.

What's at stake ...

People are angry. People know the system is broken. The rich are getting richer at the expense of the values we hold dear. Education is suffering. Our children's future is in jeopardy. Middle-class rights are being trampled.

People want change. People are ready for change.

How does change happen? We need to organize. We need to take back our streets. We need to take back our schools.



Together.

As of *We 2.0* press time, WEA members had activities scheduled for the Week of Action, Nov. 14-18, which coincides with American Education Week. In Cheney, Sunset Elementary School was planning to host state Rep. Kevin Parker. Other legislators in Eastern Washington also were scheduled to visit schools to see firsthand the circumstances being created by such dramatic cuts to education. WEA-Southeast council leaders and other activists were planning to deliver post cards written by members.

State legislators are meeting in a special session beginning Nov. 28 to consider more budget cuts. This round of cuts might include:

- Eliminating levy equalization;
- Increasing class size grades 4-12;
- Eliminating funding for all-day kindergarten;
- Reducing the school year by 3 percent (five days);
- Imposing additional 1 percent salary reduction for K-12 employees;
- Reducing health care;
- Eliminating state funding for transportation (no school buses);
- Eliminating or reducing National Board bonuses.

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