

# we2.0

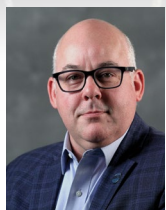
Washington Education Association  
Volume 58, Number 2 – Spring 2020



## Bringing school to students

It's time to use the skills, experience and expertise of every staff member to meet the unique needs of students during this new learning model.

# Navigating through this pandemic together



Larry Delaney  
WEA President

It's early September, and in your wildest dreams, did you ever imagine this is what back-to-school would look like?

Normally, the use of colorful language when the first back-to-school ads appear is a summertime tradition in the Delaney home. This year, that colorful language has been reserved for all the unknown that surrounds us. What will distance learning 2.0 look like? Will we be working from home or school? Will we be able to make connections — whether broadband or human — with those students who we lost last spring? What about the inequities that were on so many educators' minds last spring? What about our ELL kids? What about our students with IEPs? What about grading? Substitutes? ESPs? Bus drivers? Specialists? PPE? The virus?

There are still so many unknowns and although we want to see our students in person, in most communities starting the school year with distance learning is the correct decision. And yet, I know this doesn't feel right.

We've fought hard against budget cuts, knowing we need every person and every dollar to make this work for our students, and even so, are challenged by how to be as successful as we can with the resources available.

I'm often asked, how can we make this school year better? My answer is not unique, but it is something that I firmly believe. This year will be better if we do two things:

First, make a personal connection with each and every one of our students. Don't get hung up on standards or THE TEST. Focus rather on social emotional learning. Ten years from now, none of our students will remember that they learned how to write a story with a beginning, middle and end, or how to solve a quadratic equation during the pandemic, but they will remember that there was an adult who took the time to reach out and genuinely cared about their health, safety and well-being.

Second, grant each other — and yourselves — a lot of grace. This world that we are living in isn't normal, and few of us — educators, students and parents — are truly prepared for what the coming weeks and months will bring. But, if we take on each day with grace in our hearts we will be able to go to sleep at night knowing that, given the circumstances, we did what we always do — our best — and that is ok.

Mask up, practice social distancing, stay safe, be well, and forward together.

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Edmonds educator Michael Cook puts the finishing touches on a wand for a neighbor.

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*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 \$1.38 is included in annual membership dues. Separate subscription price: \$15.50 annually.

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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.

# Steven Alvarez brings laughter and learning to Seattle's Wedgwood Elementary

*Alvarez is WEA's 2020 Education Support Professional of the Year*

It was 4:30 on a Friday afternoon and Steven Alvarez was asked if he would join a Zoom conference to talk about paraeducator issues during the COVID-19 crisis.

Yes, of course, he said. Going above and beyond is part of his reputation.

But the pretense was a hoax: when Alvarez joined the call, WEA leaders revealed the real reason was to announce he is WEA's 2020 Education Support Professional of the Year.

Alvarez works as an Instructional Assistant at Seattle's Wedgwood Elementary, where he has earned a reputation for forging relationships with struggling students, for being a local leader, for community volunteer activities and for his sense of humor. He also is studying to become a certificated special education teacher.

"I'm that goofy guy," Alvarez laughs. "I'm that goofy teacher that is skipping up and down the hallway, singing songs. And teachers and administration just look at me like, 'OK, Steven must be doing some kind of lesson right now.'"

And he is. His zaniness carries a purpose. He might be teaching students to skip count, counting by 2s or 5s, as he is skipping down the hallway. Another day he's leading students around the lunchroom, showing them how the number of tiles on the floor can be used to model the area of the room.

"He always, and in every situation, puts students first — their needs, their hopes, their interests, their education, and their well-being," says Donna Guise, the Wedgwood Resource Room teacher who nominated Alvarez for the award. "*Every student. Every classroom. Every day.* He lives the mission statement of Seattle Schools and is a role model for us all in how to engage with, challenge, and care for each other."

Alvarez's role is to assist students in Wedgwood's Resource Room — students who may have fallen one, two, even three grade levels behind. Sometimes that means visiting their classroom to help with a subject where they're struggling. Other times he'll pull them out of class to work one-on-one or in small groups.

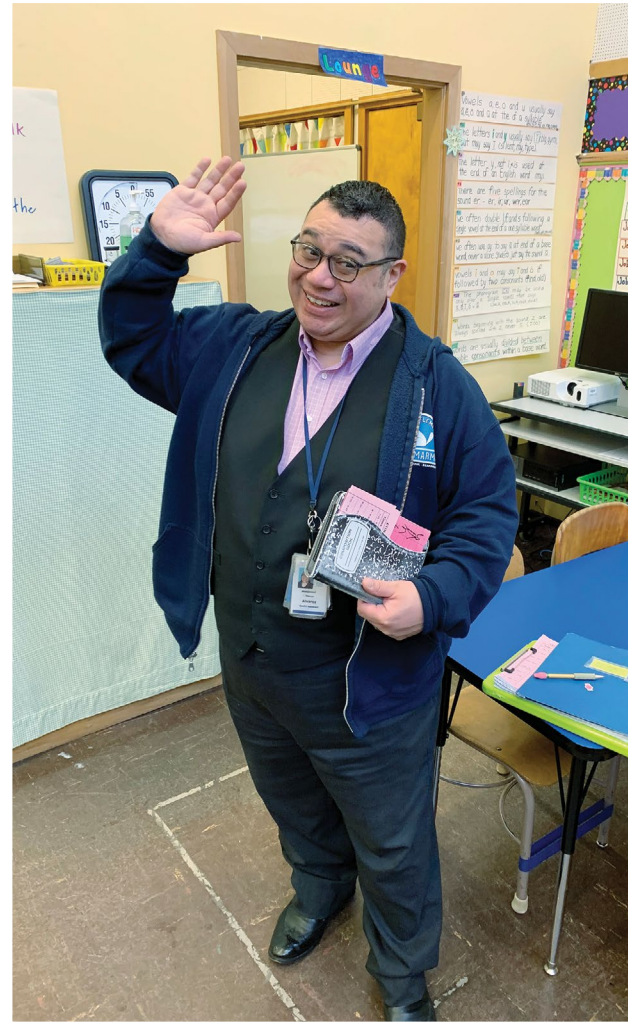
He finds humor is a valuable education tool. A student's struggle with math may elicit anxieties that spark behavioral issues.

"You're trying to do anything and everything so that they don't just shut down," he says. "Or I see a kid starting to get a little bit frustrated, (so I'm) trying to de-escalate a kid just with laughter or humor, trying to get them out of that funk so I can take them back into class. Yeah, I'm that weird guy. I love being that weird teacher that does that."

It took Alvarez several twists and turns to discover his true calling was public education. In previous careers, he worked in an administrative role in an Internet company and provided executive protection for CEOs or their children. But his wife, third-grade teacher Kami Wahl, knew he wasn't happy. She urged him to find his passion, then pursue it. As a former marathon runner, he was volunteering with middle school runners. He had a couple family members with special needs. Soon, it all clicked.

Reflecting back, one big reason was something that he missed as he grew up in a small Oregon town: He didn't have an elementary teacher that was a male. And especially not a male of color.

"It wasn't until one of my first at-risk middle school kids that I worked with told me, 'Mr. Alvarez, oh my gosh, you look like us. You have tattoos. You're brown. And you're a teacher — how can that be? I've never had a teacher like you.'"



*Steven Alvarez brings a sense of humor and ease to his work with students at Wedgwood Elementary School in Seattle.*

*See ESPOY, Page 7*

# Online learning is hard to get right

*We know that schools are the heart of our communities. As educators, we want to be with our students and with one another in our classrooms, on school busses, playgrounds and in our cafeterias.*

*As educators, we are guided by science and currently, COVID-19 transmission rates are still too high in most places to bring us together. That's why WEA remains committed to fighting for the health and safety of our students, their families, our educators, indeed, the whole community.*

*Remote learning is far from perfect, but all educators — teachers, counselors, paraeducators, custodians, bus drivers, school psychologists, school nurses — are doing everything possible to connect with our students, especially those who are hardest to reach.*

*We believe in the value of sharing educators' experiences from around the state with each other as a way to promote best practices, innovation, and to make connections across our broader collective.*



Amy Campbell  
Washington Teacher  
of the Year

Heading into the school year with so much uncertainty feels overwhelming. As a special education teacher, I feel a sense of urgency to plan for students who are disproportionately impacted by remote learning options and access to education. Last spring, we saw students with unique needs struggling to keep up with their peers, benefit from online activities, or show up to participate. After some reflection, this fall I will be making many changes.

We cannot teach them if they aren't there. How do we get kids to come to class? Students need places where

they feel safe, supported and seen. Great classrooms are collaborative places, and while we sometimes wish we could turn down the volume, there is no way to consistently mute students.

I don't suggest that we turn our Zooms into breakfast clubs, but maybe we start reimagining how our synchronous learning times are inclusive of all student voices. How do you greet kids when they come in? A prompt they can respond to in the chat, a personal check in to see how they feel. How can we use our shared time and space to elevate student collaboration and conversation? Being able to share airtime in a meaningful and safe way creates a welcoming atmosphere where students learn from each other, share how they feel and build relationships. We must carefully plan these meeting times to balance reviewing concepts, informal assessments of student learning and deepening knowledge through discourse. Last spring, I often felt guilt when group sessions stretched long as kids and parents chatted with each other or held up old pets or new books. I realize now that these shared moments brought the kids and families back each day and empowered students to learn ways to share their experience and develop their sense of empathy and self.

We video record our lessons. Having lessons prerecorded means that students can watch them where, when and how they like. They can add captions, they can slow it down, they can pause it and



watch it again, and then they can use examples in the video to help them figure out their own work. Many of my video lessons became examples for parents of how to implement an accommodation or how to

implement a support strategy. One of our paraeducators recorded and uploaded read-alouds to YouTube that kids and families could watch on their own. When we all got together for a meeting, we were able to talk about the book and ask questions. We built skills and relationships. Kids wanted to be there to be part of the conversation.

All of this is winning.

This takes planning, communication, and constant collaboration with the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team. Consider backward design: all stakeholders need the goal first. When

general education teachers know the goals and standards that our students are working toward, they can ensure their lessons connect and support the diverse needs of all learners. The steps we take to get to a goal look different in our new world, so making progress means careful planning. For my students with significant disabilities, I created simple spreadsheets for parents that laid out each learning goal and simple ways that parents could

support each naturalistically throughout their day. Outlining how to support a goal for "letter sounds identification" during play activities makes the skill practice less daunting. For students with more

*'This year will be unlike any before, but I plan to do everything I can to help students continue to grow and build systems that will support them long into the future.'*

advanced fluency goals, I helped families find the reading tasks that might have been previously overlooked. Turning the closed captioning on the television occasionally gives children practice in seeing and hearing words, as well as taking time to read cereal boxes or recipes to get opportunity with words in real world application.

Making sure general education teachers and instructional staff are prepared to implement the accommodations and modifications outlined in the IEP is equally important. Instead of having an adult read out loud to a student, one could implement use of a screen reader, and student planners may be moved to a shared online platform. From the beginning of the year, staff, students and their families must be familiar with the accommodations available in whatever learning platform and devices the district uses.

Last spring, I took time to share how to create a visual schedule, use a first/then card, create opportunities in a child's day for choice in activity or reward, create sensory and movement breaks and offer other strategies to support caregivers as they support learners. Giving families time to share what has been successful and sharing what I have seen builds relationship and fosters skills that families will use in the future.

Inclusion must continue during remote learning. I'm beginning to see this as a great opportunity to create an experience that makes a space for all learners. Making these synchronous spaces places where students can share their reflections, questions and connections to learning builds stronger community and provides a uniquely inclusive space where students can genuinely share in the dialog. I imagine what it might be like to have places where ALL students are sharing space and learning from and about each other all the time. No student will need to "leave the room" to go to a special class. Virtual spaces can mean students can stand to learn, have their mics off and hum to themselves, have fidgets, take breaks, and basically engage in their own ways. This year will be unlike any before, but I plan to do everything I can to help students continue to grow and build systems that will support them long into the future.

Spring 2020

# Power of personal connections

Like teachers across the state, paraeducators and other support staff had to adjust overnight as schools began shuttering doors last spring. In facing unprecedented circumstances due to the pandemic, roles changed while the goals remained the same — making sure every student remained connected.

Many students who are at risk of falling through the cracks became even more difficult to reach. Lack of electronic devices or internet access for remote learning, difficult living situations, language and other barriers added to the chaos everyone was feeling as school routines were suddenly interrupted.

From day one, paraeducators were able to get involved in the online meetings with teachers and supporting their students, but not every student could easily attend. Paraeducators flexed to get more engagement, reaching out to make connections.

Jesús Ramirez, a Seattle Education Association intervention assistant for ELL students, says his team at Olympic Hills Elementary went to work identifying which of them would reach out to which of the 135 ELL students at his school.

Then he personally visited two to three homes a day. "Some kids were super excited when we turned up at their doors," he noted. "Others were weirded out at first but came to appreciate the visits as they got through their discomfort." As people learned more about COVID-19 safety, Ramirez simply adjusted the way he made home visits.

He helped families sign up for internet service; he helped families navigate the devices the students received. He did whatever a family needed to help connect the student to the teacher and school. "It was just to connect and build trust," he says. "Even if it was a day to give a kid a toy from my toy box, it's a good way to checking in with parents."

In Yakima, Hoover Elementary paraeducator Janel Engelhardt also began the work of keeping kids engaged last spring. "We said, 'We can't get together in person but let's support each other and make sure we're all ok.'"

Members of the Yakima Association of Paraeducators turned to writing letters in both English and Spanish.

"My school did personalized postcards that we wrote to the kids to let them know we still cared about them," Engelhardt

said. "We really wanted to make sure kids got on the program. We're happy that so many of them were showing up. I'm sure that's how it is for all of us in the state."

To ensure as many students as possible had access, paraeducators participated with teachers in group learning sessions. Group meetings were scheduled in the daytime and evening to ensure all families could join. To share best practices and support each other, they had paraeducator meetups online also.

Making sure every student had full access to online learning platforms was front-of-mind for paraeducators. The Yakima school district made a computer available to every K-12 student to ensure access. At Engelhardt's school, educators were available to field questions from students and families about the technology. In Seattle, some 50 percent of students were given laptops and families who needed it were given hotspots.

The paraeducators knew that despite their best efforts, many families couldn't or wouldn't connect online. In Yakima, paraeducators donated books so that their families could pick them up when coming for meal pickup times.

"We even had a para who's been making homemade masks and donating them during meal distribution," Engelhardt said. "It's been pretty cool to see kids out and about in masks that I recognize."

"I started at my school when my students were kindergarteners, so it was really sad to miss their fifth-grade graduation," she said. "Our students get really close with us and it's hard to keep that going online. It's great, though, that we can try through online meetups or letters home."

Ramirez says he is looking forward to connecting with new kindergarteners this fall even if it means saying hello from the front of their apartment or house: "I'm doing what I can and sometimes, it's overwhelming, but I'm just going to try my best at doing whatever I can do to support kids."





# Help push pro-education candidates to election-day finish line

When we have the right lawmakers representing us in Olympia, it makes a huge difference for our students. That's why educators turned in ballots for our WEA-PAC-endorsed pro-education, pro-labor candidates — and it showed. After primary night, we're on track to pick up additional seats for champions for quality public education.

## For Congress, NEA has endorsed:

**Suzan DelBene**  
1st District  
**Rick Larsen**  
2nd District  
**Carolyn Long**  
3rd District  
**Derek Kilmer**  
6th District  
**Pramila Jayapal**  
7th District  
**Kim Schrier**  
8th District  
**Adam Smith**  
9th District  
**Kristine Reeves**  
10th District

## Statewide Races

**Jay Inslee**  
Governor  
**Denny Heck**  
Lt. Governor  
**Bob Ferguson**  
Attorney General  
**Gael Tarleton**  
Secretary of State  
**Hilary Franz**  
Commissioner of Public Lands  
**Chris Reykdal**  
Superintendent of Public Instruction  
**Pat McCarthy**  
Auditor  
**Mike Pellicciotti**  
Treasurer  
**Mike Kreidler**  
Insurance Commissioner  
**Charles Johnson**  
Supreme Court  
**G. Helen Whitener**  
Supreme Court  
**Raquel Montoya-Lewis**  
Supreme Court

Visit [washingtonea.org/ourvoice/2020Elections/voter-guide/#](http://washingtonea.org/ourvoice/2020Elections/voter-guide/#) for a complete list of WEA-PAC-recommended candidates and your own personal voter guide.

## ► Making a big change in the 5th Legislative District



In a race that's a big priority for educators, nurse and union member **Ingrid Anderson** is running against the incumbent for the state Senate seat in the Issaquah area's 5th Legislative District. Ingrid is dedicated to ensuring quality public education for all our students. She's running against Mark Mullet, who has let us down again and again. Many WEA members might remember that last year, Mullet introduced bills in the cover of night that would cut educator pay and limit our rights to negotiate with school districts. We fought him and won against those moves. Now is the time to fight him and win in electing Ingrid Anderson.

Ingrid's success in the primary is a great sign — she earned more votes than the incumbent. But our opponents have seen her success and will be rallying for November's general election. It's critical that we continue to build support and speak out for Ingrid for state Senate.

## ► A promising primary for Black candidates



We know that representation matters, and that's why it's notable that so many Black American candidates made it through the primary. Never in Washington's history have we had the opportunity to send such a diverse slate of candidates to Olympia.

Most notably, former educator **T'wina Nobles** in the 28th District (near Lakewood) will be on the ballot this fall to become the only Black state senator. In the 30th Legislative District, the winning candidates for both state House races were WEA-PAC-endorsed, attorney Jamila Taylor and educator Jesse Johnson. Both candidates won by large margins so we can expect strong results in the general election, too.

Several more WEA-PAC-endorsed candidates placed in their top-two primaries and will appear on the November ballot. Substitute teacher Joy Stanford won the most votes in her race for a House seat in

the 26th Legislative District in the Gig Harbor area. In Vancouver's 17th Legislative District, Tanisha Harris earned a strong showing with more than 46 percent of the vote. In the 44th District around Lake Stevens, April Berg is moving on to the November election as well. We also appear likely to re-elect two representatives to their second term. Incumbent Rep. Deb Entenman in the Auburn area's 47th Legislative District won nearly 60 percent of the vote. Melanie Morgan looks strong in her re-election to the 29th Legislative District in Tacoma.

## ► Retaining Reykdal

One surprise on election night was the



challenger who emerged in the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction race, Maia Espinoza. Voucher-supporting Espinoza has been called the "Betsy DeVos of Washington." She is an anti-public education extremist and while she claims to be a teacher, there's no evidence she's ever taught or been certified. She's also the main spokesperson opposing Referendum 90, the comprehensive sexual education legislation.

It's clear that we need to retain Reykdal and stop Espinoza from destroying public education from the inside. Supt. Chris Reykdal is a strong supporter of public schools and has opposed both charter schools and voucher schemes. He has supported WEA legislative goals including anti-racist professional development and building an ethnic studies curriculum. He has set a new tone for the OSPI by meeting with WEA leadership regularly. Let's keep Chris in office!

## Get involved, make a difference

This year, since we can't be out there doorbelling, we've formed a new Digital Action Team to make our voices heard. It's fun and simple. You download an app, either on your phone or on your computer, that makes it easy to text and share social content about our WEA-PAC-endorsed candidates with your friends and fellow WEA members. Use the app, engage with friends, and earn fun WEA swag.

More than 100 educators have already signed up for the Digital Action Team. Join us and be part of a winning team for pro-labor, pro-education candidates. Visit [washingtonea.org/ourvoice/2020Elections/](http://washingtonea.org/ourvoice/2020Elections/) for more information.

# ‘No longer having that student debt ... I’m now able to purchase a home!’

High school teacher Chris Howell is free from his student loans years sooner than he expected, and he gives the credit to his union.

Howell, a math and science at Harbor High School in Aberdeen, had been paying down his student loans for years, but still had more than \$22,000 in unpaid principal. He knew there were loan forgiveness programs out there, and had even applied previously, but his applications were repeatedly rejected.

“Then through a seminar we had at our school from the WEA, they talked about their Members Benefits program,” Howell recalls. “I decided to check into it and I applied, and through working with them, I was able to get \$22,000 and change forgiven!”

“That was the remainder of my debt,” Howell says, “so I’m student-loan debt-free!”

The program, through NEA Member Benefits, offers online tools and personal assistance to help walk educators through the detailed process that previously had thwarted Howell.

“I tried several times,” Howell recalls of his earlier attempts, “But it just didn’t work out. So I was just left to pay that amount each month, each year.”

One of his earlier applications had been rejected simply because he put the date in the wrong numeric format.

“They sent it back and said you’ve got to resubmit it.”

Eventually, he gave up. But through the Member Benefits program, “they helped me fill out that application, and to go through all the various steps that were needed,” Howell recalls. “Eventually, the teacher loan forgiveness program granted forgiveness for the \$22,000 of debt that I had left.”

Being free of those monthly payments — and free from the debt on his credit reports — did more than lift a mental burden: It allowed Howell to buy a home, a decision he’d postponed when he didn’t have the extra money available.

“I was very ecstatic and excited because it allowed me to make some big changes in my life,” Howell smiles. “It made it so that I could move forward with purchasing my house!”

See if your loans could be forgiven, too.

WEA/NEA members can enter their own financial numbers for free through the Savi NEA Student Loan Forgiveness Navigator (You’ll need to sign in to verify your union membership). You’ll receive information about programs for which you may qualify, and how much you can save — whether through loan forgiveness, cancellation or consolidation. If you find a solution that’s right for you, for \$30 you can also have the tool help fill out and file your paperwork.

Find details online at [neamb.com/student-loan-debt](https://neamb.com/student-loan-debt).

**PAID  
IN FULL**



Chris Howell

## ESPOY from Page 3

Alvarez now realizes there is another reason he connects with his kids.

“I also was a kid, as an elementary kid, who utilized the Resource Room. I didn’t realize it at the time, until I got older,” he recalls. “I spent a year, almost two years in the resource room, because they thought I didn’t understand English. But it wasn’t that. I was shy.”

He’s no longer shy about speaking out. He’s a member of Wedgwood’s Building Leadership Team, taking concerns of the school’s support professionals and classroom teachers to administrators. And he served on Seattle’s bargaining team, helping ensure paraeducators’ concerns were heard.

He’s now focused on securing his master’s in Special Education and becoming a classroom teacher, and he’s set for that challenge, too.

“I love Mr. Rogers,” he laughs, “And I love to wear my sweater vest every day to school. And I hope to be the next Hispanic Mr. Rogers: ‘Welcome to Mr. Alvarez’s Classroom!’ That’s my goal!”



*‘I spent a year, almost two years in the resource room, because they thought I didn’t understand English. But it wasn’t that. I was shy.’*

— Steven Alvarez  
WEA’s 2020 ESP of the Year

## Edmonds educator creates a little magic



Above: Michael Cook uses wood and embellishments from a variety of sources to best match the wand recipient. Top right: Cook's latest wand ready for delivery to a neighbor diagnosed with cancer.

A couple of years ago, Edmonds EA high school teacher Michael Cook told one of his students, an ardent Harry Potter fan, that one day, he'd make her a wand. She told him her favorite color was green.

"I totally forgot about it," Cook says. Last October, when he realized the student would be graduating in June, he started looking for a green piece of wood. Cook settled on *lignum vitae*, a dark or olive-green wood which means tree of life in Latin (appropriate for Harry Potter fans). Once he found the appropriate wood, he began creating the wand by beading, adding turquoise inlay and trying to dye horsehair several different colors. He added a crystal on the end of the wand, packed it in a box leftover from a Christmas gift from his wife, then wrote a letter on parchment paper which he aged by using coffee and his oven. He named the wand *The Green Liberator*, signed the letter with his name and the Office of Ollivanders then called the student's family.

"We stood socially distanced from her and her family and left the box halfway in between us so we could watch as she opened it," Cook says. "The student was ecstatic to receive it. A week later, she received a financial scholarship for college." Magic wand or coincidence?

That might have been the end of wand making for Cook, but while in the process of creating *The Green Liberator*, he finished two other wands and thought about what he might do with them. He sent one to a person working hard to take care of her family. He sent another to an occupational and physical therapist who lives in Montana. He created two new wands — for two sisters different as night and day. He named the wands *Dusk* and *Dawn*. The wands were made from black and white ebony wood.

Cook found joy in creating wands and sending them both to people he knows and to strangers. One wand went to his nephew who lives in Calgary; another to a critical care nurse in Yakima whom he read about in the newspaper.

"I try to find out something about the person before making the wand," Cook says. "I've been playing and working with wood for years. I'm getting better at it."



Cook, who is a Native of Swampy Cree, a division of the Nation of Cree, says his grandmother tried to teach him beading skills when he was younger.

"She was a brilliant teacher and I was a severely lacking student," Cook says. He continued resisting until colleagues got him started when he was working in the Seattle Public Schools. He says he spent a lot of time looking at pictures before he began trying his hand at beading.

Cook is a WEA Board member who was originally encouraged to connect with the union through a friend who asked him to come along to a building rep meeting.

"Tom Pirie said, 'Cook, why don't you come with me to our union rep meeting in case there's a time I can't go?' He also told me there was free food, so I joined him. After that, I became a building rep then an Edmonds EA executive board member," Cook says.

He has worked long and hard with several colleagues to build the Edmonds Educators of Color Network. He says he's proud to have helped begin the Educators of Color Conference and has been pleased with how they continue to try and grow the network.

Cook says he really enjoys working through the process of building the right wand for the right person. He has created talking sticks for educator colleagues, too.

"Years ago, a fisherman in Cuba told me to take a scrap piece of wood," he says. "I'll make several wands from that piece of wood, but the first one is for my wife. I'm thankful she let me turn our garage into a wood workshop."