

## ♦ Hanging on together

WEA continues advocating for clear and enforceable safety requirements and fully supports local decisions to stand for safe schools. Some locals are finding ways to make in-person school work while others are standing resolute when districts fail to take essential steps to ensure safety for students and staff.

## ♦ A new chapter for WEA

## ♦ Legislating in pandemic times

# we2.0

Washington Education Association  
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# Goodbye 2020

## Ending a year like no other

2020 has been a helluva year.

As I reflect on all that has transpired over this past year, it seems like ages ago that I was able to travel the state to engage with members face to face and not on a screen. It seems like the terms COVID, asynchronous, social distancing, Zoom bomb, Seesaw, and herd immunity have been a part of my lexicon for years, not just nine months. But nine months it has been. And, although it seems that the past nine months have been filled with nothing but tribulation, there have been triumphs as well.

COVID has separated us, but technology has been able to bring us together. We have been able to use Zoom to connect with family and colleagues from across the world, the state, our town — or our hallway. Although, I for one look forward to meeting in-person once again, the benefits of meeting via our screens cannot be denied.

When distance learning was dropped in our lap last spring, it was a struggle for many. But we have learned from those struggles and, statewide, educators are doing amazing work at bringing learning into students' homes. We know that there are still far too many for whom distance learning is not equitable and we must use our voices and collective action to bring real systemic change to our communities.

We were sickened to see the murder of George Floyd played out for 8 minutes and 46 seconds last May, and across the state and nation educators took to the streets and marched with neighbors and strangers to demand justice for Floyd, Breonna

Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and too many others. But six months later, is society any more racially just?

As educators and students prepared for a return to school, across the state local unions bargained the impact of that return and health and safety was at the forefront of our thoughts. This fall, the Monroe Education Association reminded us that even in this COVID world, when contracts and MOUs are broken, good, old-fashioned organizing and collective action works.

This election season has brought great victories. Seven WEA members were re-elected to the state Legislature. WEA worked to elevate the voices of Black women and ensure that our state Legislature continues to evolve and more closely represent the faces of all Washingtonians. But even with progress, we have seen the political chasm widen and opportunity politics divide us.

As we look ahead to 2021, we are at a crossroads. And, as we anticipate a return to normalcy, we truly have an once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to determine our new normal. Do we continue straight on a road that is familiar and comfortable or do we make a turn down a road that is challenging and difficult, but in the end will lead us to a brighter place for all regardless of race, religion, gender or sexual orientation? I know what I want to do. Will you join me and make a turn?

In this holiday season, stay safe, be well, and forward together.



Larry Delaney  
WEA President

## CONTENTS

- 3 A new chapter
- 4 Bringing school social work to the forefront
- 6 Preparing for a legislative session like no other
- 7 Changing the conversation



### On the cover ...

"When educators and families stand together, we have the power to hold our district accountable to keeping our community safe."

Robyn Hayashi, president of  
Monroe Education Association

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*Aimee Iverson says Armand Tiberio has been a strong leader and mentor to her in the years they worked together. They spent countless hours helping to guide members in creating policy at WEA Representative Assemblies. Iverson takes over in 2021.*

## WEA's 130-year-old ceiling is shattered

The first female executive director in WEA's 130-year history, Aimee Iverson, takes the helm Jan. 1, 2021. Iverson, who began her WEA career in 1997, has served in several positions, taking over as General Counsel in 2008.

"It's not like I woke up 23 years ago and said, 'I have to be executive director of a state affiliate one day,'" Iverson says. Navigating the McCleary case for its 14-year journey through the courts is when Iverson began realizing she had more to give. She finds problem solving and identifying strategies to get members the resources they need is what she loves most about her work.

"I believe I can help us continue moving forward while protecting what we've worked so hard to gain," Iverson says. One of her goals is to make sure the Legislature doesn't use COVID-19 as an excuse to make cuts. "The pandemic has laid bare the inequities in our schools for the public to see which means we need more investment. While the McCleary win made things better, our schools are nowhere near fixed, so we'll need to be aggressive with the Legislature."

Iverson is also energized about the formation of WEA's new Racial, Social and Economic Justice Center. "It's critical to make sure this is the lens through which we do all of our work," she says. She looks forward to digging into WEA's organizational

structure which is steeped in white supremacy culture. Because she has been working on these initiatives, she says, "We won't lose momentum as we start changing structures that block true inclusion for all members."

Some of Iverson's other goals include thinking about ways for WEA to fit more into the bigger labor picture. WEA's Vice President, Janie White, is already involved in working with the Washington State Labor Council and Iverson hopes to find ways we can partner more with other education unions and work together.

Iverson and her husband, an operation room nurse, are proud parents to two sons — one in middle school and the other in high school. Both boys attend Issaquah public schools where Iverson has been a long-time volunteer. Spending time in her sons' classrooms, she says, has given her an even deeper understanding and respect for what our members do both in and out of the classroom.

"I look forward to working with Aimee as she is smart, steady and practical," WEA President Larry Delaney says. "Our members should rest easy knowing that there will be no gaps in the important work that we are doing advocating and organizing around the impact of COVID, nor slow progress in making our union more racially and socially just."

See *IVERSON*, Page 8



Seattle EA's Carrie Littlefield Syvertsen is the 2020 National School Social Worker of the Year. Watch her acceptance speech at [https://youtu.be/\\_zSplbd8dQI](https://youtu.be/_zSplbd8dQI)



## Meet Seattle's Carrie Syvertsen, the nation's not-invisible School Social Worker of the Year

It should come as no surprise that someone who dedicates their career to social work cares deeply about inequality and social justice. And while the COVID-19 pandemic has spread countless horrors, it has simultaneously helped awaken our communities to glaring inequities that have been ignored far too long.

That has helped Carrie Littlefield Syvertsen, a Seattle EA member and this year's National School Social Worker of the Year, rethink how she approaches her mission.

"The data is really glaring and appalling at how we are failing our BIPOC students, and that schools, I think, are racist structures," Syvertsen says. "It used to be that I would help families navigate and try to overcome barriers. And now I am really passionate about talking really explicitly about the barriers, and then trying to dismantle them."

Historically, school social workers have helped connect students and families to community resources that allow students to thrive. But now, Syvertsen says, instead of centering her strategies around issues facing a particular family, she is looking much more at the societal barriers that may be contributing to that family's struggles.

"It's so much more complex and deep: the institutional racism feels like such a huge beast

to even be able to tackle," she says. "But I feel real passionately that you dismantle systems in sustainable ways, in a lot of little steps that take time. It's like a marathon, not a sprint."

She believes the dual pandemics of COVID and institutional racism provide an opportunity to reimagine education, and school social workers are there to innovate and influence positive change.

So how does one affect huge educational and societal systems?

Syvertsen's strategy is to find allies, and to create visibility.

Unlike her experience in the Midwest, many districts in Washington still don't employ school social workers as certificated Educational Staff Associates (ESAs). And when they do, they often are hidden behind other titles: family support worker, counselor, intervention specialist or graduation success coordinator. Even our state's largest district, Seattle, didn't have dedicated school social workers until former WEA staffer Steve Pulkkinen, then executive director of the Seattle Education Association, worked with the district to hire the first three in 2007. Syvertsen was among the three hired that fall. But she, too, worked under differing titles. Her profession can feel invisible.

A year ago, in November 2019, Syvertsen combed



through the district's HR records to see who else on staff had an MSW, or master's in social work. To her surprise, she found 44 MSWs in the district, most all hidden behind other titles. Following on those efforts, the district this summer agreed to identify its school social workers by their proper title, and link them together in a common department.

"I think my avenue, honestly, is promoting our profession," she says of creating change. And she understands the strength in numbers. Together, school social workers can speak with a united voice about the issues they see — and help focus on the root causes. They can work together on cohesive policies at the district and state level. And they can unite to support legislative changes that bring those policy initiatives to life.

"We are able to tackle big problems together, and to support one another," she says. "That is my passion: I feel like our profession as a whole — and our strength in numbers, and us being in schools — will help combat and dismantle those barriers."

Syvertsen's recognition as National School Social Worker of the Year comes from the School Social Work Association of America. She works in Seattle's Robert Eagle Staff Middle School, and previously worked nine years at Chief Sealth International High School. She also served as vice president of the Washington Association of School Social Workers, where she worked for five years. One key victory, with WASSW's then-President Erin Romanuk, was passage of HB 1377, Improving Students' Mental Health by Enhancing Nonacademic Professional Services. Until the legislation became law in June 2018, there was no definition for a school social worker in Washington.

Syvertsen worked in middle schools in the Chicago area, the Kent School District in Washington, as well as Seattle's district office in its Behavioral Health department to implement Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS). As a school social worker, Syvertsen works with a multi-disciplinary school team and advocates on behalf of students' mental health within the school system. Using trauma-informed anti-racist practices, she conducts staff training on de-escalation techniques, provides crisis intervention and mental health counseling, collaboration with other professionals and community agencies, social emotional learning, and advocacy for students and parents.

While school social workers are part of the education fabric in other regions of the country, they remain rare in Washington, with districts largely



*Carrie Syvertsen's colleagues celebrate her national recognition in a pandemic-delayed gathering outside her school.*

relying on unsustainable grants or local levies for funding. Even in the state's prototypical school model, funding is allocated for only one school social worker for every 72,000 — yes, seventy-two *thousand* — students at the middle school level.

"I'm proud to call myself a school social worker," Syvertsen says. "We get messy in the work. We uncover and unravel the many layers that influence human behavior and dynamics. And we actively and unapologetically advocate for changes in systems — and changes in hearts and minds."

*Seattle's Carrie Syvertsen believes the dual pandemics of COVID and institutional racism provide an opportunity to reimagine education, and school social workers are there to innovate and influence positive change.*





# Gearing up to advocate for equitable, just schools



As we head toward the end of 2020, WEA is focusing on the 2021 legislative session with a focus to fully fund and support equitable, just schools for our students, families and communities.

## Our priorities for 2021

Our students are facing even more hurdles to learning during a global pandemic. We must ensure the health and safety of students, families and staff while equitably meeting the educational needs of all Washington students. Closing opportunity gaps requires additional investment and legislative support. WEA is committed to bringing educators' on-the-ground experience and expertise into every decision legislators make concerning our schools. Students, families and communities need consolidated state support systems including employment, nutrition and housing supports. WEA supports additional resources and investments that will support Washington families and communities. This is not the time for austerity.

## Fully fund schools.

- WEA opposes any cuts to education in this time of changing student needs. It takes more resources, not less, to meet the needs of students during a pandemic, especially schools in communities that have been historically underfunded.

- WEA supports fully funding special education, which is part of basic education.
- WEA supports a more equitable tax structure to ensure that education is fully funded.
- WEA supports "cradle through college" quality public education. Our early learning and higher education institutions must have the resources to continue providing excellent education and opportunities.

## Address the challenges presented by COVID-19 recovery in schools.

- WEA supports meeting the need for increased staffing whether in remote, hybrid or in-person learning models. Students need individual attention for their learning and social-emotional needs in this challenging environment and schools need more staff, not less.
- WEA supports funding for protections for the health and safety of students, staff, and our communities, including nurses, custodians, adequate PPE, cleaning, disinfecting, HVAC, water and physical space.
- WEA supports a voice at the table for front-line educators through protections for bargaining rights and due process for staff.

## Improve equity by dismantling racism and meeting the needs of all students.

- WEA supports continued anti-racism training for staff and students in Washington schools.
- WEA opposes high-stakes tests which are inherently biased.
- WEA opposes barriers to a more diverse workforce, such as the EdTPA requirement, and supports efforts to recruit and retain educators who reflect the diversity of our student populations.

- WEA supports dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline through the collaboration of districts, educators, students, families and the community to equitably fund wraparound services and training in order to implement antiracist discipline policies and restorative justice practices.
- WEA supports solutions that keep families housed continuously and structures of supports for our students who are unhoused, who are disproportionately people of color.

## Ensure every school is safe for students.

- WEA supports policies and practices for students and educators when addressing mental health and behavior that maintain a safe learning and working environment for all.
- WEA supports fully funding and enhancing the prototypical schools model (I-1351) to focus on the social, emotional, and safety needs of students. Communication with parents, support for families and parents, and wraparound services must also be prioritized.

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# Our pro-union, pro-education electorate is growing

Election officials are still busy making sure every one of our mailed-in ballots are counted, but almost all of the results of this November's election are clear. WEA members turned out in record numbers — an astounding 96 percent turnout rate, nearly 10 percent higher turnout than Washington registered voters in general — and our votes and action made a difference to elect our pro-union, pro-education endorsed candidates.



*T'wina Nobles* As we head into the 2021 legislative session, this will be the most diverse legislature in state history. Notably, we helped elect T'wina Nobles from University Place, who will become the only African-American woman in the state Senate. In addition, we helped elect

more Black women to the state House, ensuring that the 2021 state Legislature will have the highest percent of Black legislators in state history. We're making progress toward a legislature that better reflects our communities.



*Washington Superintendent of Public Instruction Chris Reykdal meets with WEA members in Olympia.*

WEA members also worked hard sending hundreds of thousands of text messages to re-elect Schools Superintendent Chris Reykdal. This was a critical race for educators because

Reykdal's opponent believes we should funnel money away from our public schools into private schools. In the end, Reykdal won a commanding victory.

We're also proud to re-elect several WEA members to the legislature. Congratulations to Reps. Jesse Johnson, Steve Bergquist, Matt Boehnke, Lillian Ortiz-Self, Mike Sells, Monica Stonier and Sharon Shewmake who will once again be powerful voices in Olympia for public education.

And finally, NEA saw some great victories on the national stage. We're thrilled that an educator, Jill Biden, is headed to the White House along with President-elect Joe Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris. This also means we're saying goodbye to Betsy DeVos and we'll see a new, pro-public Education Secretary come January.

## Changing the conversation: WEA supports BIPOC candidates and consultants

As we live our commitment to become an anti-racist organization, WEA is looking at how we can address systemic racism — and part of that is how we decide in which candidates WEA-PAC invests. Traditionally, we had emphasized WEA-PAC-endorsed candidates in swing districts, but this sometimes pre-empted potential support for Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) candidates running in safer districts, even though their voices are underrepresented in the Legislature.

At the same time, when a conversation began this summer about how BIPOC-owned consulting firms were being locked out of getting contracts for political work, WEA wanted to make sure we were supporting BIPOC consultants, in addition to BIPOC candidates.

"If we wanted a different outcome, and more BIPOC representation in this election cycle, we needed to stop doing things the same way we always have,"

said Djibril Diop, WEA director of government relations. "We were ready to do things very differently than we had in the past and make a concerted effort to invest in BIPOC candidates."

For this fall's election, we set out to do things a little differently. It started with putting our support behind a slate of eight African-American candidates who would bring more diverse voices to Olympia. They weren't all running in critical swing districts, but they were the candidates we needed representing us in the state Legislature.

At the same time, we were looking to hire political consultants. Like many other organizations, we had our usual go-to consultants with whom we had established relationships, but they were white-owned. We knew that to address the lack of diversity among our consultants we'd have to start new relationships, so we met with Crystal Fincher of Fincher Consulting, Christina

Blocker of Archway Consulting, and Seferiana Day of Upper Left Strategies. Knowing a little more about each firm, we decided not just to hire one firm, but each of them, as we worked toward our goal of helping elect more BIPOC candidates, and Black women specifically, to the Legislature.

As of now, five of our eight endorsed Black candidates have won their races. This nearly triples the number of Black voices in Olympia, and we're proud to have been part of this effort. Equally important, we have forged new relationships with BIPOC-owned consulting firms whom we look forward to working with for future races.

"At the end of the day, we're so proud of the work WEA-PAC did to help elect BIPOC candidates and the relationships we formed with BIPOC consultants" Diop said. "We've created a roadmap for a more inclusive and representative political process in the future."



#### IVERSON from Page 3

"Aimee has vision, expertise, and unwavering dedication to our WEA family. Her commitment to racial, social and economic justice will advance WEA's mission for an equitable and inclusive union," says WEA Advocacy and Organizing Manager Naché Duncan.

"With her knowledge, ability and passion for our organization, Aimee will bring great things to the WEA," Chief Financial Officer Donna Wesley says.

"WEASO looks forward to shared work with Aimee and WEA to address our own institutionalized racism structures and practices so we can focus more intentionally to support our members with this urgent work," WEA Staff Organization President Jim Meadows says. "She has a career-long commitment to WEA, and a strong, strategic leadership style that will help build a stronger WEA going forward."

Iverson says it will be challenging to follow in one of her mentor's footsteps. One of the many things she has learned from WEA Executive Director Armand Tiberio is that sometimes you just have to make decisions and move forward — that even if you make mistakes, own them and move on. She appreciates that he shows concern about each employee; that he's 100-percent committed to WEA's values; that he is forever respectful of boundaries and consummately professional about privacy; and that he has zero ego.

"As long as I've known him, I've never once seen him exhibit ego. He is far more concerned with what he can do to help people better understand things in a clearer way," Iverson says. And many current members don't know this, but Tiberio worked as a UniServ representative at WEA Olympic more than 40 years ago.

Former WEA staffer Steve Pulkkinen says when he first came to WEA in 1986, he was reviewing old contracts for the community colleges.

"Some guy named Armand Tiberio was the staff person who negotiated those early contracts out on the peninsula and they were great, done under

meet and confer laws, and had all the provisions," Pulkkinen says. "In Armand's time as NEA Pacific Region Director, he embraced and funded the National Staff Organization's Organizing for Power training and for ESP members. It was a great commitment to strengthening our ESP units."

Tiberio served as WEA's executive director once from 2001-2007 then worked for NEA and its affiliates before returning for his second stint beginning in 2014.

"Armand came in at a time when the management team and the organization needed to take a course of action," Iverson says. "He set a path forward, made sure there were sufficient resources while making sure we weren't cutting programs. He helped make it possible to get McCleary results."

One of Tiberio's many legacies, Iverson says, is that he jumped with both feet in moving WEA toward addressing our own organizational shortcomings. He has pushed consistently to make sure doors are opening. He has expanded management team diversity and emphasized time and again that we can't call out others until and unless we do the hard work ourselves.

"Today is an exciting and demanding time for the WEA and our members. WEA could not have selected a more talented and professional individual than Aimee Iverson for this position," Tiberio says.

"Hard work continues in protecting our members and students due to COVID. Our commitment to advancing race and social justice has never been stronger. After many years, I am proudly leaving WEA's 95,000 members strong and knowing Aimee Iverson is stepping in to lead WEA into the future. Thanks for the opportunity for working with and serving you."

"On behalf of all of our members," Delaney says, "we thank Armand for his years of dedicated service to the members of WEA. You are certainly leaving our union in a better place."



Aimee Iverson



Armand Tiberio