



Summer 2021



# Connections

NEWS TO KEEP YOU ENGAGED IN THE PROFESSION YOU LOVE

## WEA-Retired conference: “It's not too late; you still have time to do what you want!”

We are excited to announce the 2021 WEA-Retired conference, “It's not too late; you still have time to do what you want!” It will be held VIRTUALLY Sept. 22-23, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. each day. The conference fee is complimentary – and is a benefit of your membership. Be sure to sign up today!

It's not too late; you still have time to write that novel, travel, enjoy a new hobby, get involved in politics or volunteer for a favorite non-profit! Our keynote speakers will be Nate Turner, an author, public speaker, role model, and mentor to many students will share a backward design process for living your best life. Robin Todd, a published author, will speak about "Mindfulness." Robin will share simple practices to cultivate the present moment, jump-start curiosity and reignite inspiration. Ann Randall, a former WEA staff person and current author and travel enthusiast, will share adventures she has pursued during retirement. This is not a complete list!

Attendees will have the chance to “travel the world” by participating in a virtual activity. We will also have time to chat, share and build new relationships. Please join us for two fun and educational days!

Be sure to invite your friends, too. Remember, to attend this conference, WEA-Retired membership is required. If they are not a member, but are a retired educator in Washington state, please encourage them to join today at [www.WashingtonEA.org/retired](http://www.WashingtonEA.org/retired). We look forward to seeing you Sept. 22-23!

RSVP here:

<https://bit.ly/WEARetiredConference>



# The President's Corner

By Mary Lindsey, 2021-23 WEA-Retired President



August is the time of year we focus on what we have done and what we plan to do during the next school year. As retirees, we do not have classrooms, workstations, or students to prepare for, but we do have important work to accomplish.

As always, since WEA-Retired began over three decades ago, our purpose is to support public education students and staff in a variety of ways. As you will see in this issue of *Connections*, the WEA-Retired Scholarship program has awarded 10 WEA members \$1,000 scholarships each to support their desire to further their education and training goals.

WEA-Retired will continue to promote retirement security for all our members and future retirees. We have a WEA-Retired Legislative Work Team that meets monthly and emails an the Actively Retired legislative bulletin to members after the meetings. We also team up annually with Retired Public Employees Council (RPEC) for legislative training and lobbying. Please join us this year on Jan. 31, 2022. We also join forces with Washington State Alliance for Retired Americans (WSARA). Shirley Hickey and I serve on the WSARA executive board. WSARA is planning their annual conference on Oct. 5. If you are interested in attending as a WEA-Retired delegate, please contact me. WEA-Retired member Phyllis Farrell serves on the Senior Citizens' Lobby executive board. Look for the announcement of their annual fall conference. It is extremely helpful to have allies from other organizations so we can work together for the common good in areas of pensions, healthcare, transportation, housing and other needs for our retirement security.

Thank you to all of you who took action as the result of our email dated July 16 concerning the July 20 *Select Committee on Pension Policy* (SCPP Committee Meeting). Part of the agenda was to hear from a policy analyst concerning the TRS/PERS Plan 1 COLA. As in any meeting, there was time for public comment/testimony. We had four WEA-Retired members speak: Stephen Lalonde, Edith Ruby, Gloria Smith, and me. There were also members who expressed their views by email. Members who attended the Zoom meeting and showed their support by filling the Zoom room with their presence is also much appreciated! If you would like to be included on a "red alert team" list, please send your name and legislative district to me at [WEARetired@WashingtonEA.org](mailto:WEARetired@WashingtonEA.org). You will be contacted when support is needed from your LD to contact your legislators about specific topics, or to attend a meeting locally or in Olympia on occasion. We can achieve our goals when we are organized and work together for the common good! Thank you for being a WEA-Retired or pre-retired member!

Do we have your current mailing address, email and phone number?

If not, please send to [WEARetired@WashingtonEA.org](mailto:WEARetired@WashingtonEA.org)!

# WEA-Retired Legislative Work Team Annual Report, June 2021

By Lee Ann Priellip, Legislative Work Team Chair

The Legislative Work Team completed its charges for 2020-21, thanks to the involvement of all work team members.

We are especially proud of establishing *Actively Retired*, an ongoing WEA-Retired legislative bulletin which is emailed to all retired members following each of our meetings. Shirley Hickey and Pam Fuelling have been essential in coordinating the work involved in preparing each issue in a timely fashion for Brooke Mattox-Ball, WEA Communications, to edit and send to our members. We encourage you to offer us feedback as we continue to learn what is legislatively important for our members to know and as we encourage them to act in support of the issues.

Once again, WEA-Retired was able to join with RPEC (Retired Public Employees Council) for a joint lobby day. This year, the event was held virtually. RPEC coordinated the training session and appointments with legislators. Many retired members joined with WEA-Retired leadership and members of the Work Team to participate in this virtual adventure. We anticipate that our WEA-Retired participation will increase in the future as members have experienced how this event provides an opportunity for our two organizations to show strength in numbers on issues pertaining to both groups.

At each meeting, Julie Salvi, WEA lobbyist, kept us up to date on issues which might affect retirees. We always appreciated her time and ability to answer our plethora of questions. She helped us to determine the most effective ways we might influence the upcoming legislative actions. We also received reports from WEA-Retired representatives to various groups: Maureen Ramos kept us informed on WEA-PAC; Phyllis Farrell on Senior Lobby; and Shirley Hickey and Mary Lindsey on the Alliance for Retired Americans.

This is the first year that the work team has not been able to meet in person with legislators. However, we did receive some returns on questionnaires that were sent to individuals regarding specific issues. Several of our team members were able to meet virtually with their representatives and report on their discussions. We will strive to re-establish closer relationships with legislators serving on key committees related to our issues.

Our goal now is to have an early planning session on how to best influence this next legislative session. It is clear that issues most important to retired members are healthcare and pensions. We need to determine specifics such as COLAs for pension plans, the amount of subsidy for healthcare plans, how other legislation might impact the lives of retirees, if we need to propose legislation, and how to coordinate with other retiree groups. We look forward to your suggestions and input in assisting the work team as our charges are developed for next year.

## WEA-PAC ... a new contribution year begins in September

When you use recurring credit card or checking account withdrawals to make contributions towards electing pro-education and pro-labor school board and other candidates, you can give a little each month without reminders. You may also make a one-time WEA-PAC donation online - <https://bit.ly/givetoweapac>.

# WEA-Retired Delegate to the 2021 Virtual NEA-RA

By Michael McSweeney, WEA-Retired Puget Sound Chapter

When I retired from my very long and mostly wonderful K-12 public school career in December 2016, it never crossed my mind NOT to remain active in WEA and NEA-Retired. The issues I cared about and fought for all those years are still important to me.

I was proud to be elected as a delegate to this year's NEA Representative Assembly, even after learning it would be a virtual event and not held in the Denver Convention Center as scheduled. I took my election seriously and knew that four days at my computer would be brutal, so I bought a height-adjustable computer desk, which enabled me to stand, stretch, move about, occasionally sit down, and keep exercising while staying focused for four very long, 8-to-12-hour days, from June 30 to July 3.

Each morning began with a Zoom meeting with the WEA Caucus. It was gratifying to see, live and in real time, the dynamic and capable leadership of WEA President Larry Delaney and WEA Vice President Janie White. Approximately 300 Washington state delegates, including seven WEA-Retired delegates, joined together for very spirited and extremely respectful debates on a variety of New Business Items that would be placed to a vote on the virtual floor of the actual NEA-RA later that day. Known as "NBIs," these issues are the meat of the RA. They are issues brought forth, explained, debated, and then voted on. Those passed by the entire body of the RA become the issues that NEA as an organization commits itself to fighting for and supporting. Just a few of the more than 40 NBIs we voted on included:

- Requiring schools to provide for the hygiene needs of female students at no cost to the students, also called "menstrual equity;"
- Meeting the needs of school employees who face "invisible disabilities" in their lives, including bladder/toileting issues, mental health, hearing impairment, and vertigo, to name a few;
- Demanding that school boards find the funds to repair or replace neglected school buildings; and
- Building greater awareness that every student has an absolute right to have their name correctly pronounced by their teachers and others.

The second part of the NEA-RA was the (virtual) assembly of nearly 7,000 delegates. Fortunately, this was not a Zoom! It was a well-produced live video feed. Our new NEA President Becky Pringle is a passionate voice to be reckoned with. I urge you to watch her keynote address to our membership: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GoJQNrYstM>



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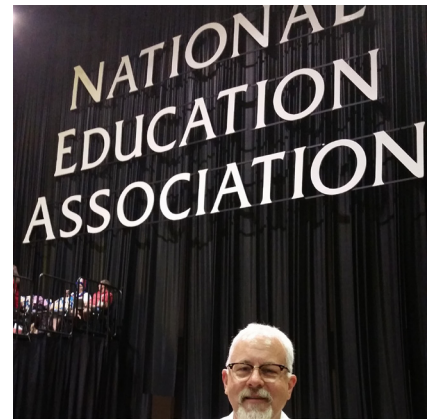
Further debate and final voting on all of the NBIs took place on the “virtual floor” of the RA each of the four days. NEA figured out a way that rank-and-file delegates could call in to debate the issues they cared about. Voting was done in real time, electronically. What could have been a gigantic tech crash and burn went amazingly well. Truly, the RA, like NEA itself, is a large-scale example of democracy in action, that uses a variety of resources and best practices to enable its members to have a voice in decision making.

On July 2 President Biden and First Lady Dr. Jill Biden addressed the convention, not by pre-recorded video, but live and in person. President Biden spoke about several topics, including universal preschool and two years of tuition-free community college (and how to pay for it). Even as a retiree, it was splendid to hear the president of the United States address the largest educator union in the world with the phrase, “you deserve a raise!”

My final take-away was the importance of this year’s “Friend of Education” award. NEA President Becky Pringle presented the award to 74-year-old disability rights activist Judy Heumann. Many retirees remember from their own childhoods the era of public schools not serving children with disabilities, but Heumann did not accept the status quo. She is a polio survivor who uses a wheelchair. In a fair comparison to Rosa Parks, she simply got fed up with society telling her and other people with disabilities what they were and were not allowed to do. She literally stopped accepting being told what she couldn’t do and demanded the right to do what she had to do: attend public school, go to college, and become a public school teacher. She galvanized the disability community worldwide to do the same. Heumann’s 60 years of lawsuits, demonstrations, sit-ins, lobbying, and demanding equal rights for people with disabilities have literally changed our profession, as well as our whole society. Every aspect of what we call “special education” has Heumann’s fingerprints on it. Her story is featured in an Academy Award nominated documentary film called “Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution” now streaming on Netflix. Please watch this remarkable, infuriating, and ultimately uplifting film about the life’s work of Judy Heumann, our 2021 Friend of Education award winner.

I was exhausted when the virtual RA gaveled to a close on the afternoon of July 3. I was also proud, inspired, motivated, and quite honored to have represented WEA-Retired as a NEA RA delegate.

We worked all our careers to create life-long learners, and that’s because we, WEA-Retired members, are life-long educators. Our voice does belong at the NEA Representative Assembly each summer.



# Congratulations to our 2021 WEA-Retired Scholarship Recipients!



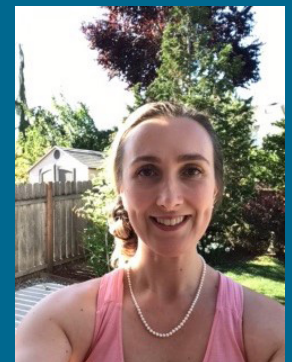
Jasleen Aulakh is a first-year special education teacher with Bellingham Public Schools who serves students in grades sixth to eighth. She has a dual endorsement in Special Education (K-8) and In-terdisciplinary Studies (K-8). She will use her scholarship toward her tuition in a master's program at Western Governor's University for English Language Learners.

Ligia Chis is a certificated English language arts teacher as well as a behavior specialist with Vancouver Public Schools. As a former ELL student whose parents emigrated from another country, she is the first one to attend college in her family. In her words, "I am a certified, life-long learner who seeks to grow professionally and to perfect her craft of teaching." She will apply the scholarship to the Retooling program through ESD 112.



Leslie Flores is currently a paraprofessional in the Seattle Public Schools/South Park neighborhood. Four years ago, she was a City Year Corps member and was convinced to stay on as a para because she expressed interest in teaching. She also had a level of determination and thoughtfulness that showed she would be an amazing asset to the school. She is currently enrolled in a certification program at Seattle University.

Lisa Freeman is a first-grade dual immersion classroom teacher with the Vancouver Public Schools. She has worked in education for 12 years, starting in Spain. This is her fifth year in Vancouver. She will use the scholarship toward out-of-pocket expenses for her National Board certification. "If WEA-Retired was able to help me financially in my endeavor toward National Boards, it feels like my journey will in a way come full circle, as WEA motivated me to start the journey in the first place," she says.



Areli Ester Lopez is a certificated educator in the Washougal School District. She started working in Earle, Alaska, through AmeriCorps. She has taught high-school Spanish for five years. She would like to teach Dual Credit classes in high school, which would benefit students who would like to earn college credits at the high school level. She will apply the scholarship to finish a Master of Arts in Spanish through Middlebury College in Spain.

## Continued from page 6.

Harpreet Kaur Padda is a paraeducator in the Kent School District. From March 2017 to March 2020, she was a substitute teacher. Due to the pandemic, she lost that job but was rehired last September as a paraeducator. She will use the scholarship to pay for tuition and to buy books. She is enrolled in special education coursework at Seattle University. “The end goal is to nurture the development of students to become active and engaged participants in society” she says.



Makenzi Schurerholz is a one-to-one deaf/hard-of-hearing paraeducator in the Edmonds School District. Her dream is to become a high school English teacher and is enrolled in the Accelerated Master of Arts in Teaching program at Seattle Pacific University. She says, “When given the chance, English can amplify students’ worlds, introduce them to others’ experiences, teach empathy, and create a space where all voices are heard.”

Caitlin Tomlinson is a high school Spanish teacher in the Nine Mile Falls School District outside of Spokane. She has worked eight years in education teaching all levels of high school Spanish, mostly in Nine Mile Falls, but has taught in large, urban high schools in the Spokane School District as well. She will use the scholarship to cover the cost of taking two graduate-level education courses at Eastern Washington University this summer. When not in the classroom, Caitlin also serves as pres-ident of her local, on the WEA-Eastern Board of Directors and as a WEA Board member.



Francine Walsh is in her fourth year as a second-grade teacher with the Edmonds School District. She will use her scholarship toward tuition at University of Washington Bothell to obtain a master’s with an ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages) concentration. Even though planning to remain in general education, getting an ESOL endorsement is a necessary tool, as upwards of 30 percent of her school’s student population are emergent bilinguals.

Erin Wolfswinkel is a one-to-one paraeducator in the Anacortes School District. After five years of working one-to-one with students in the Life Skills program, as a Title reading paraeducator, as a health room assistant and as para liaison for the leadership team, she realized she has a passion for teaching students. She will be pursuing a master’s in Elementary Education through Western Governor’s University.







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## Important dates

Sept. 17: Virtual WEA-Retired Executive Committee Meeting  
Sept. 22-23: Virtual WEA-Retired Members' September Conference  
Oct. 20: Virtual WEA-Retired Executive Committee Meeting  
Oct. 21: Virtual WEA-Retired Board Meeting  
Jan. 19, 2022: Virtual WEA-Retired Executive Committee Meeting  
Jan. 20, 2022: Virtual WEA-Retired Board Meeting  
Jan. 31, 2022: WEA-Retired/RPEC Legislative Training & Lobby Day  
March 11-15, 2022: NEA Leadership Summit/ NEA-Retired Conference  
April 7-9, 2022: WEA Representative Assembly  
June 8-9, 2022: WEA-Retired Annual Meeting  
June 29-30, 2022: NEA-Retired Annual Meeting  
July 2-6, 2022: NEA Representative Assembly

## Agency contact information

Department of Retirement Systems: [www.drs.wa.gov](http://www.drs.wa.gov)  
or 800-547-6657  
Health Care Authority (PEBB): [www.pebb.hca.wa.gov](http://www.pebb.hca.wa.gov)  
or 800-200-1004  
Medicare: [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov) or 800-633-4227  
Social Security: [www.ssa.gov](http://www.ssa.gov) or 800-772-1213  
SHIBA (Statewide Health Insurance Benefit Advisors): 800-562-6900

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*Connections* is published by Washington Education Association-Retired four times a year. We invite your comments and contributions. During other months, a newsletter is sent to your email address. If you're not receiving those, please send an email to [WEARetired@WashingtonEA.org](mailto:WEARetired@WashingtonEA.org).

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