

WE...too

Washington Education
Association – Retired

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Lawsuits impact TRS, K-12

*By Kevin Teeley, Lake Washington
Education Association*

Gainsharing for TRS Plan 1 and Plan 3

Several years ago, the Legislature repealed a benefit that was included in Teachers Retirement System (TRS) Plans 1 and 3. The provision, called “gainsharing,” allowed plan members to share gains from investment earnings that exceeded a certain amount over a period of time. The legislation also lowered the retirement age for Plans 2 and 3 to age 62 without penalty, and reduced the penalties for retiring after age 55 with at least 30 years of experience. The Legislature, however, attached a “poison pill” to the bill, which stated that if they lost a lawsuit challenging the gainsharing repeal, the early retirement provisions would immediately be revoked.

The lawsuit was filed and was heard by Judge Richard Eadie in King County Superior Court. Judge Eadie ruled that the Legislature’s repeal of the gainsharing benefit was unlawful. The lawsuit was split into two phases — one dealing with

the gainsharing repeal, and the other dealing with the Legislature’s “poison pill.” Judge Eadie ruled that the second phase (poison pill) must first be litigated before the entire case could be moved forward. There is a summary judgment motion on Phase 2, which was heard on Dec. 16, 2011. Once Judge Eadie rules on Phase 2 (which could be any day), it’s anticipated the entire case will be appealed. As a result, we’re at least another year away from a final decision.

Plan 1 COLA Repeal

During the last legislative session, the Legislature repealed the COLA provision in Retirement Plan 1. The COLA had been added to Plan 1 a number of years ago to address the significant loss in buying power Plan 1 retirees experienced during their retirement years. An automatic COLA kicked in after a retiree reached 66 years of age. The removal of the COLA means that current retirees in Plan 1 had their benefits permanently frozen at last year’s level. Future retirees will have their benefits perma-

nently frozen at the amount they receive during their first year of retirement. This means if someone retires at age 55 and lives for 30 more years, that person will receive the same dollar amount in retirement income at age 85 as he/she received at age 55.

WEA, along with the Washington Federation of State Employees, filed a lawsuit challenging the repeal in Thurston County Superior Court. Since the lawsuit is still in the preliminary stages, a hearing has not yet been set.

Initiative 1053, sponsored by Tim Eyman, was approved in 2010 and requires a 2/3 majority vote of the Legislature to pass revenue increases. A lawsuit filed challenging its constitutionality is now in the discovery phase.

The Network for Excellence in Washington Schools (NEWS) prevailed in its suit against the State of Washington for failure to meet its constitutional mandate to fully fund basic education. The effect of this on the current legislative session is uncertain.

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President's Message

Importance of an adult mentor

As I sit down to write my column this January, the Legislative Session is underway and the news is filled with projections of more cuts to public education, more attacks on collective bargaining, the introduction of charter schools legislation and much more.



Kit Raney, WEA-Retired president

I could easily fill my column space with the importance of standing up for public education, our students and fellow educators and contacting your legislators (go to www.OurVoiceWashington.org). And believe me, it is still very important that you continue to do that. But January is National Mentoring Month so I am going to write about mentoring.

As retired educators, I'm sure that you are well aware of the importance of adult-student relationships, time spent individually with students and the fact that as class sizes increase, there is less time for educators to spend with each

student. You probably also have some stories from your own classroom about how a caring adult was a positive influence on your students. At my school, Emerson Elementary in Snohomish, we were fortunate to have several different mentoring programs at different times. Members of the Snohomish Kiwanis were a consistent mentoring presence, as well as "Grandma Doris," a retired teacher who came weekly to read in her granddaughter's classroom. We also had mentors who would come to school each week to eat lunch with, and then spend recess with, their mentee. As you know, mentoring can take many different forms.

You probably also know that education professionals today have a hard row to hoe... with increased testing and class sizes, reduced funding and support and, quite honestly, a bull's-eye on their backs as the cause of everything that is wrong in society. We know the truth — educators today are working harder than ever and are doing more with less.

But I'm going to give you some sobering statistics:

- 1.3 million students drop out of high school each year;
- One third of all children — and half of low income and minority youth — fail to graduate on time;
- Only 10 percent of students who enroll in college will

graduate;

- Only 3 percent of 21st Century jobs are available for unskilled employees.

And it starts very early:

- 61 percent of low-income children have no age-appropriate books in their homes;
- A child from a low-income family enters kindergarten with a listening vocabulary of 3,000 words, while a child of a middle-income family enters school with a listening vocabulary of 20,000 words.

Research has shown mentoring to have significant positive effects on two early indicators of high school dropouts: high levels of absenteeism and recurring behavior problems. Reading aloud is widely recognized as the single most important activity leading to literacy acquisition. And access and exposure to books is critical to a child's cognitive development.

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You made a difference in the lives of your students when you were working. You can continue to make a difference for students and our active members by volunteering to be a mentor in a school. If you would like to be a mentor in a school, it shouldn't be hard to find one that will welcome you with open arms. Stop by your local school or district office. Or talk with some of your friends who are still working. Mentoring in a school would be providing needed support for students and help for our active members.

If you would like to connect with a mentoring organization in our state, Washington State Mentors has a very good website www.wamentors.org. This site has mentoring resources and a list of mentoring organizations across the state.

It has been about 15 years or so since Hillary Clinton said, during her speech at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago:

"And we have learned that to raise a happy, healthy and hopeful child, it takes a family, it takes teachers, it takes clergy, it takes business people, it takes community leaders, it takes those who protect our health and safety, it takes all of us.

"Yes, it takes a village."

Fifteen years later, providing a village for our students is more important than ever. Can you help?

Current session

by Mike Ragan, WEA Vice President

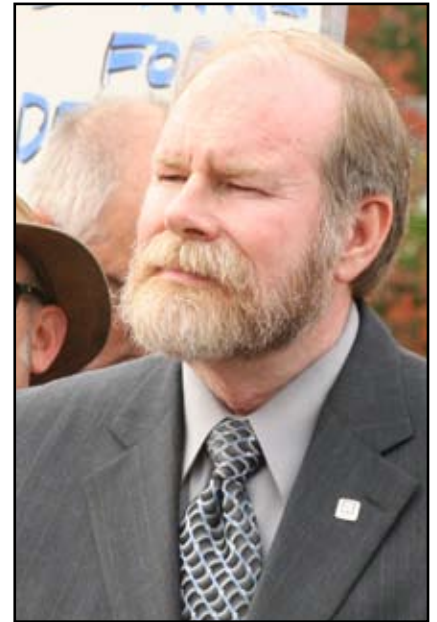
Best wishes for a prosperous New Year!

Last November, Gov. Gregoire called a special session of the Legislature to deal with a revenue shortfall of \$2 billion. The Legislature was unsuccessful at achieving its stated purpose. They did approve a \$500 million budget fix, but left a shortfall of \$1.5 billion for the regular session. The cuts to education include cuts to OSPI funding, and some accounting tricks, such as an enrollment reporting change that will cost school districts \$6 million, and a delay in the bus transportation payment to districts.

And so the special session ended, but every ending is a new beginning. This particular ending also ended the calendar year, and the New Year also brought the new regular session of the Legislature.

The 2012 legislative session has opened with the reintroduction of all the discredited education "reform" legislation which was rejected in the last session, and with the addition of a bill on charter schools. I do not know how these bills will fare, but be sure to check the Our Voice website for updates, and to let your opinion be heard by your legislators.

Thank you for all you have done, and will do for public education in Washington State.



Mike Ragan, WEA Vice President

Have an opinion?
A response? A solution? Want to write a
letter to the President? Or to the Editor?
Please do! Use snail mail or send to
njmcmler@hotmail.com.

Member Activities

Adventures with Queen Elizabeth

by Chris Gray, LWEA, and Ed Gray, NEA
Both members of WEA-Retired

After spending years and more money than we care to admit, we finished restoration of a beautiful, old 1962 Lincoln 4-door convertible. We decided there was something more exciting than the inside of a garage, so we sold the convertible, shopped around and found a stunning, low-mileage modern Lincoln. It was truly the car of a "little old lady from Pasadena," a 1989 Mark VII Coupe. It had been used twice a week to go to church and the grocery store and its owner, Elizabeth, meticulously maintained it. She was a former Miss California from the '30s/40s. We bought the car from her estate and in her honor we named the car Queen Elizabeth VII aka QEVI.

We were members of the Lincoln and Continental Owners Club (LCOC), which has three national judged events per year in different towns across the country. After getting the car, we started on a four-year journey into America ala Charlie Steinbeck and William Least Heat-Moon that went from Ocean Shores, WA to Annapolis, MD. Although the car could do well on super-highways and interstates, we traveled the state highways, those roads indicated in black on the maps.



Ed Gray, formerly of Northshore EA, now WEA-Retired with his 1989 Lincoln, Queen Elizabeth VII.

Beginning with a trip to Dearborn, Michigan in 2003 for Ford Motor Company's 100th anniversary, we began our great adventure. QEVI took her initial national first-place award in Dearborn. We traveled the original Lincoln Highway and toured the Studebaker and Auburn/Cord Museums in Indiana.

By the time we retired the QEVI, we traveled about 20,000 miles covering 28 states and seeing some of the country's great car collections and museums. In the meantime, QEVI won major trophies in Ocean Shores, WA; Albuquerque, NM; Branson, MO; Cleveland, OH; Sacramento, CA; Scottsdale, AZ; and Federal Way, WA.

On the way we saw America. Eating in small local cafes, staying in tourist courts and B & Bs, traveling at a leisurely pace, QEVI and the Grays got to know our country. In four summers of travel we built a lifetime of memories, developed lasting friendships and filled a case full of trophies.



Reform: Not a new idea

by Neil Bergeron, Tacoma EA,
WEA-Retired

After a 25-year hiatus from education association business, events culminating in Ken Mortland's article in the last issue of *WE...too* prompted me to write this piece. Thanks go to my friends David, Mohsen and Ron, who kept me talking; to Ken, whom I don't yet know; and also to Kit.

To begin with, "reforming education" is not a new idea. Every time a teacher improves what she does or how she does it, or shapes a lesson to better fit her class, she "reforms," i.e., improves education. Every time she consults with her colleagues looking for new ideas, they together "reform" education. Good teachers do it all the time, nearly every day. That's one of the things that makes them good.

And that is how improving our educational system will always occur — one classroom at a time, one teacher at a time. Not by policy makers forcing top down "solutions" or creating competitive systems as might be done in the corporate world. Carrot and stick approaches, my way or the highway threats, will ultimately result in an essentially robotic teaching corps, one without a heart, one a good teacher wants to flee from. Clearly, that's not a consequence any of us look forward to.

However, the Legislature and others, frustrated by the

difficulties involved in fixing public education, continue to opt for easier solutions — charter schools being one example. Transferring new techniques or curriculum from a charter school into a traditional school setting will be very difficult because of inherent differences between them. The only way to improve our public education system is to work within that system, tackling the issues in the environment in which they exist. That is being done in many school districts in this state right now and deserves more visibility. Two good sources are WEA's 22-minute innovative schools video and the report published by The Paramount Duty Coalition. Perhaps we can help publicize these.

Also, both individually and organizationally, we can become better informed about successful education reform efforts, no matter where they occur. As someone once said, a good idea is a good idea no matter who came up with it. My favorite among the many available on this subject is *Education Nation: Six Leading Edges of Innovation in our Schools* (Jossey-Bass, 2010) by Dr. Milton Chen. This is a very positive book full of examples, citations, and links to various websites coupled with thoughtful discussion aimed right at both classroom teachers and policy makers — student assessment, technology, curriculum, educational materials,

teacher training and assistance. An extension of the book is an educator friendly website, www.edutopia.org, that Chen and film director/producer George Lucas created about 10 years ago. Everyone interested in improving our schools ought to read this book or go to the website, or both.

Education reform is taking place all around us. WEA-Retired can be instrumental in helping others recognize it where it exists, support it organizationally, and help decision makers at various levels become supporters as well. Our working colleagues will be encouraged, kids will benefit, WEA-Retired membership will increase, and our public image will be more in line with what we all want it to be. I don't know how to bring all that about, but I'd like to think caring people can find a way.

Having an
adventure?
Discovered a passion?
Have a question, an
answer, an opinion?
Submit up to about
450 words to
njcmiller@hotmail.com.
Photo is a plus.

Member Resources

What is SHIBA?

by Annette Barca, Everett EA
WEA-Retired

SHIBA is a program under the auspices of the Office of Insurance Commissioner (OIC). SHIBA stands for State Health Insurance Benefit Adviser. Individuals who serve as SHIBA counselors are volunteers trained by OIC employees and then attend monthly update meetings on current insurance-related issues. In addition, they provide information updates as well as reminders about various insurance-related aspects.

What does a SHIBA volunteer do? Their primary task is to help clients assess the various insurance options they have, as well as providing the information needed for a client to make the best decision possible from these options. They are not to recommend a specific plan, but rather, help clients understand what choices they have. Additional tasks may include helping review insurance bills and claims, and helping to provide guidelines to appeal a claim if you feel it has not been handled correctly.

Originally SHIBA counselors focused mainly on helping people find plans to supplement their Medicare insurance. As more plans became available, the task changed to include information about all the plans available. Then, non-Medicare plans were also included for people under 65 as well as plans for children. The plans can vary by the county and/or state where you live. Plus, the plans sold must have providers willing to accept the coverage you have. **Plans cannot be sold with expectation that you have to go out of your area (county) to receive services.** A person may choose to go out of area but cannot be required to do so for basic medical coverage.

Since late 2005, SHIBA reps have assisted tens of thousands of clients find the best Part D drug plan. These plans change every year. This may be the plan itself, the rates charged and/or the formularies offered. During the open enrollment period (for Part D), this is a major activity. While the information is online, many often do not know how to interpret the details to get the best coverage for the least amount of money.

At times, SHIBA counselors will determine that a client may qualify for financial aid due to low income. This might be covering all or part of their Medicare Part B premium; the cost of a plan to supplement their Medicare benefits; and/or help with the cost of their drugs. The most common form of help is with their drugs. They often make referrals (to other agencies) to help their client get additional help such as assistance with heat, food, in-home care or even extended care outside the home such as nursing homes or hospice.

Additional SHIBA activities include conducting seminars on topics such as "Getting Reading for Medicare," "Medicare Options for the Coming year," "Long Term Care" and program benefits for children.

Most likely, if you are a person who has retired or separated from service, you have your insurance through PEBB or you have deferred this coverage under PEBB's guidelines. In general, for WEA-Retired members (and their spouse/partner), PEBB provides an excellent set of choices for your coverage and at very good rates. The plans and the benefits offered cannot be beat in the current open market. Thus, you are not likely to need the services of a SHIBA counselor.

However, as you are about

to turn 65, have parents who are on Medicare (and you are helping them), or are dealing with disabilities making you Medicare eligible, you are encouraged to attend a Medicare education seminar. You will learn ways to help you transition into the world of Medicare. SHIBA counselors will also be willing to help you one on one.

SHIBA services are available at many Senior Centers. These services are available to people of all ages and are free of charge. You can call 1-800-562-6900 toll free to get information on the nearest location. Note: SHIBA is considered a "SHIP" (State Health Insurance Program) — every state has such a program. You can also find out more insurance information at the OIC website, www.oic.wa.gov.

SHIBA runs through the Office of the Insurance Commissioner. Volunteer roles include counseling, clerical support, outreach, public presentations and special projects. If you'd like to talk to someone about volunteering, you can contact the SHIBA office at the number above, or call a local office from the county list at the OIC website.

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Nomination Form

WEA-Retired elections for officers, board directors, and annual meeting delegates

WEA-Retired will convene an Annual Meeting, June 6-7, 2012. This year the delegates will elect a president and vice president, as well as board directors for Kent, North Central, Rainier, Spokane, Vancouver, WEA-Cascade, WEA MidState, WEA Olympic, and WEA-Riverside (all non-chapters).

This form is for nominating non-chapter delegates, non-chapter board directors, president and vice president. Fifty words or less biography for each nominee is optional. Non-chapter delegates will be elected during a conference call meeting of WEA-Retired Board of Directors in late March. Non-chapter board directors, president and vice president will be elected at the annual meeting in June.

Non-Chapter Units are: WEA-Cascade (4), WEA-Eastern Washington (5), Kent (1), WEA-Lower Columbia (3), WEA MidState (5), North Central (2), WEA Olympic (7), Rainier (3), WEA-Riverside (3), Sammamish (8), Soundview (1), WEA-Southeast (5), Spokane (3), Summit (2), and Vancouver (3). The number in parentheses is the number of delegates the chapter is allowed in addition to the board director.

All nominees must be WEA-Retired members. More than one name can be submitted to be a non-chapter delegate. The same person can be nominated for more than one position. You can nominate yourself or another retired member. If you nominate someone other than yourself, you must have the consent of the nominee.

Mail the nomination form to: **Jan Curtis, 718 Russell Road, Snohomish, WA 98290-5617.**
Nomination forms **must be postmarked no later than March 9, 2012.**

2012 WEA-Retired Annual Meeting Nomination Form — Multiple positions

Your Name _____

Date of Retirement _____

Your e-mail _____

Phone Number _____

I nominate the following retired members for:

Non-chapter delegate:

Non-chapter WEA-Retired Board Director:

Name

Name

UniServ Council

UniServ Council

WEA-Retired President:

WEA-Retired Vice President:

Name

Name

Chapter units are: WEA Chinook (10), WEA Fourth Corner (7), Pilchuck (6), Puget Sound (5), Seattle (6) and Tacoma (4). The number in parentheses is the number of delegates the chapter is allowed in addition to the board director. Pilchuck and Puget Sound will elect board directors for a 2012-14 term. Chapter units should elect their delegates before March 15, 2012.



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