



we2.0

Washington Education Association
Volume 60, Number 2 – Spring 2022

Elevating our members

Congratulations to Rochester ESP's
Pamella Johnson, 2022 WEA Education
Support Professional of the Year

Rising Together: Vision. Strength. Unity.

In lieu of my regular column, I would like to use this space to share an excerpt of my address to delegates at our 2022 virtual WEA Representative Assembly in April.



Larry Delaney
WEA President

Do not allow the mess and chaos of the last two years fracture us.

We have been through a difficult time, and times of great uncertainty bring out the best — and the worst — in us. But we all must work together to address our complex world.

And public education is the newest political battlefield. Now, we can be angry at those who vilify our profession. But if we think about why they are doing that, it's because they recognize our strength. They recognize the power of standing hand in hand in union!

With more than 90,000 members, when we harness our collective power, we can do amazing things.

Many folks want to separate our jobs as educators from politics. But our jobs are political. What we teach, what we are allowed to say — or unfortunately — what we are *not* allowed to say or teach is determined largely by elected officials.

We can see the education-related battles taking place across the country — transparency laws, laws against teaching the truth, anti LGBTQ+ laws, laws requiring educators to teach two sides to issues that only have *one* side — such as the Holocaust or slavery or segregation. This is what public education is up against in 2022.

We are fortunate in Washington that we have elected policymakers who believe that public education is the solution, not the problem.

And we can see in this past legislative session the fruits of our labors.

Together, we were able to:

- Win funding for Cost-of-Living Adjustments (COLAs).
- Secure \$346 million to ensure that school districts would not be unfairly penalized for a decline in enrollment due to COVID.
- Win the necessary funding wrap-around services.
- Ensure that a post-secondary education is more accessible for students with expanded financial aid.

But elections matter. And in 2022, we must ensure:

- That all educators receive a living wage.
- That we have educators in our schools and classrooms who are as diverse as the students that they teach and the communities in which they work.
- That our schools are welcoming spaces where all students can thrive.
- That educators are treated as professionals, and we are given the respect that is commensurate with the tremendous responsibility entrusted to us.

We have been in survival mode since March of 2020, and we cannot escape the pain we have experienced or the burden we have carried.

I think back to that cold, sunny day in January 2021 when a powerful 24-year-old woman shared a poem she wrote. On that day, Amanda Gorman said: “And so, we lift our gaze, not to what stands between us, but what stands before us. We close the divide because we know to put our future first, we must first put our differences aside. We lay down our arms so we can reach out our arms to one another.”

We must allow Gorman's words to resonate. We must continue to move forward. We must be more determined, more fearless, and more devoted to our vision for our students, and for our union.

CONTENTS 3

Scholarship fund

Delegates at this year's WEA Rep Assembly overwhelmingly voted to create a new program to support aspiring educators of color.

4 Equity team

Arlington members put equity team into action.

6 2022 WEA Education Support Professional of the Year

Meet Rochester ESP's Pamela Johnson who colleagues call a fearless 'change agent.'

8 Bridging the gap

Where occupational therapy and mental health meet



Pamella Johnson

Building a more **INCLUSIVE** workforce

We know our students succeed when educators share their cultures and perspectives and now WEA members are using our union strength to build a more diverse educator workforce to serve our students. Delegates at this year's WEA Representative Assembly voted to create a \$1 per member per month special assessment, lasting 10 years, to fund a scholarship program for BIPOC aspiring educators. While governance and staff work out details of the new program, members will see the new rate on their fall 2022 dues.

According to proposal sponsors Justin Fox-Bailey (Snohomish EA), Jared King (Everett EA) and Pamela Sepúlveda Wilson (Monroe EA), the scholarship fund will build a more inclusive workforce and help more students see themselves and their experiences represented in our buildings.

"This is something we've been talking about for a really long time," Sepúlveda Wilson said. "One of the things that we talked about was the data on our profession and that educators that were not entering the profession. We really noticed that as the trend was going down, as educators were not entering the profession anymore, the trend for BIPOC educators was going down at an even more exponential rate."

Delegates discussed the proposal on the first day of the Representative Assembly. Proponents repeatedly said students need to see themselves. Nearly half of Washington's public-school students are people of color, but barely a fifth of the teaching workforce identifies as people of color. Studies have shown that students succeed when they see their community and experiences reflected in the front of the classroom. When educators of color succeed, students of color succeed.

Equity should start in education, said Fox-Bailey, Snohomish EA president. Educators of color should be supported, and students should feel like they belong.

"We are bringing our own resources to making the world more just, more fair, more equitable," he said. "This fund allows us to put our values into action."

"It's a systemic solution to a systemic issue that was created because of racism within the system," said Lake Washington EA member Rochelle Horner. "If we are truly wanting to create a world that is liberating for everyone, we have to start with education, and this is a way to do it."

WEA-Sammamish Council President Tani Lindquist called the proposal a "visionary idea" to address the shortage of people entering the field of education as well to support and ensure that student diversity is represented in the diversity of the staff.

"Anything we can do to reduce barriers to get people to join, become part of the education community is absolutely important, and to have more people enter the education community that reflect our students is also incredibly important to ensuring that we are creating the supportive, safe, nurturing learning environments that all our kids need," Lindquist said.

Leaders are working now on building the framework for the scholarship fund. Details are coming soon.

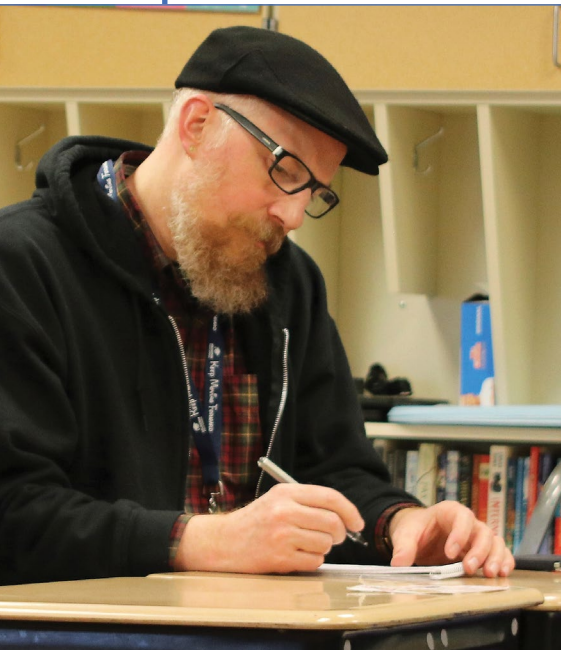
Elections results

WEA RA Delegates elected the following individuals for NEA State Director. They are

- | | |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Position 1: | Becca Ritchie (Sequim EA) |
| Position 2: | Jeb Binns (Highline EA) |
| Position 3: | Pamela Sepúlveda Wilson (Monroe EA) |

Leading for equity

Arlington members use equity team to make schools better and to give back



Arlington High teacher Jason Ford wanted a way to do more to promote equity in schools, so he asked others in his local association what they could do.

When people think of the power of their union, their first thoughts are often of the financial gains of being in a union. After all, it's true that union workers enjoy better wages and benefits than similarly qualified non-union workers.

For Arlington Education Association Equity Team members, being involved in their union is also a way they can make their schools better and give back — to their students, fellow educators and the community.

The equity team formed in 2020, and the timing was less than ideal according to its chair, Presidents Elementary fifth-grade teacher Denise Wilson. “The pandemic really put a crunch on us,” she says. “We had just started our team and then the pandemic hit.”

Still, the 20-plus member team has advocated for positive change on several issues in that time and its first monthly newsletter went out in January.

Wilson credits Arlington High teacher Jason Ford for getting the ball rolling.

“He is a huge advocate for all people,” Wilson says of Ford. “He had been doing work with marginalized people and noticed that we had people in our district that we weren't serving.”

She says, “Jason Ford went to (Arlington EA President) Jason Klein and said, ‘Can we leverage our union to do something about this?’ and Jason Klein said, ‘You know what? You want it, let's do it.’”

“It was something that I felt we needed,” Klein says.

Klein is in his 25th year of teaching at Arlington High and is himself an Arlington High School graduate. He has deep local roots as well: His grandfather is a 1943 Arlington High grad.

Though the town historically has not had a very diverse population, there's been a significant demographic shift in recent years.

“It's changing rapidly,” Ford says. “People are migrating and moving. I think there's 38 or 40 languages spoken in the district.”

According to the Arlington School District website, student ethnic makeup went from 80.5% white in 2011-12 to 74.5% white in 2018-19. Educators on the equity team want to ensure that these changes are opportunities for broader learning rather than points of conflict.

As recently as 2004, a local racist incident shook the community and even made the national news when a Black minister's family woke at 2 a.m. to find a cross burning in their front yard.

“That really hit home,” Klein says. “Their kids were in the school that I teach in. I think it's gotten a little bit better as we've gotten more inclusive and diverse, but it's still there.”

While the team looks forward to collaborating with district leadership on its initiatives, members don't plan to passively sit back and wait for things to happen.

“We want to use the newsletter as a vehicle to push things forward,” Wilson says.

Unlike a district-selected equity committee, this team is made up of union volunteers. They see advocating for equity as part of their overall role of advocating for students and fellow school staffers.

In addition to the newsletter, the team has pushed for equity clock hours and a districtwide equity plan, supported a request for a middle-school LGBTQ+ club, advocated for equity positions in every building and led book studies.

Another achievement that grew from team members' commitment to both their union and equity is new language in the collective bargaining agreement (CBA) between Arlington EA members and the district. Spelling out all parties' intent to work toward equity in a legally binding document helps ensure that good intentions don't simply get lost in the shuffle.

Moving forward, they'd also like to see the district do more to celebrate different heritage months, holidays and observances. "We want to make sure these acknowledgments aren't just going out to staff," Wilson says. "They should be on all our community-facing websites, all our communications in all our buildings."

"We also need training," Ford says. "We need high-quality professional development on equity."

Another need they see is for the district be more proactive in equity-based staff recruitment.

"When I bring up the hiring, they get a little defensive on that," Klein says. "You can't just say, 'Well, we posted it.' You've got to go out to these universities and make sure that these students know that we're looking to diversify our staff and we want to hire more people of color."

Wilson agrees: "I'm one of 2 teachers of color at my elementary school."

Since starting this work, team members have found that their colleagues come to them more often for advice on how to handle equity-related matters. They're encouraged by this willingness to learn and grow.

"Come and ask questions," Wilson says. "We're not here to judge you."

The team's rapid growth over the past couple of years has also been encouraging. "It's been great to see more members get involved and make more changes," Ford says.

Klein agrees, "This is one more way that our union is able to support doing what's right. It's something that's meaningful."

That has included educators who weren't interested in previous Arlington EA activities, Wilson says: "Two of our new members said, 'I've never really done anything union-related, but these issues need to be addressed and you guys are doing good work.'"



Top: Arlington EA Equity Team members attend a recent meeting.



Center: Arlington EA President Jason Klein, right, discusses a proposal.



Bottom: Arlington EA Equity Team chair Denise Wilson speaks to the group.

Inspired? Get involved in your area equity team

Locals and councils throughout the state have equity teams. Here are some things they work on:

- Eliminating institutional racism in the council, local or district.
- Recruiting and retaining educators of color.
- Providing professional development and best practices in cultural competency, diversity, equity and inclusion.
- Examining district/local policies to address acts of internal, individual, institutional and structural racism.
- Engaging members of color.
- Developing leaders of color for the local, council, state and NEA.

Taking
every mile
in stride



When she was in school, Pamella Johnson's track coach encouraged her to excel. Now she's paying it forward to her students.

Pamella Johnson: We can build a better world for our students and education support professionals

Rochester ESP's Johnson is 2022 WEA Education Support Professional of the Year

Though Pamella Johnson has one of the most important jobs at Rochester High School, her school-day job is just a small part of her incredible contribution to her students and to ESPs statewide. A dedicated social emotional and behavior interventionist, a supportive track coach and a tireless advocate for paraprofessionals, Johnson is WEA's 2022 Education Support Professional of the Year.

Education has long been in Johnson's family and five of her siblings are educators. She grew up knowing she wanted to be an educator and though she detoured for a few years into the corporate world, she returned to education more than 10 years ago and has worked at Rochester High since. For the last four years she has served as a social emotional and

'Our work is critical to all that goes on in schools, from custodians to office staff to food services to paraeducators, we make the school run. We're first to open and last to leave. And we love it.'

— Pamella Johnson



behavior interventionist, a role that has become critical for students during the pandemic recovery.

"I love my students," she says. "I love how authentic relationships make it possible for students and educators to come together to map a way to success."

Johnson works hard to ensure she's welcoming, visible and supportive to all students, but she stresses the importance of being among very few Black educators in her rural district. When students see her, they see what they could be in the future.

"I love what students bring to the table," Johnson says. "Teenagers are still growing up and looking to grown-ups to guide them to be members of society. We're there for them."



Johnson's work day takes her into classrooms and outdoors and everywhere in between. She meets regularly with colleagues to discuss strategies to help students who need a little extra support.

Johnson attributes her dedication to education and her drive to give back to her own track coach from eighth grade. Coach Hawkins, the only Black woman in her school district, took time to be intentional and authentic in connecting with student athletes.

"Coach Hawkins taught me what inequities were and fought for us girls to have the same resources the boy athletes had," Johnson reflects. "She gave us what we needed to survive and I'm proud to pass that torch on to my students."

Johnson's advocacy for students extends beyond the district, serving on the Board of Directors for NEA and WEA along with an official appointment to the Washington State Paraeducators Board. She has been instrumental in raising ESP needs in each of these organizations, stressing the urgency of getting respectful pay and appreciation for the important work of all ESPs. As a member of the Paraeducator Board, Johnson will help set policy around paraeducator training, certification and standards. The Board, created in 2017 as a result of successful WEA member advocacy, is currently reviewing the state's new standards for cultural competency, diversity, equity and inclusion (CCDEI) training.

"Now more than ever we need to attract more ESPs and stop ESPs from leaving the field and the



way to do that is by addressing livable wages," she says. "We need to support and appreciate ESPs for what we do and make the work rewarding."

During the conversation with *We2.0*, "Ms. J," as her students call her, responds to a shout-out from a boy in the hallway with a smile and a friendly good morning.

"Our work is critical to all that goes on in schools, from custodians to office staff to food services to paraeducators, we make the school run," Johnson shares. "We're first to open and last to leave. And we love it."



Johnson laces up her sneakers to get ready for track practice after school.

School OTs part of the healing equation



Laura Hamilton works with a student on fine-motor skills.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, students have exhibited increased distress, worry, fear, anger, depression and anxiety. These mental health challenges have led to short-tempers, distraction and inattention in school. As a result, educators are struggling in their practice, experiencing secondary trauma and focused on providing social-emotional supports for students before they can focus on academics. With their background in mental health, occupational therapists are important members of school support teams in meeting the social-emotional and mental health needs of students.

“Occupational therapy as a profession started in the mental health field, with the use of occupations for treatment for mental health patients,” Sheri Burrill, occupational therapist for Spokane Public Schools, explains. “Occupation is what occupies a person’s time. It’s not job or vocation, like what most people think. We are very adaptable and holistic. We look at the whole patient, not just one area.”

More than half of all youth seek mental health support at school due to limited access outside of school to clinical mental health treatment. An article in the *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* says educators who work daily with students provide the most evaluative

health services, while counselors and mental health workers provide only 2% of services in schools. Lack of mental health supports in high-poverty, low-resourced schools is an even bigger problem. The *Seattle Times* reports Washington state schools have only one school psychologist per 1,000 students and the state ranks 43rd in the nation for mental health supports.

Laura Hamilton, also an occupational therapist for Spokane schools, says that OTs wear many hats. While their focus is mainly on addressing fine motor skills and sensory processing, OTs also address students’ social-emotional growth and mental health needs.

“The goal when working with a student might be to write legibly, but the underlying objective is to help them with that skill by looking at the whole child, like their sensory needs,” Hamilton says. “Sensory processing impacts a student’s ability to self-regulate and calm.

“We use a developmental lens,” she says. “We pair what is expected and compare it with where the problems are and how to bridge that gap.”

Burrill says OTs have a unique lens.

“Kids with behavior issues get misdiagnosed all the time. Because of our training [in mental health supports], we look at different reasons for the behavior, such as developmental, sensory, trauma or emotional needs,” she says. “We can then provide recommendations. We have a broad perspective and are able to see what other team members may not be able to see. We do more than fix the problem, we dive into the cause.”

Hamilton recalls a recent experience with a first-grade student. The student had gotten into a fight that morning and was shut down, his hood up, refusing to participate in his class. His teacher didn’t feel he would be able to do his therapy that day with her.

“We have developed a really good relationship,” Hamilton explains. “I’ve seen him for a couple of years and I got down to his level and said, ‘I really miss you and want you to come.’ I focused on that emotional connection with him and got him to come to our session.”



Sheri Burrill demonstrates how she uses manipulatives with students.

Hamilton shares that the student's goal is to legibly print sight words.

"That was the farthest thing from what we were going to work on," she says. "We spent time together and I got out some fine motor toys that he could

play with. Having that time to decompress, pretty soon his hood came off, his sleeves were rolled up so he could dig into the putty and his shoulders dropped. When he was ready, only about 15 minutes later, I asked if he wanted to make a Mother's Day card. His mother is his key connection in life. The session was all about his social-emotional needs and connecting with an adult. It was what he needed at the time."

"We have the luxury of meeting students where they're at," she says. "We can ensure their social-emotional needs are met so that the learning can happen later, both with me and with the classroom teacher."

After that session, Hamilton recalls the teacher hugging her and thanking her for turning that student around so he could have a positive rest of the day.

Burrill calls this "the therapeutic use of self" and letting the child lead from where they are.

"We may be looking at handwriting with a student and fine motor skills, but we're also looking at interaction, we're looking at their physical development, at how this incorporates into their written language and how it will carry over into the classroom," she adds. "We're looking at their sensory

processing. We're also looking at their behavior and how we can better support that. We're always looking at their social-emotional well-being and we share those goal areas with our team members to address the needs of the whole child."

Hamilton credits the Spokane Education Association with helping OTs to better support students through lowering the number of students on their caseloads. "Over several bargains, SEA was able to reduce caseload caps down to 40 so we can provide more direct student services." With fewer students, occupational therapists can expand their scope of practice and offer a broader program of support. "It was really powerful working together as the union to bargain those lower caseloads."

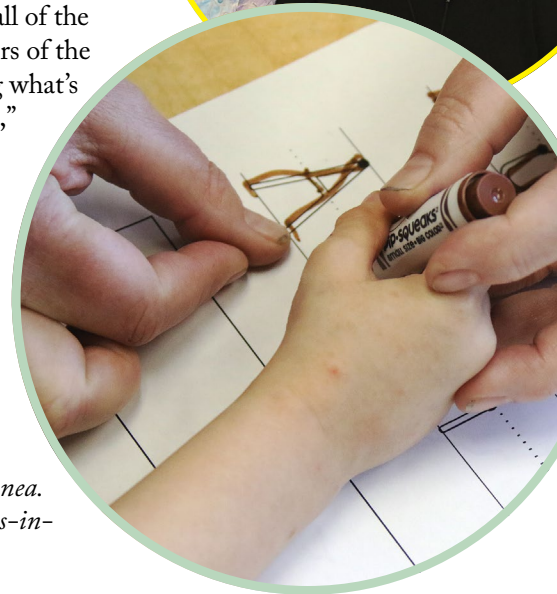
Spokane EA President Jeremy Shay says that it's always important to consider workload in every bargain.

"We are always striving to get language that impacts workload into the collective bargaining agreement," Shay says. "We were able to add language for our OTs, SLPs and a lot of our other ESA staff."

Preparing for the upcoming bargain, SEA has done more than 40 listening sessions across the bargaining units SEA serves. "We have to be willing to reach out to all of the members we serve, in all the corners of the association to ensure we're hearing what's out there and what members need," Shay adds.

This last legislative session, WEA lobbied to provide students with more student physical, mental and behavioral supports, successfully urging the Legislature to fund more mental health professionals for students. Learn more about that work at at <https://www.washingtonea.org/advocacy/ourvoice/post/increases-in-student-mental-health-supports>.

Laura Hamilton



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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.

HUMAN & CIVIL RIGHTS

AWARDS 2022

Every year WEA's Human and Civil Rights Committee recognizes outstanding achievements and contributions in the areas of community partners, cultural awareness, international peace and understanding, and student involvement.

These awards are open to individuals, organizations or groups whose efforts have made a difference to communities within Washington.

Congratulations to this year's winners and our gratitude for their investment in our students, schools and communities.

Student Involvement HCR Award: Shamerica Nakamura



"It's important to empower students. When you look at any movement, it is always the young people who are part of that movement. They are the future. They are the change," says Shamerica Nakamura, school community facilitation specialist at North Central High School in Spokane. "I think it's important to allow space in the school building to explore what that means

and how students see themselves in the community making that change."

As the student who did not have a positive experience when she was in school, Nakamura wants to be the person she needed.

"My voice was often silenced," Nakamura says. "I realized I want to be that adult that I needed in the building who believed in me and gave me opportunities to speak up and to show my talents and my gifts in the classroom."

It is this passion and dedication fueled by her own experiences that inspired her work to elevate student voice through SHADES, a multicultural club she started in 2017. Through SHADES students take an active role in their community. "I have been effective in ensuring students use their voices and understand how to navigate systems that typically would oppress them," says Nakamura.

During a conversation at a SHADES meeting students shared that they did not see themselves in their history classes and that their stories were seldom told. Nakamura encouraged the students to meet with the district advisory council about their concerns. At that meeting, she told them to speak their truth.

At first, when the students shared their concerns about the history curriculum, members of the advisory council tried to assure the students they were working on modifying and adapting the

curriculum. But the students pushed back. "What are you doing now?" they asked. "We often hear that you are doing stuff, but what are you actually doing? What action do we see?"

The pressure from the students led to the advisory council requesting a meeting with Nakamura in which she expressly told the council what the students needed. As a result, the district created a new U.S. history class, called American Perspectives. The course examines U.S. history through the lens of historically ignored and marginalized groups.

Nakamura is also the adviser for the PRIDE club at North Central and a lead trainer for culturally responsive classroom management in the district. She has led her training cohort in delivering modules 1-3 to every building in her district.

"Shamerica is tireless and passionate in her support of students, and for the policies and practices that will make equity explicit in Spokane Public Schools," says nominator April Eberhardt.

Nakamura recognizes what she represents for the students in her community. "Students seeing me doing this kind of work, helps them to see themselves in the future in these types of roles," she says.

"Knowing that people see the work that I am doing and that students are feeling empowered by this work, allows me to want to continue moving forward in pressing the importance of equity in schools and ensuring that all students' voices are heard and amplified and that they understand the importance of being civically engaged and that they are the change."

Elaine Akagi Cultural Awareness HCR Award: Ashley DeMoville

Dr. Ashley DeMoville, director of the drama program at Spokane Falls Community College, recognizes the power of theater to connect people.

"One of the most important things about theater is that it connects community members," DeMoville says. "As a community college, we exist to serve our community and the performing arts is a very visible connection point."



DeMerville understands the weight of her role as program director. “Because the performing arts are so visible, we have an opportunity and a responsibility to step into that role of making sure people have a pedestal and that there’s representation in a field that has historically been exclusive,” she explains.

In response to this history, one of the first committees DeMerville

established at SFCC was the Season Recommendation Committee, made up of students, faculty, alumni and community members. The committee selects plays for the upcoming season, with scripts that represent diverse communities and include works written by women, LGBTQ+ and BIPOC playwrights.

“As a woman in a management position in the theater, Ashley is acutely aware of the lack of representation in backstage and managerial roles in professional theater,” says nominator and colleague Conrado Zepeda-Pallares. “To counter this sad fact of American theater, Ashley has instituted hiring practices and recruitment efforts for hiring BIPOC designers and directors.”

Beyond play selection, DeMerville also ensures the plays are cast appropriately and brings in cultural practitioners and respected experts to teach students about the intricacies of the cultures represented within the plays. She describes one experience. “This last show that we did, *Alicia in Wonder Tierra*, was written by a Latina playwright, but we also made sure that it was appropriately cast. A cast of community members and students for whom the show had meaning and who fit into the show meaningfully.”

During and after the play, students approached DeMerville to express how meaningful the experience was to them. “Students in the cast who identified so completely with the themes of the show, with trying to find your own identity as someone who has a multicultural background and who feels perhaps distanced from one of the cultures more than the other,” she says.

The cultural adviser for the play, Spanish educator at SFCC, Conrado Zepeda-Pallares, helped teach the students about the cultural aspects of the play and the language. DeMerville explains the impact,

“Seeing the students light up and realize, ‘I’m just like this main character that’s learning about her heritage on different sides of the family.’” This is why DeMerville does this work.

DeMerville led a curriculum and instructional review to address equitable representation in the drama department. She also ensures shows are accessible through cross-department partnerships, like working with the sign-language interpreter program at SFCC to interpret for hard of hearing, and Deaf communities. According to Zepeda-Pallares, “Her goals are to both provide opportunities for cross-cultural and cross-curricular explorations and engagement, but also to give students diverse textual representations outside of the typical Euro-American canon. Ashley has actively engaged in and promoted color-conscious & age-conscious casting for all SFCC productions [and] engages in anti-racist casting policies where students discuss race and discuss how conscience casting deepens theatrical conversations.”

“The crux of everything is connecting to the community where you are and empowering the people in the community,” DeMerville says. “What I’m doing is what we should be doing, what all of us should be doing. What we should’ve been doing for decades. I’m running the program to value and honor the dignity of every student and every community member that comes in.”

Community Partners Award: Brandi Bispham



Race comes up every day in conversation in the Bispham household.

For Brandi Bispham, it’s part of her family’s life experience. Her husband is from Guyana and their sons identify as Black. She and her husband met during their work as part of the first Teach for America Corps in Los Angeles and taught through the Rodney King riots.

“We just eat, sleep, breathe it here,” says Bispham, whose entire family participates in elevating issues of equity and diversity in their own way. “In my home, somehow race enters the conversation every day.”

See HCR, Page 12



HCR from Page 11

But she knows it's not an easy or comfortable topic for everyone. Even so, the Bainbridge Island teacher says the time is ripe for holding conversations about bringing meaningful change to our schools and communities.

"We need to go forward and talk about this," says Bispham, a social studies teacher at Woodward Middle School. "We all have the white stories; we need to balance that with other stories. We need to focus on teaching truth, using multiple perspectives. We must open up and deepen the narrative. So many of the most important, compelling stories in history are the ones not being told."

At the end of her first year of teaching on Bainbridge Island, she and others at Woodward decided that they needed a school equity team to talk about race and look at their students through a lens of equity.

"We've got to be intentional," she says. "We've got to understand what we're teaching and why we're teaching."

In fall 2019, the Bainbridge School District created a District Improvement Plan and Bispham helped write the final draft. The school board adopted the plan, giving educators the backbone and policy to create lessons that embrace and demand different perspectives and teach truth.

Then COVID hit, schools went remote, and George Floyd was murdered. That was a breaking point, Bispham says, recalling feeling sick, panicked and helpless, especially as she and her husband prepared to send their son to college out of state.

"I went to old lady Facebook, made a video asking if there were people out there willing to talk about race with me," she recounts.

Today, there is a nationwide network of some 100 members, mostly women, that continue to meet online, hold book

discussions, and talk about what is happening in their private group. Teachers from California, Texas and as far as the East Coast share what is happening in their schools, whether it's curriculum or some other issue.

At Woodward, Bispham created the school's Ally Club for students to "be allies and for those who need allies."

Bispham is the middle school representative for the Multicultural Advisory Council, an advisory group to the School Board. She listens to members of the community and ensures their children are supported at school.

For the past four years, she has been a part of a small team to design and implement weekly, schoolwide seminar lessons for all seventh- and eighth-graders at her school. These lessons train students to get along with each other and be their best selves. They include video clips, interactive activities, goal setting and study skills.

Every year, she makes book recommendations for Woodward staff, and book discussions, says colleague Julee Longridge. She asks colleagues to do a self-assessment of biases and eases everyone into conversations. She brings guest speakers and films.

"I appreciate that Brandi is so genuine in her equity endeavors," Longridge writes in her nomination of Bispham for the award. "Even when no one is looking, Brandi continues this work."

As a white woman, Bispham is aware of her privilege and is uncomfortable receiving attention for equity work. She also credits the courageous conversations occurring in schools and the others in the community who are open and willing to do the work, too. She's quick to say that the work she has been doing came at the right time in the right place.

"We have lots of teachers doing great lessons and pushing themselves and others to create more units and lessons that hold up all students, not just the traditional white voices," Bispham says. "We also have community groups that are leading great work on Bainbridge Island."

"We have been really lucky to have a community of people in front, alongside and behind our efforts in antiracism, equity, diversity and inclusion."