



Washington School for the Deaf alumna is 2023 State Teacher of the Year

*Dana Miles says state honor is 'opportunity to educate people
about the deaf community and our language.'*



A season of new beginnings



Larry Delaney
WEA President

As I write this column, the weather tells me that it is still February; however, the calendar reminds me that spring is right around the corner. At my home, we have begun to see the first bits of new green growth in our garden – a reminder that even though we can't always see it in the dark of winter, growth and change is always occurring.

The same is true with WEA, and even though we can't always see it, change and growth is taking place. I'd like to highlight three WEA undertakings that give me much pride.

Nearly a year ago, WEA was approached by OSPI to gauge our interest in an ESSER grant to develop a first-of-its-kind teacher residency program in Washington. The WEA Board gave its approval and less than a year later WEA is on the verge of becoming the first educator union in the country to provide a certification pathway for both current and aspiring educators who already hold an undergraduate degree. If approved — and I'm very optimistic that it will be — this program will begin to address two issues that are very important to our members, students and communities: the lack of BIPOC certificated educators, and the severe shortage of special-education teachers.

Last spring, at our virtual WEA Representative Assembly, delegates adopted a WEA bylaws amendment that created a special assessment to be used for scholarships for BIPOC educators. I am thrilled about the work that has progressed on the scholarships and am optimistic that I will be able to share some good news and welcome some very special guests to our in-person WEA RA this April – which is a great segue to the last topic that I wish to highlight, WEA RA.

The last in-person WEA RA was in 2019, the same year when I was elected. I am now in my fourth year as WEA president and excited does not even begin to describe how I'm feeling about our upcoming IN-PERSON RA in Spokane on April 13-15. To all delegates – returning and new – I hope that you share in my enthusiasm and are looking forward to being an active participant in our union's democratic processes. There are a few changes to the submission deadlines, and I invite all delegates to check the RA page on our WEA website (<https://www.washingtonea.org/ra>) for more information.

Thank you all for what you do on a daily basis to make positive changes in our communities.

Together, we can do great things.

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Dana Miles encourages her students to share their perspectives and opinions in every conversation.



OFFICIAL NOTICE

Nominations open for WEA office

WEA is holding elections for WEA President, WEA Vice President and one NEA State Director this year. Nominations for these positions will close on the floor of the 2023 WEA Representative Assembly in Spokane. Guidelines and nomination forms as well as campaign and election regulations are on the WEA website at <https://wea.mobi/weaelections>. Questions? Please contact Eric Pickens, chair of the WEA Nominations and Elections Work Team, at eric.pickens@washingtonea.org.

Speaking out for students with disabilities

Jamillah Bomani teaches fourth grade and sees her students with disabilities struggle with the lack of supports every day. In order to meet students' Individualized Education Program (IEP) needs, her school was forced to make choices that no school should face.

Our state's paramount duty is to provide a quality public education to every student, regardless of disability.

Our state's paramount duty is to provide a quality public education to every student, regardless of disability. WEA members who work in PK-12 schools know well that the state has long failed to provide the resources necessary to support our students with disabilities. During the 2023 legislative session, WEA members across the state are coming together to ensure the state addresses the ongoing Special Education shortfall that leaves our students with disabilities behind.

"Let's take away the barriers to get students what they need," Bomani says. "These students are the future of our country and our communities. Why are we penny-pinching in this space?"

"We're having to lose specials," says Bomani, a Seattle EA member. "We don't even have music for my K-5 school. 'If the state could just fund Special Education, the money can go back into the schools to fund other things, instead of having to make cuts to cover the cost of Special Education.'"

What are the cap and multiplier?

The **multiplier** is how many times more than a general education student a district gets for each student who qualifies for Special Education services, an amount that is currently insufficient to provide the services most students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) need.

The cap limits the percentage of students in a district who can receive the multiplier-enhanced funding for Special Education, currently 13.5%. Over half of the districts in our state have more students with IEPs than the cap allows.

The basics aren't enough

Underfunding has ripple effects that impact the entire school community. Raz Nair is a Spokane high school paraeducator who is assigned full-time to support one student. While he's resourced to support his student academically, social supports are still lacking.

"The school supports my student quite a bit, but there are a lot more students who could benefit from one-on-one support," says Nair. "And students would benefit from more balanced attention about social skills and support for social integration."

Speaking out to support students with disabilities

WEA members are speaking with one united voice about the urgent need to fix Special Education funding. We're emailing legislators, meeting with them, testifying in hearings, and hand writing notes. Talk to your local union about how they're getting involved to get our students what they need.



A new look

Throughout its history, our association has grown and evolved, finding new ways to support our students, each other and our communities in the face of countless challenges. While our ties to tradition are strong, we know that staying current is critical to being effective — both as educators and advocates.

In January, the WEA Executive Board approved a new logo and accompanying variations designed to reflect our commitment to Red For Ed, our strength, our connectedness as a statewide community and our union pride. The new logo features the acronym WEA with two hands clasped in solidarity forming the "A" and our full name stacked beneath.

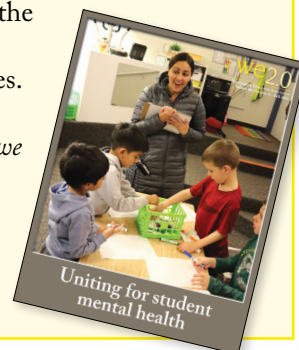
The logo will be rolled out over the coming months across our channels, councils and locals.

HOW ARE WE DOING?

We2.0, your association's all-member publication, showcases our members, advocacy and the public education trends we're watching. Published quarterly, we want to make sure we provide relevant tips and tools for your professional growth, info on the latest events, issues and trends in teaching and learning, and local and state association activities.

Please give us 30 seconds at <https://wea.mobi/we> or scan the QR code to let us know how we can best get information to you.

Thank you.





A voice in the hearing world

Dana Miles hopes that being the 2023 Washington State Teacher of the Year will help highlight the accessibility and inclusion needs of Deaf and Hard of Hearing students throughout the state

In Miles' classroom, desks are arranged in a semicircle to ensure that lines of sight can always be maintained. The layout allows for students and teachers to be able to see one another clearly in their communication using American Sign Language.

2023 Washington State Teacher of the Year Dana Miles wants her and her students' identities to be recognized, affirmed and celebrated. "How can we adjust our lenses from focusing on the deficiency of a student to a student's assets?" she asks.

Miles has taught for the last 11 years at the Washington School for the Deaf in Vancouver, a school she also attended. She teaches work experience and bilingual language arts.

"Our school is magic," she says. "The kids are able to thrive and develop confidence, which helps them to feel more included in the hearing world." Miles describes her school as an example of true accessibility, full inclusion and asset-based learning.

Students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing do not often have equitable access to education in the current system. Instructional materials and assessments are based on English, and many Deaf children do not have access to English-language instruction until they enter school.

When Deaf or Hard of Hearing students enter school at pre-school, many have not had formal

instruction in language, which impacts their acquisition. Also, many schools do not provide enough or consistent interpreters. Because of the lack of interpreters, Deaf students often do not have access to clubs or sports and find it difficult to make friends with their hearing peers.

'Deaf students need to feel their thoughts and opinions matter, and they need to be involved.'

– Dana Miles

"It is important for Deaf children to have access to education early on," Miles says. Full access for Deaf children means access to language instruction in American Sign Language and English language from birth, explains Miles. She is excited to share what she and her colleagues do at The Washington School for the Deaf. "It is an example of what 100% accessibility and inclusion can be," she says.

Miles' colleagues believe in her ability to use her new platform to make a lasting impact for the Deaf community. "Her tremendous humility and understanding of disenfranchised and disempowered people make it easy to connect with her," says Amy Blades, a counselor at the school. "Dana offers a unique perspective on disability and what empowerment looks like. Empowerment is sharing and fostering

growth in students being self-sufficient rather than being 'helped' by others." This sentiment is clear in Miles' message.

Miles believes that we all must work to see people with disabilities through an asset mindset, looking not at what they can't do, but what they can. She calls on educators to be authentic, approachable and affirming. She encourages educators to be professional but personable. "Share your stories and help students see what and how you learned. Instruction should come through stories," she says.

She adds that teachers should also be positive, supportive and affirming. "Deaf students need to feel their thoughts and opinions matter, and they need to be involved. Educators must be consistent advocates," she says.

Miles also calls on decision-makers to make vocational education accessible by redesigning training programs to include performance-based assessments, and to accommodate Deaf students' language needs. Driver's education also needs to be accessible, and interpreters should be required at every school by law. She also calls on legislators to pass LEAD-K legislation to ensure language equality and acquisition for Deaf kids.

Despite Miles' dedication and commitment to her students and to the Deaf community, she was surprised when her name was announced as the 2023 Washington State Teacher of the Year. As the first Deaf teacher of the year in Washington state, Miles was prepared to be lonely during the selection process.

Although she is naturally social within the Deaf community, social situations can be more difficult amongst her hearing peers. "Our cohort was so warm and welcoming. I was touched by everyone's efforts to overcome communication barriers," she says of her fellow regional teachers of the year.

As far as being named this year's honoree Miles says, "I'm not used to this kind of publicity and feel overwhelmed but am honored and excited to talk about the issues my students face."

Miles was born and raised in a family of educators. Her mother was a teacher, and other family members have been as well. So it makes sense that when asked what inspires her outside of school she says, "I eat, breathe and live teaching." She does enjoy reading books and being out in nature, but what really inspires her is figuring out the changes needed to help Deaf people succeed. "I work to know what works, what doesn't work and how we can change the system," she says.

Winter 2023



Top photo: Students Enrique Jose and Stanity Jorju, along with student teacher Maya Penn, go over recipe details with Miles during a cooking session. Below: Student Savannah Cruz tells a student how much his purchase is at the school's store, which gives students practical, real-life skills for life beyond the classroom.



Miles is passionate about providing students an opportunity to prepare for a variety of career options, including the nuts and bolts of soft skills, where to look for employment and how to navigate those conversations. She also feels strongly that education for those who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing should include discussions about their personal rights and how to handle situations of prejudice.

Schools have gone to the dogs...

... and cats and horses and llamas and bears

One of the best ways to get to know students is petting a dog together, according to Mount Baker Education Association (MBEA) member Holly Koon.

Koon's dog, Sadie, is part of the part of the Pawsitively Baker program that enables staffers to bring their animals to campus. Recently, Koon had a student whose family lost their home to a fire. The student was adamant that she didn't want to talk with counselors or teachers about it. But as the two of them stroked Sadie's soft fur, the student began to talk about the difficulties she and her family are facing.

"For me, the most powerful aspect is having the kids reveal aspects of themselves I would never see without those crouched-down-hands-in-fur interactions," she says.

"It's all about the relationship with kids," says Koon, who teaches biology at Mount Baker High in Deming. And she finds that Sadie helps make those relationships better.

Britta Martens agrees. Martens is a learning-support teacher and co-president of MBEA. She's at Mount Baker Junior High, which shares a campus with the high school.

"Reluctant learners are more willing to do work if they get to sit with the dog after they do work. Reluctant readers are more likely to read to the dog than to other humans," says Martens, whose dog, Hans, is in the program.

With such great results — not to mention all those canine cuddles — you might think there would be a dog around every corner, but it's not as easy as just clipping a leash to the family dog and heading to school. There are rigorous requirements.

"This is not a bring-your-dog-to-work program," Koon says. "This is a specific educational program to improve the mental health of students."

Martens notes that it's taken "a lot of time — a lot of trial and error — to make a solid program" over the past three years, and that there are staffers at all different phases on the path to bringing in their animals.

Someone interested in participating has to agree to completing the district training program followed by an evaluation through Pet Partners, a Bellevue-based nonprofit that helps make sure animal therapy teams are safe for everyone involved.

They evaluate teams — both the animal and the human handler together. Some are rated "not appropriate" and won't be eligible to serve. Others are rated "not ready" and need additional training

Sadie and a Mount Baker High student share a hug.



before they're approved. The third group — rated "predictable" — can be on campus for shorter stays and small-group environments. Pet Partners helps define what's approved for these animals and their human partners. The highest rating is "complex," which means a team can likely handle any environment on campus.

That's a good dog. A very good dog.

But while dogs are the main animals on the Mount Baker campus on a regular basis, a llama or two have been known to turn up for special occasions. The llamas belong to substitute teacher Niki Kuklenski, who sparked the idea for animals on campus when she brought her therapy dog to school. After seeing how students reacted, she and Mount Baker Junior High Principal Troy Wright got the program off the ground.

If you're looking for Wright, look for a crowd, according to Koon. Wright's dog Chappie is one of the dogs you'll see on campus — with students gathered all around.

In addition to the training and registration, the dogs' human pals need to show the district proof that they have \$1 million in personal liability insurance, in case anything goes wrong. While that sounds like a lot, many homeowners' and renters' policies already include that type of coverage. Koon said her policy allowed her to add the required additional personal liability coverage for a very reasonable sum.

With so much on educators' plates, why do Mount Baker staffers take on this extra work and expense?

"The results that it yields in the classroom is what makes it worth it," Martens says. "It's such a powerful tool to connect with kids."

Animals on the curriculum at Sehome High

Sehome High students in Bellingham also enjoy the animal-human connection. In fact, that's one of the topics they study

as part of a class called “Animal Studies and Outreach.” Other topics they study include animal intelligence, animal welfare and rights, wildlife and conservation.

The class, which counts as a semester-long elective toward graduation requirements, goes far beyond the theoretical: Guest speakers such as dog trainers, animal-shelter workers and law-enforcement K-9 dog handlers talk with the class about their careers working with animals and how students can prepare to do that in the future.

Several students have taken them up on the idea, according to Bellingham Education Association member Shannon Casey, who teaches the class.

“So often as an educator, we don’t see immediate results of what we do and that can be difficult,” she says. “One of the great things about this class is that students who have gone on to animal-related careers have gotten in touch with me to let me know.”

Among former students, she counts K-9 officers who work with dogs, a National Park Service ranger, veterinary assistants, a wildlife biologist and some who work in environmental careers. One current student hopes to be a wildlife photographer someday.

Over the course of the semester, students also engage in community-outreach projects, which includes projects such as a pet-food drive for an area animal shelter or a fundraiser for a local orca organization.

This ties back to the program’s roots: Back before it was a class, the animal program at Sehome was a volunteer opportunity for students to help as trainers for Brigadoon Service Dogs, which trains dogs for people with disabilities. For many years, Sehome students also did volunteer work for Whatcom Humane Society.

Now that it’s a class, students study the broader context of animal issues, learn how they can help animals, and start picking up skills that help them help animals.

Casey notes that one student did an awareness campaign about the plight of honeybees. The student made and sold pottery



Above left: Abraham Luna and Hans enjoy a moment together. Right: Mount Baker EA member Holly Koons and her dog, Sadie, and MBEA Co-President Britta Martens and her dog, Hans, work in teams to help their students.

online that included educational messages about honeybees and ended up earning several hundred dollars that she donated to a conservation organization. Who knows where she’ll use those online marketing and outreach skills in the future?

Students also flex their research and presentation skills to teach each other about animals. During the unit on animal intelligence this fall, students put together a PowerPoint presentation about their chosen animals, talked to their classmates about them in small groups and then led the groups in a quiz game.

In past years, students have gone to a nearby elementary school where they led the younger kids in interactive presentations about endangered species.

“Instead of me, the students have become the teachers, passing down their learning to younger generations,” Casey says.

Casey has also been encouraged that this outside-the-box approach to learning has helped engage students who might not have seen the relevance in some of their more traditional classes, by connecting school to a subject they care about.

While she’s happy to see her students stretch, grow and learn new skills, what Casey really hopes her students will learn is empathy.

“If they come away with a sense of compassion for other living beings, I consider it a success,” she says.

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Edmonds EA members' fast thinking, CPR training and AED help referee win another shot at life



From left, Mountlake Terrace High School nurse Shermin Davidson, athletic trainer Saboora Deen, and basketball coach Nalin Sood worked together to respond quickly when a referee collapsed in the middle of a game.

Teamwork is critical to any athletic program's success, but at Mountlake Terrace High School's Jan. 6 home Junior Varsity basketball game against Snohomish High, it was a matter of literal life and death.

As the game's first quarter was being played, athletic trainer and teacher Saboora Deen settled in. She has been at MLTHS since 2017.

"I had just taken out my laptop. Basketball games are usually not that bad for sports injuries, and I was going to get some other work done," she said.

Referee Brian Comfort was having a fairly routine basketball day as well, as the C game ended and the Junior Varsity game began.

"I felt a little lightheaded toward the end of the first game. I drank some water and it went away. I thought I was just a little woozy from not eating. About four minutes in, I was feeling lightheaded again and it went to the point where I collapsed," he said.

"At first, we thought, 'Oh, he tripped and fell,'" recalled MLTHS school nurse Shermin Davidson, who started at MLTHS this past fall. "Then he didn't get up."

That's when "about 20 people started saying my name all at once," Deen said.

Davidson wouldn't ordinarily be at school after hours but her son is on the junior varsity team, so she and her husband, who is a police officer, were in the stands. As soon as it was clear that something serious was happening, "he just grabbed my hand and said 'let's go,'" as they made their way toward the fallen man.

"It was just blessings upon blessings," that Davidson happened to be there, Deen said.

Both Davidson and Deen also credit basketball coach Nalin Sood for his role in managing the situation under the Emergency Action Plan, which is a document Deen works on with coaches to identify the people who will be responsible for roles in an emergency such as doing CPR, assisting with CPR, calling 911, crowd control and more.

Sood, who has taught at the high school for 36 years — spending 40 years there, if you count his days as a student — is one of the coaches who takes this planning very seriously, running a test "emergency" every year. He hopes that this will help other educators see that such drills are more than just an empty requirement.

"People don't realize how important it is until they go through it," said Sood, who is president of Edmonds Athletics and Activities Association within Edmonds Education Association.

Another critical element to their response is that the school has automated external defibrillator (AED) machines. Both the gym manager and a student ran to get one, so those providing aid had two.

Deen and a Snohomish junior varsity coach traded off providing CPR until aid cars took Comfort to the hospital.

Comfort is recovering well and was back to work part-time a few weeks later. He said he didn't have any of the typical heart-attack symptoms such as chest or arm pain.

He, his wife and their son went the school's Feb. 3 basketball game against Everett's Cascade High School to say hello and thank everyone who helped him that day.

"I'm a firm believer that their response is the key to me still being here," he said.

Sood said the thing he's proudest of is how staff and students used what they knew and came together to work as a team.

"That's the most important thing we do in our basketball program," he said.