



OKANOGAN COUNTY SCHOOL RETIREES' ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER, January 2026

Website: <http://wssra-units.org/okanogancounty>

OCSRA MEETINGS FOR 2026

Meeting Dates: February, March, May.

New Meeting Location: St. Anne's Episcopal Church, 639 W. Ridge Drive at Emery, Omak.

Lunch Available: No charge.

Wednesday, February 18: E-5, E-6 Coordinating Council Zoom Meeting.

Contact Tara at (360) 413-5496 or Tara@wssra.org for login information. Time: TBD

Tuesday, February 24, 11 am: Lunch and General Meeting. Voting on Grant Winners.

Tuesday, March 24, 11 am: Lunch and General Meeting. Election of officers.

Wednesday, April 8, 10 am: E-5, E-6 Coordinating Council Meeting. Palace Restaurant, Ellensburg.

Tuesday, May 26, 11 am: Lunch and General Meeting. Budget Proposal for 2026-2027.

June 8-June 10: WSSRA 79th Convention: Great Wolf Lodge, Grand Mound.

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

December Compilation: As of December 2, 2025, OCSRA had 334 members: 24 Cash Payers, 216 Retirees on pension payments, 2 in Honorary Status, and 92 Actives working in school systems. Total WSSRA membership: 16,855.

OCSRA Welcomes New Members: Brewster School District: Esmeralda Barboza and Anali Hernandez; Okanogan School District: Jeremy Clark; Omak School District: Carissa Crum, Nicole Pearce, and Amy Porter.

In Memoriam:

- Hazel Dezelle of Tonasket passed away on September 6, 2025, at the age of 91. Her 37-year teaching career began in Toutle Lake and continued with positions at Pateros and Brewster.
- Henry Hagen of Chewelah passed away on July 22, 2025. No other information was provided.

- Rudolph Peterson, Duvall, passed away on October 1, 2025. No other information was provided.
- Kurt Ramcke of Mount Vernon passed away. No other information was provided.

ATTENTION ALL SCHOOL EMPLOYEES

Whether you're retiring soon or just beginning your career, you need to know your pension plan's benefits and the steps to take to ensure a stable financial future. The Washington State School Retirees Association is sponsoring free **Pre-Retirement Webinars** in mid-March. Complete information will be sent to local schools by early March. For more details, contact Tara at WSSRA: 360-413-5496. Each webinar will be recorded and made available for viewing online at www.wssra.org.

Retirement information is also available on the **Department of Retirement Systems** website, drs.wa.gov. A reminder that you can retire at age 62 with full benefits if you have worked for 30 years or more and use the **2008 Early Retirement Factors** schedule (2008 ERF), but you must plan out your health care coverage until you reach Medicare age.

Free individual help is also available from **Financial Alternatives** in East Wenatchee through a partnership with the North Central Washington ESD. Phone: 509-663-7526 or email: www.finaltllc.com.

AMBA DISCOUNTS: PASSPORT MOBILE APP

WSSRA/OCSRA members are entitled to AMBA discounts, including the free use of the Passport Mobile app. This app provides various ways to save on dining, shopping, and traveling throughout the USA. Follow the instructions below to download the app on your phone or computer.

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SPREAD THE NEWS--WSSRA & OCSRA SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE

WSSRA has two types of scholarships available:

1. One scholarship is available for high school seniors pursuing a degree in education. Applications are **due by March 1**.
2. The other scholarship is for college students who will be student teaching or interning in an educational field, with applications **due by April 1**.

For additional information and applications, visit WSSRA's website www.wssra.org.

OCSRA \$2,000 college scholarship for an Okanogan County high school graduate who is at least a college junior working towards initial certification in a field of education and plans to work in public schools.

Applications are available at OCSRA's website: wssra-units.org/okanogancounty. **Deadline: May 1.** For more information, contact OCSRA Scholarship Chair, **Sibyl Wehmeyer** at sibylwehmeyer@yahoo.com.

OCSRA MONTHLY GUEST SPEAKERS



Dr. Ryan Christoph was the guest speaker at OCSRA's September meeting. He is the Executive Director of Career Technical Education (CTE), Alternative Learning School, and Indian Education at Omak High School. He discussed Omak's CTE/vocational program and his hopes of creating a Skill Center in Okanogan County.

T Lewis, from Omak, is an award-winning comic artist known for the "Over the Hedge" comic strip and its movie adaptation. He was the guest speaker at OCSRA's October meeting. He also worked on Mickey Mouse comic books at Disney Studios.



Lanita Pomeroy from Moses Lake attended OCSRA's October



meeting with her husband, Dale. She serves as our District 6 Representative to the WSSRA Board, beginning her first year of a three-year commitment as a Board Representative.

FEBRUARY OCSRA GUEST SPEAKER

May Riggan and her students will be the featured speakers for the February OCSTR monthly meeting. She is in her fourth year of teaching at Omak High School and is excited to have some students highlight the benefits of the Foods program. She is eager to showcase the program's offerings and provide opportunities for students to describe their classroom and lab experiences.

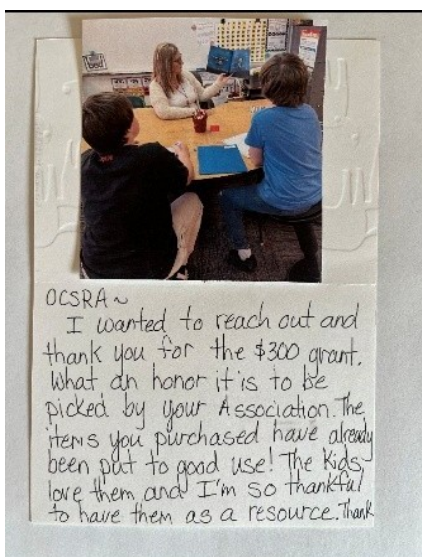
May has 38 years of experience in the automotive service industry, having held positions such as General Manager, Service Manager, and Fixed Operations Director. She brings real-world career skills into her teaching to bridge the gap between the classroom and the workforce, building practical skills, professional confidence, and direct pathways to future careers. We hope you can attend.

THANK YOU LETTERS

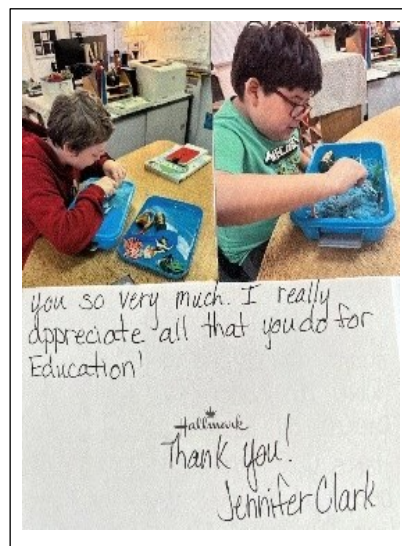
A Christmas greeting from our Edward Jones advisor, Jessica Harriman, was received.

FALL GRANT RECIPIENTS

In October, **OCSRA** awarded four grants of \$300.00 each to the following members.



OCSRA \$300 Fall Grant winner Jennifer Clark sent a thank-you note and photos of her students using the books and sensory items she purchased for her special education classes at Okanogan's V G Elementary School.



OCSRA Grant Chair Carol Payne (left) presented Okanogan Elementary Special Ed. teacher Jennifer Clark with a \$300 Grant for social-emotional picture books, chapter books for dyslexic students, and calming sensory items.



Evon LaGrou presented a \$300 OCSRA grant to Ellie Swartsel, K-8 teacher at Omak Highlands Campus. Ellie plans to purchase sets of graphic novels and library books.

Ellie Porter accepted a \$300 grant from OCSRA for her Mom, Amy Porter, from Grant Chair Carol Payne. Amy plans to purchase math and reading games for her title classes.



May Riggan, Omak HS FACSE Foods teacher, holds a \$300 OCSRA Grant check presented by OCSRA VP Evon LaGrou. On the right is Omak HS Principal David Kirk. May plans to purchase either a 3D Meat Cut poster or a classroom hydroponics garden.



2026 WSSRA LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

Washington State School Retirees'

- Restore an automatic ongoing cost-of-living adjustment for TRS 1 and PERS 1 retirees. Pass Substitute Senate Bill 5085.
- Protect the \$183 Medicare Eligible Healthcare Subsidy. Make sure funding remains in the budget to reduce costs for retirees who get health insurance through the Public Employees Benefits Board.
- Fully fund pensions. Maintain actuarially recommended employer contributions to make sure we have among the healthiest retirement systems in the country.
- Improve health and pension benefits for members of Plans 2 and 3.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

The Governor's Budget **DID NOT** propose a COLA for TRS 1 and PERS 1 retirees in 2026. Also, Emmett (WSSRA'S Legislative Coordinator) informed the WSSRA Legislative Committee that Senate Democrats will be working with House Democrats on a version of HB 2034, which ends LEOFF 1 to be replaced with the Restated Law Enforcement Officers' and Firefighters' Retirement System (Restated LEOFF).

Other key factors of HB 2034 include:

- Using excess billions of LEOFF 1 funding to fund Restated LEOFF at 120 percent.
- Immediately vests all remaining LEOFF 1.
- Allows active employees of LEOFF 1 to retire—**with a \$25,000 bonus.**
- Transfer all remaining assets to the Pension Stabilization Account, from which it can then be transferred to the State General Fund for use by legislators.

FYI, legal advice to the SCPP stated SSB 5085 (Plans 1 COLA) was preferable to HB 2034. **As a result of this shift by legislators, WSSRA lobbying efforts will shift to supporting HB 1474, another one-time capped COLA for TRS 1 and PERS 1.** Since it has a cost, the chance for success is questionable.

WSSRA will be working to protect the \$183 Medicare Eligible Healthcare Subsidy, which benefits all Medicare-eligible retirees who get health insurance through the Health Care

Authority (HCA)/Public Employees Benefit Board (PEBB). This was included in the Governor's budget. (FYI--The legislature reduced it to \$150 in 2011 for seven years.)

As always, WSSRA will be working to maintain/improve health and pension benefits for members of Plans 2 & 3.

The 2026 legislative session started today, Monday, January 12, and lasts 60 days, scheduled to end on March 12. The chief Senate budget writer and Governor Ferguson set the tone by making it known that **legislators should not ask for any new spending**. However, new taxes and increases on existing taxes have already been suggested.

You are urged to take a little time to explore <https://leg.wa.gov/>, where Contact information for legislators can be found under the "Legislators" tab. More information on bills can be found under the "Bills and Initiatives" tab. Information on committee meetings/times can be found under the "Committees" tab, as well as how to sign up to testify or just leave a comment. Any and all things legislative can be found on this site, though you may have to explore a little to find what you want.

Jim Davison, Legislative Chair
WWCSRA

OKANOGAN COUNTY SCHOOL RETIREES' ASSOCIATION GRANT FORM

It is now time for **OCSRA** to award four more grants. We hope many will consider applying. Use the application in this newsletter or on our website. The applications are due February 15.

GRANTS AVAILABLE FOR OCSRA MEMBERS

ATTENTION: Members of Okanogan County School Retirees' Association (OCSRA) currently employed or volunteering in one of the Association's school districts—

- OCSRA offers members eight \$300 grants this school year. The grant must be used in a single school year to fund projects and materials (excluding field trips) not covered by other financial means. The grants must be used in an OCSRA School District and the application must have the signature of the *building principal*. This year four grants will be awarded in the fall with an October 15 deadline and four grants will be awarded in the spring with a February 15 deadline.

To apply, complete the form below and return it to OCSRA Grants Chair, Carol Payne, 13 Kermel Road, Omak, WA 98841 by October 15, 2025 to apply for the fall grant or by February 15, 2026 to apply for the spring grant.

Applicant's Name: _____

School District's Mailing Address: _____

Applicant's Email Address: _____

Applicant's Home Address: _____

Grade Level/Area of Instruction: _____

Number of Students to Benefit: _____

Estimated Cost: _____

Will the Grant Provide Resources for More Than One School Year? ____ If Yes, How? _____

How Will the Grant Be Used? Attach Any Helpful Pictures/Supporting Documentation for the Grants Committee. Please Use the Back Side for Further Explanation for the need.

Signature of Applicant: _____ Dated: _____

Signature of Building Principal: _____ Dated: _____

Office Telephone Number of Building Principal: _____

