



# Bits & Pieces

IN-PERSON  
LUNCHEONS ARE  
CANCELLED  
UNTIL  
FURTHER NOTICE!

[www.wssra-units.org/thurstoncounty/](http://www.wssra-units.org/thurstoncounty/)

January 2021

Unit 28 of the Washington State School Retirees' Association  
*Serving retired and active school employees and our community.*

## IT'S TIME FOR HOPE!

It's 2021. . . finally. Happy New Year—Hopeful New Year! This is a year full of HOPE. Hope for a quick delivery of a vaccine. Hope for a return to some form of normalcy. Hope for hugs, and family gatherings, and for our luncheons. Hope for the future. In the meantime . . .

We are going to get together! Please read **Karen Keller's** article about our January program on Zoom. [See column 2 on this page.] Additional programs will be listed on our website and on our Facebook page.

**Ann Chenhall** is leading our efforts to contact legislators. It is critical that they hear our needs: protecting our medical benefits, maintaining our pensions, protecting our active members from COVID-19 by possibly lowering the retirement age, reopening the PEBB enrollment window for retirees who have not been able to join, and reestablishing a permanent Plan 1 COLA.

Our Pre-Retirement Webinar is happening via Zoom on February 18, 5:00–7:30 p.m. If you know of someone who is retiring within the next five years, let them know about this important resource! [See the article on page 3.]

Membership. Last year was a bumper year for membership. Our unit went over 1,000 members. We visited schools, told them about our organization, and signed them up. This year, of course, that's been impossible. So it is up to us! Who do we know who should be a member? Who is interested in an organization that works for them? Who would be interested in becoming involved in community service, legislative action, fun luncheons (soon, we hope)? Tell them about our organization! Send them to our website where they can easily join!

Be safe! Happy Hopeful New Year!

*Pat Slosson, TCSRA President*

## LUNCHEONS ARE BACK! (AFTER A FASHION)

On January 15—our regular meeting day—we will have a Zoom presentation from **Peter Diedrick**, WSSRA Legislative Coordinator, to fill us in on the upcoming session. Work must be done to keep our pensions fully funded and to protect our Medicare health insurance benefit. We also need to support our employed members with legislation that honors their years of service.

**You do not need a computer to participate.** You may call in on your phone to listen or sign in on your computer. The meeting room will open at 9:50 a.m., and Peter's presentation will begin at **10:00 a.m.** To call in on your phone, dial the following number and then follow the prompts to enter the meeting ID and the passcode:

Dial: 1-253-215-8782  
Meeting ID: 993 1124 5683  
Passcode: 084733

Zoom computer links will be available on the Program page of our website, on our Facebook page, and in a reminder email notice sent out from ZiNita Carrell. I hope to "see" you this month. You can expect another Zoom event on our regular meeting day in February.

**Peter Diedrick** earned an Associate of Arts and Sciences degree from Everett Community College, a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Western Washington University, and a Master of Public Administration from Seattle University. WSSRA employed Peter in 2011, and we are fortunate to have his wealth of experience working for us. Prior to joining the WSSRA staff, he was an Economic Data Analyst for the Washington Employment Security Department, a legislative aide for the Washington State Senate, and a graduate intern in the United States Department of State. Peter and his wife Danielle are the proud parents of two boys, Charlie and Freddy.



*Karen Keller, Program Chair*

## LEGISLATIVE REPORT



The outlook for the 2021 Washington State Legislative Session continues to improve. What began as a \$9 billion budget crisis has become a \$1 billion budget crisis. Bad, but substantially less bad. The dramatic shifts were caused by the coronavirus shutdowns, by unprecedented federal fiscal stimulus, and by Washington's businesses reopening faster than the state economist expected.

Other economic assumptions currently in place are a slow vaccine rollout, no 737 MAX re-certification in this fiscal year, and no additional coronavirus business shutdowns. The February forecast will see more big shifts.

WSSRA's 2021 request legislation is developing at a good pace. Legislation to allow for Plan 2/3 retirement at age 60 during the coronavirus pandemic and a bill to open an enrollment period for retirees locked out of PEBB retiree insurance are both set to be filed with the legislature and will receive bill numbers soon. Representative Harris (R-Vancouver) will sponsor the early retirement legislation; Representative Dolan (D-Olympia) will sponsor the open enrollment legislation.

The WSSRA political team is still concerned about potential benefit cuts. There is a budget shortfall, and legislators will need to balance the budget, one way or another. There is no doubt WSSRA will ask retirees to call on their representatives at some point during the legislative session.

Do you know who your representatives are? If not, you can call the legislative hotline at 1-800-562-6000, look it up at <https://app.leg.wa.gov/DistrictFinder/>, or find out on the TCSRA website.

*Peter Diedrick, WSSRA Legislative Director*

indicates that even minimally trained volunteers can help fill in the gaps.

Some well-off parents are hiring professional tutors, but this solution is prohibitively expensive for most. If a relatively small number of comparatively advantaged students receive supplemental learning, while millions of other families struggle to access virtual learning and/or get their children to part-time school, the already significant learning gap between rich and poor could grow even larger.

But what if the benefits of individual and small group instruction could be offered to kids who need it the most? In a recent paper that examines dozens of experimental studies of the effects of individual and small group tutoring, educators have found that even minimally trained personnel can have transformative academic impacts. It has been suggested that para-professionals or college students assist in tutoring students who have fallen behind, but school districts are facing massive financial shortfalls, so asking them to hire thousands of new employees just isn't realistic.

One possible solution that has recently gained attention is the idea of a national tutoring corps, funded by the federal government and drawing from the ranks of college students, the unemployed, retired teachers, and volunteers. Of course, this would require strong leadership, program design, and training. The logistics of setting up a program like this on a national scale would be massively complicated. But we all know that so many students have fallen behind academically during this pandemic and that something major has to be done to help them catch up. Perhaps our new Secretary of Education will take on this challenge. It could be called the **National Tutoring Corps (NTC)**!

*ZiNita Carrell, Education Committee Co-chair*



## COVID-19 LEARNING LOSS: CAN TUTORS HELP?



Students are coping with off-again, on-again online and in-person learning challenges. Thousands of students are not even attending school at all. They are "lost" because COVID-19 has forced their families into financial hardships, which are affecting living conditions. New research

### SAVE PAPER WITH EMAIL ONLY!

If you would prefer to receive only emailed copies of *Bits & Pieces* rather than paper ones in the mail, please send your request to **Sharon Dennis** at [bitsandpieces-editor@hotmail.com](mailto:bitsandpieces-editor@hotmail.com).

All issues will be sent in PDF format from Tara at the WSSRA office via Constant Contact, a secure emailing service.



Each month we will randomly draw the name of one of our “active” (not-yet-retired) members, who will receive a Starbucks gift card in the mail.



This month’s winner is:

**Grace Bigelow**

**Tumwater School District**



Check this box each month to see if YOU are the lucky member.

## **BOOSTING YOUR IMMUNE SYSTEM**

Winter—the season of colds, flu, viruses, and this year COVID-19—is upon us. Our immune systems help us fight these infections. As you probably know, our immune systems begin to weaken as we age, particularly after age 65. Leonard Calabrese, D.O., a clinical immunologist, has said that inflammation and infections weaken the immune system.

Some signs of a weakened immune system are frequent colds, high stress levels, stomach issues, slow-healing wounds, frequent infections, and feeling tired all the time. Smoking, excessive alcohol drinking, too much sun exposure, too much exposure to carcinogens—such as when cooking with charcoal a lot—wreak havoc on immune systems.

Luckily, there are ways to strengthen your immune system:

**SLEEP:** Get plenty of it, 7-8 hours each night. Sleep restores our bodies and releases infection fighting molecules. During COVID-19, many people have reported having sleep problems such as insomnia, difficulty staying asleep, and restless sleep. Correcting your sleep issues is very important for your immune system.

**HEALTHY EATING:** Eat more fruits and vegetables and minimize sugar, salt, and processed foods. Some foods that boost the immune system are citrus fruits, red bell peppers, broccoli, garlic, ginger, spinach, yogurt, and almonds.

**EXERCISE:** Try to get 150-300 minutes each week. This can include walking, running, biking, and swimming. If you can’t get outside, do some indoor activities that raise your heart rate.

**STRESS:** Minimize stress with exercise, meditation, yoga, deep breathing, prayer, or any activity that

helps you relax. Stress suppresses your immune system.

**HYDRATION:** Drink plenty of water. It supports the immune system. Lymph, a fluid in the circulatory system that carries important infection fighting cells around the body, is mostly made up of water.

**COVID-19 SAFETY PRECAUTIONS:** **Mask up** and **wash your hands** frequently. Avoid crowds and/or keep your distance, especially from people who are sick. Cover coughs and sneezes in an elbow or tissue. Those germs can travel 6-8 feet.

**VACCINES:** Have yours up to date. This includes flu, shingles, pneumonia, and tetanus as well as the new COVID-19 vaccine when it is available.

*Gail Feagins, Health Committee Chair*



## **BEWARE OF VACCINE SCAMS**

Now that the COVID-19 vaccines are rolling out, beware of scammers trying to get your personal information or money under pretense of obtaining the vaccine. These include asking you to verify Medicare or Social Security numbers or to pay a fee to jump the line and get the vaccine sooner. Also dismiss online offers to buy the vaccine.

*Gail Feagins, Health Committee Chair*

### **PRE-RETIREMENT WEBINAR**

**Thursday February 18, 2021**

**5:00-7:30 PM**

**Certificated and classified employees:** If you are within 1–5 years of retirement, you will want to attend this webinar presentation to learn about your Plan 2 or Plan 3 pension, health insurance options, Social Security, Medicare, and VEBA (your sick leave buyout).

Presenters include: Washington State Retirement Systems, Social Security, VEBA, and the State Health Care Authority.

**To Register, email [tara@wssra.org](mailto:tara@wssra.org)**

Agenda with zoom instructions will be sent out before the event.

**Questions:** Email or phone Tara at 360-413-5496

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**ALL MINI-GRANT APPLICATIONS  
ARE DUE SOON!**

The application forms for all mini-grants are available at [www.wssra-units.org/thurstoncounty/](http://www.wssra-units.org/thurstoncounty/) and can be submitted online or printed and mailed. Your application must be submitted or postmarked no later than **January 8, 2021**. Grants will be awarded at the beginning of the second semester.

**COMMUNITY SERVICE**



If you are cleaning closets and cupboards, which many folks are doing judging by the long lines at the Goodwill, stop to consider that blankets, sheets, towels, and warm clothing—coats, scarves, hats, and gloves—would be greatly appreciated at a local homeless shelter or charity such as the Union Gospel Mission. Likewise, books, puzzles, games, and craft supplies would be most welcome at a nursing home. (Before delivering anything to a nursing home, however, you should phone to make certain that donations are being accepted at this time.)

There are many other local charities that also need help like never before. Just google "Olympia local charities" and you will be amazed at their number and variety. The Interfaith Works group is requesting socks for the homeless. You say, "Oh really?" And I say, "Yep, maybe we should add sock donation to our mission statement."

For TCSRA's collective donations, please keep saving **socks** for the Little Red Schoolhouse and

**toiletries** for The Other Bank. We will plan another drop-off event for later in the spring, if we're still not able to have in-person luncheons by then.

*Sally Jones, Community Service Chair*

**MARK YOUR CALENDAR!**

You'll not want to miss our upcoming Zoom events. All programs will begin at 10:00 a.m., and complete information will be published in *Bits & Pieces*.

- **JANUARY 15:** See page 1, second column.
- **FEBRUARY 19:** *Twenty Books in Twenty Minutes*, **Carolyn Peterson**, assistant program manager for Library Development at the Washington State Library.
- **MARCH 19:** *History of the American Flag*, **Art Dolan**.

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