

Bits & Pieces

IN-PERSON
LUNCHEONS ARE
CANCELLED
UNTIL
FURTHER NOTICE!

www.wssra-units.org/thurstoncounty/

February 2021

Unit 28 of the Washington State School Retirees' Association

Serving retired and active school employees and our community.

WE HAVE SCHOLARSHIPS!

"Grandma, why did you become a teacher?" What a wonderful opening to a discussion that we have had quite often in our household. We call education our "family business." Grandparents, sisters, sons, daughters, nieces, nephews . . . we have had so many family members enter the profession. We hope our conversations encourage our grandchildren to consider it as well.

Part of our discussion is, of course, the cost of education. It is expensive, and as we get down to the nuts and bolts of financing, we invariably talk about scholarships as part of the equation.

Did you know that WSSRA has scholarships available for students who plan to pursue careers in education, as a teacher, a counselor, a speech or occupational therapist, or a psychologist?

High School seniors with a GPA minimum of 3.0 are invited to apply for **WSSR Foundation Scholarships**. These are one-time awards of \$2,500. Additionally, **Robert J. Handy Scholarships** award \$900 per year, renewable for up to four years. These scholarships are available state-wide and divided among the WSSRA districts. **TCSRA** also awards a \$1,000 scholarship for a student in our county. All are selected from those applicants who submit the WSSR Foundation form.

Seniors planning to attend WSU and go into agricultural education can apply for a **Gene Forrester Memorial Scholarship**, a \$2,000 one-time award.

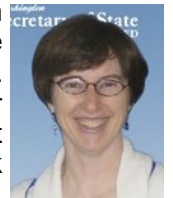
High School counselors have information on all of these scholarships. The applications are also available at www.wssra.org under the Foundation tab. Applications are due by **March 1, 2021**. Check out the website, too, for information on the \$1,000 **Neil D. Prescott Student Teaching/Internship Scholarship** for those further down the road toward a teaching career.

Granddaughter, grandson, niece, nephew, son, daughter interested in a career in education? Let them know about WSSRA's scholarships!

Pat Slosson, TCSRA President

TWENTY BOOKS IN TWENTY MINUTES

Our February 19 Zoom "luncheon" will feature **Carolyn Petersen**, assistant program manager for Library Development at the Washington State Library in Tumwater. Carolyn will share at least ten of her favorite winter reads. I don't know about you, but I'm always ready for book suggestions.



Although Carolyn was born in Yakima, her parents moved to California when she was a toddler. After graduating from high school in Sacramento, she returned to Washington State to attend Pacific Lutheran University where she double majored in English and history. She then went immediately into the Master of Library Science program at the University of Washington.

Carolyn's favorite part of being a librarian is connecting individuals to materials they would enjoy reading. She has been doing this in the South Puget Sound area for 20+ years, where she concentrates her efforts on helping rural and tribal libraries become better able to serve their communities. Library board training and strategic planning efforts are a key part of what she does.

Carolyn's interests include gardening, cooking, traveling, and entertaining. As an amateur musician she is a member of the bell and adult choirs at her church, where she occasionally accompanies the choirs on her flute.

The Zoom meeting room will open at 9:50 a.m. and Carolyn will be introduced at 10:00. **Remember you don't need a computer to participate.** You can call in on your phone and listen to her presentation. 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: 975 1399 6778
Passcode: 817218

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.

Karen Keller, Program 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
or call 360-413-5496, ext 111**

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



LEGISLATIVE REPORT



The 2021 Washington State Legislative Session has officially started. Opening ceremonies were held in-person, but legislators' first act was to change operating rules so they could conduct the remainder of the session remotely. This is scheduled to be a longer 105-day session and should adjourn on or before Sunday, April 25. Due to the limited capacity that comes from working at home, Democratic leaders have asked members to limit the amount of legislation. Priority areas will be public health and COVID-19, economic recovery, equity, police reform, and the budget. So far, calls for reducing the number of bills have gone unheeded.

With the public banned from meeting rooms, there is a new protocol for testifying on bills. The good news is that you can do it from your living room! Sign up to testify via live or written testimony at www.leg.wa.gov. When it is your turn to testify, the committee chair will let you into the Zoom committee as a participant. The WSSRA office staff can help if you want to testify on something.

WSSRA's priorities are moving along. The WSSRA political team has been meeting with legislators to ensure there are no skipped pension payments or reductions to medical benefits. Our bills have been formally sponsored and given bill numbers. HB 1032 reduces early retirement penalties for school employees during the COVID-19 crisis. HB 1040 creates an open enrollment window for retirees to re-

enter the PEBB insurance programs. Both bills have been sent to the House Appropriations Committee.

This is the beginning of a four-month political marathon. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact our team by calling 360-413-5496 or emailing peter@wssra.org.

Peter Diedrick, WSSRA Legislative Director



CHANGES ARE COMING TO THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Part 1

Meet the nominee for our new U.S. Secretary of Education; the contrast with the prior occupant is stark.

Dr. Miguel Cardona, whose family is from Puerto Rico, grew up in a housing project in Meriden, Connecticut, entered kindergarten unable to speak English, and went through the city's public schools—unlike Ms. DeVos, a billionaire champion of private schools that she and her children attended. While DeVos was never a teacher, Cardona began his career as a fourth-grade teacher in 1998. At age 28, he had become the youngest principal in Connecticut before working his way up to assistant superintendent. Eight years ago, he was named that state's principal of the year and served as co-chairman of the Legislative Achievement Gap Task Force.



Cardona's goals insist that the federal government's role in education is to improve access and opportunity for every student, to defend our students' civil rights, and to focus on the success of all students. Closing the achievement gap is a top priority; he supports making improvements "inside the schoolhouse" and "outside the schoolhouse" by addressing "housing insecurity, hunger, and economic instability." He seeks to provide whole-student support.

He wants to erase the 'digital divide' that became clear during our pandemic. With his leadership, Connecticut was, in his words, "the first state in the country to provide its public school students with universal access to learning devices," including "a laptop and access to high-speed internet so they can log in to school remotely during the pandemic."

During his tenure as Commissioner of Education, Cardona pushed for Connecticut to become the first state in the nation requiring more culturally diverse

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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:

Jaedyn Harlan

Yelm Community Schools



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

COVID-19 VACCINATIONS

What You Should Know

According to the U.S. Census, there are about 7.6 million residents in Washington state to vaccinate against COVID-19. The CDC has made recommendations regarding the distribution of the vaccine, but the states are free to set their own priorities. Washington state expects to vaccinate those in the following phases:

1A-1 and 1A-2: (January) Those working in health care facilities, and seniors living in congregate setting.

1B-1 (February) Those 65 and over and those 50 and over living in multigenerational households.

1B-2 (Before the end of February) Certain high-risk critical workers over 50, such as K-12 teachers, grocery workers, law enforcement, and others.

1B-3 (March) Those over 16 with at least two health conditions that the CDC says can put you at serious risk from COVID-19.

1B-4 (April) High- risk workers under 50 listed in 1B-2.

The Washington State Department of Health has launched a Phase Finder tool, which you will find at findyourphasewa.org. You will answer a series of questions, be told if you are eligible to receive the vaccine, and get help scheduling an appointment. If you are not yet eligible, you can submit your email or cell number for a text message to be notified when you are eligible. Some health care providers have been notifying their participants about scheduling, and Kaiser is now making appointments for their members in the 1B-1 phase. You can also access the web site www.safeway.com/covid-19 which sends out alerts.

The two vaccines in circulation now are Pfizer and Moderna. Both vaccines have two doses. The Pfizer vaccine doses are given 21 days apart, and the Moderna 28 days apart. Both vaccines have been found to be about 95% effective 7–14 days after the second dose. They are also believed to be effective against the newer, more contagious strain. They use mRNA vaccine technology, which uses messenger RNA, a genetic material that our cells read, to make proteins that trigger an immune response in our

bodies. This is different from other vaccines that use dead or weakened germs or viruses. Other vaccines in various stages are Johnson & Johnson—a one dose vaccine—expecting to apply for approval in February; Novavak in Phase 3 trials; and Astra-Zeneca. These do not use the mRNA technology.

According to the Department of Health there are 189 organizations in this state that have enrolled as COVID-19 vaccine providers. Retailers such as Walmart, Costco, Rite Aid, Kroger, and Safeway/Albertsons have signed up with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for future vaccine distribution.

The vaccine will be free. However, depending on where you get it, you may be charged for an office call. Will you be able to choose which vaccine to take? Probably not. You will have to take what is available at the time. Even if you’ve had COVID-19, you should get the vaccine, as the length of the immunity from the disease is unknown.

Some of the side effects observed so far are muscle pain, fevers, fatigue, and headaches. Some people with a history of severe allergies have had serious reactions but recovered. After receiving the vaccine, you will be asked to stay for a 15-minute observation period. The vaccine will not change your DNA, install a chip so the government can track you, or give you COVID-19. Beware of scams with offers to buy the vaccine, pay to be on a list, or to move up your place in line. Do not give out personal information such as Social Security numbers.

After being vaccinated, it will still be necessary to wear masks and maintain social distance for a number of months until enough people have been vaccinated to achieve herd immunity. You can send questions to the Washington State Department of Health by emailing covid.vaccine@doh.wa.gov.

Gail Feagins, Health Committee Chair



EDUCATION (Continued from page 2.)

courses by requiring all high schools to offer courses on African-American, Black, Puerto Rican, and Latino studies. He also announced programs to entice more students of color to become teachers and to get Connecticut college students already planning a teaching career into the classroom quicker.

Next month: Dr. Miguel Cardona on charter schools and so much more.

Gery Gerst, Education Committee Co-chair

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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

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

- **FEBRUARY 19:** See page 1, second column.
- **MARCH 19:** History of the American Flag, Art Dolan.

COMMUNITY SERVICE



When I agreed to be the community service chairperson, I decided that I wanted to emphasize giving of our time for worthy causes as opposed to asking members to give monetary donations again and again. We are already encouraged to give to the Food Bank, the Salvation Army, the Little Red Schoolhouse, the WSSR Foundation, and the WSSR-PAC.

However, these days with being faced with COVID for so many months, it is not sensible to plan a volunteer opportunity in which we give of our time by DOING something together. Consequently, I have come to believe that NOT DOING our usual activities is a valid form of community service.

Consistently following the CDC and state guidelines and restrictions is a sacrifice we can all make to protect our community as well as ourselves.

Every activity involving people outside of our homes poses the risk of contracting and spreading the virus. What we can do to promote the recovery and

health of our community is to continue not eating out, not visiting with friends in person, not cruising the mall, and not participating in group activities.

In a rather oxymoronic conclusion, it seems that what we CAN DO by way of community service is best expressed by what we choose NOT TO DO.

Sally Jones, Community Service Chair

In Memoriam

We note the passing of **Linda Azzarella-Moore** and **Gene Forrester**. We offer sincere condolences to their families and friends.

***BITS & PIECES**, the newsletter of the Thurston County School Retirees' Association, is published nine times a year, September through May, as a membership service. Editor: Sharon Dennis, 360-438-5351. **Information for the March 2021 issue is due by February 11.** Please email copy to bitsandpieces-editor@hotmail.com.*