



Bits & Pieces

www.wssra-units.org/thurstoncounty/

October 2022

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

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

In reviewing the past few weeks, I noted the power of relationships among members doing the work of TCSRA. Three events provided rich opportunities for developing and sustaining relationships as we launched our 2022-2023 meetings.

On August 26 the Board met for a **planning meeting** to address several goal areas: increasing membership, promoting scholarship applications, encouraging applicants for mini-grants, and reviewing organizational processes including our Bylaws. Our unit was well-represented at the September **WSSRA convention** at Great Wolf Lodge in Grand Mound. Unit #28 sent members to participate in various sessions, hear keynoters, and see the installation of **Ron Crawford** as WSSRA President-Elect. Our members worked together to prepare baskets and collect auction items for the WSSRA Foundation **fundraiser for scholarships**. We thank all who participated.

Happy 68th Birthday, TCSRA! Our **Welcome Back and Birthday Celebration** was held on September 16, our first in-person meeting since COVID. The picnic provided a wonderful opportunity to renew old friendships and to make new ones. We met at Woodland Creek Park and enjoyed box lunches from Bayview Catering. A total of 33 attended.

Thank you to the discussion leaders at the planning meeting: **Ron Crawford, Dorn Barr, Ann Chenhall, Patty Colombo, Nancy Zabel, Karen Keller**, and our scribe **Patty Gee**. Also thanks go to the group, under the leadership of **Ann Chenhall**, who created and donated items, contributed money, gift cards, and other treasures and collected wine and wine racks for the baskets and auction. This group included **Karen Keller, Jo Edwards, Pat Slosson, Will Gentz, Sally Jones, Keitha Bryson, Nancy Zabel, Sharon Dennis**, and **Sue Shannon**. Thank you to the hospitality committee **Bobbie Andreas, Vicki Carter, Nancy Peebles**, and **Pat Slosson**. We appreciate all of these members for their efforts. Please consider ways you might participate throughout the coming year. Thank you.

Sue Shannon, TCSRA President

WELCOME JARED KOEPP: 2022 WASHINGTON TEACHER OF THE YEAR

We are pleased to welcome Jared Koepf as our luncheon guest and speaker. Jared has a unique position in North Thurston Public Schools (NTPS) as Native Student Program Specialist. He completed a Master in Teaching degree specializing in Native education in 2008 from Evergreen State College,

Mr. Koepf's role includes cultural and academic support for approximately 230 Native American students from more than 50 tribes, nations, bands, and villages in the 22 schools in the district. He also provides professional development for staff members.

Mr. Koepf is a Wukchumni, which he describes as a small tribe from central California, and he is a tribal liaison to local tribes. He has been instrumental in strengthening the partnership between the Nisqually tribe and NTPS, which has adopted a Land Acknowledgement, and now flies the Nisqually flag at NTPS district sites.

Quite recently, Mr. Koepf contributed to drafting legislation requiring professional training in equity and government-to-government work for all administrators and certificated teachers in the state. It was passed into law and is being implemented across districts.

Katie Frazier, Director of Equity and Languages at NTPS, said, "He is by far one of the most transformative leaders and teachers I have ever had the privilege to work with."

We are fortunate to host Mr. Koepf for the October luncheon.

Sue Shannon, TCSRA President

Friday, October 21, 2022 – 12 Noon

The Ember's Restaurant
Indian Summer Golf and Country Club
5900 Troon Lane SE, Olympia

(\$20 includes tax and gratuity)

LUNCHEON RESERVATIONS



I will be sending out emails to remind you of our upcoming luncheon. Please respond to that email if you plan to attend. Our callers will also contact those people who do not have email. We need our reservation count by noon on Friday, October 14. If you **do not receive a call or an email**, or if you **need to cancel or add** a reservation after that date, email me at dazicar88@gmail.com, or call me at **253-381-2592 no later than noon on Friday**. Please do not call the restaurant with reservation changes. To be added to the email list for notification, please send me your email address.

ZiNita Carrell, Telephone/Email Committee Chair



LEGISLATIVE REPORT



Greetings from Grand Mound where we've just finished up the 75th WSSRA Convention. A special thanks to everyone who participated. It was a great time!

The Washington State Legislature and the Select Committee on Pension Policy (SCPP) continue to analyze and draft legislation in anticipation of the 2023 Legislative Session. The SCPP has Plan 1 COLA issues on its agenda for the October and November meetings. The Committee regularly has quorum issues at the December meeting, so we ask them to complete the Plan 1 work by November.

Please contact the SCPP and, if possible, participate in the meetings. Whatever the SCPP recommends for a Plan 1 COLA is likely what the legislature will provide in the 2023 Legislative Session. Advocacy now is imperative for a successful legislative session. Your message can be simple as a few sentences. Concisely explain that you want the Committee to provide Plan 1 Cost of Living Adjustments and why it is important to you. Email the SCPP at state.actuary@leg.wa.gov. The committee meeting Zoom link can easily be provided by office. Simply email me at peter@wssra.org or Executive Director Alan Burke at alan@wssra.org, and we will send you the meeting links.

WSSRA will be working on a variety of issues for Plan 1, Plans 2 and 3, and all senior citizens in the upcoming legislative session. The November and December editions of this report will explore WSSRA's full legislative agenda for 2023.

Peter Diedrick, WSSRA Legislative Coordinator

In Memoriam

We note the passing of **Carolyn Keck** and **John Vandewege**, and we offer sincere condolences to their families and friends.

EDUCATOR SHORTAGE IS REAL



We all want happy news, but the educator shortage is real:

Florida is recruiting military veterans to teach without a license, and Polk County has hired 60 international teachers.

Georgia is failing at recruiting retired teachers.

Nevada students started school in August with a shortage of over 1,400 teachers.

Texas' rural school districts are implementing a 4-day school week to alleviate the teacher shortage. Houston alone currently has over 2,200 vacancies.

New Jersey is implementing a pilot program to allow individuals with workforce experience to pursue a teaching certificate, even if they don't have the grades or higher education requirements.

New York City is spending big bucks to recruit retired educators and those who quit and to accelerate the teacher cert process.

Daly City, California, is offering affordable housing to teachers with minimal rent prices.

Why? You know: low teacher pay to large class sizes, burnout from the coronavirus, school shootings, and even intimidation. A lack of substitute teachers, bus drivers, nurses, counselors, and paras. Even climate catastrophes in many states have dumped further problems on schools, their employees, and their patrons. Who pays the price? Our youth, ultimately.

Washington is among the top 10 in teacher shortages. New teacher recruiting is 1/3 of needs nationwide; our state is bending the rules to get people in classrooms; e.g., the Selkirk district has filled nearly 1/4 of positions with limited certification holders.

In Washington, you can generally earn somewhere between \$48,916 and \$83,689 as a teacher, depending on your skillset, experience level, certifications, and location. But we're one of only 7 states with no income tax; our system is problematic for school funding, and levy support is often based on zip code.

This year started with picketing, bargaining problems, and a pressing need to upgrade school facilities to make them healthy and safe from intruders and the increasing heat.

What can we do? Write to your legislators to improve funding and safety. Write to your paper or social media in support of levies and bonds and educators' needs. Write to school boards with your opinions. Drop a note of support to an educator. Attend a school board meeting and speak out. Rally with marching educators or bring them water, snacks, a supportive note. Contact your local teacher association and get a sign to put in your yard. Whatever you can; teacher appreciation day once a year doesn't seem sufficient in these times.

Gery Gerst, Education Co-Chair

THINKING ABOUT RETIREMENT?



Certificated and Classified Employees: If you are within 1-5 years of retirement, you will want to attend these (free) WSSRA virtual webinars to learn about retirement Plan 2 and Plan 3, medical/dental options, sick leave buyout (VEBA), Social Security options, and Medicare. Please mark your calendar and join us!

Tuesday, October 18 at 4:30 p.m. Department of Retirement Systems and Health Care Authority/PEBB.

Thursday, October 27 at 4:30 p.m. Social Security, Medicare, and VEBA

These webinars will feature presentations from the following agencies:

WA State Department of Retirement Systems
(Plan 2 and Plan 3)

WA State Health Care Authority/PEBB
(Medical/Dental/Vision options)

Social Security and Medicare

VEBA (Your sick leave buyout options)

Registration for these events can be arranged through an email to Tara Teitzel (tara@wssra.org) or by registering on the WSSRA website(www.wssra.org) under the Webinar tab/Pre-retirement Zoom webinars October 2022.



COMMUNITY SERVICE

With the new TCSRA year beginning, we can resume some of the ways we did community service pre-COVID. Needs are still great. We will continue to collect toiletries which are then distributed by the Food Bank. The **Little Red Schoolhouse** has changed its sock policy by buying socks instead of having to sort through the huge variety of sizes and styles that were donated. Cash donations are preferred, so we can decide if we want to choose a Little Red Schoolhouse month to collect cash. We will continue the tradition of collecting donations for the **Salvation Army** and the **Food Bank** in November and December. I hope there will be interest in preparing "mom bags" for the Salvation Army family gift program.

In addition, there are plans to arrange some community service activities that involve "time versus treasure" such as helping out for a morning at the South Sound Reading Foundation.

There will be opportunities for members to give suggestions for other projects/activities. I would also be happy to hear your suggestions via email at: sljonz@gmail.com.

Sally Jones, Community Service Chair

BOOSTERS AND MORE

TIRED OF BOOSTERS? Unfortunately, COVID-19 is not tired of us. With many in the world remaining unvaccinated, the virus continues to change and spread. The U.S. government has projected that the U.S. could have a million more infections this fall and winter. It is estimated that 70% of the U.S. has been infected with COVID. About half of those eligible for boosters have not gotten them. Two shots are no longer enough. As the coronavirus continues to mutate, the vaccines become less effective at blocking infections. Omicron is essentially a new virus. Thus, even if you've had COVID, you can be re-infected.

The new approved vaccines by Pfizer and Moderna are a mixture of two versions of the vaccine. This booster will target the original coronavirus strain and the BA.4 and BA.5 Omicron subvariants, which are currently spreading in the U.S.. Since a booster's efficacy starts to wane after four months, it's important to keep up to date on them. The peak effectiveness is in the 4–5 months following the shot. This new booster is a substantial upgrade in the vaccine's ability to prevent infection, transmission, and serious illness. It is hopeful that if enough people get the vaccine a bad fall/winter surge can be averted.

The new Pfizer booster is available for those 12 and up; the Moderna for those 18 and up. It needs to be two months since your primary vaccine or your last booster shot. If you've recently contacted COVID, you should wait three months.

If you do contract COVID, there are two oral medications to treat COVID—Paxlovid and Molnupiravir. They are available by prescription only and have to be taken within 5 days of the onset of symptoms. The Washington State Department of Health has a telehealth webpage at doh.wa.gov. Or you can call 1-800-525-0127 and press # to set up a video consultation via the DOH hotline. This service is available from 8a.m. to 8p.m. on Mondays, and 8a.m. to 6p.m. Tuesdays through Sundays and observed holidays. After the telehealth consultation, if treatment is appropriate for you, you will receive a prescription for free home delivery or pharmacy pickup.

Don't forget your annual flu shot this fall. If you have not had a shingles (50 years+) or pneumonia (65 years+) vaccine, consider getting those.

Gail Feagins, Member and Health Services

Each month we 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:

Erin Crabtree

Tumwater School District

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

Thurston County School Retirees' Association
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Lacey, WA 98509-3051

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Email michele@wssra.org, or call 360-413-5496.
Remember, the Post Office charges our unit for each forwarded or returned copy of *Bits & Pieces*.

ATTENTION PUBLIC SCHOOL EMPLOYEES: FILL OUT YOUR MINI-GRANT APPLICATION NOW!

Do you know a school employee who could use a little help with a special project? A TCSRA mini-grant is just the thing. Applications for elementary and secondary mini-grants are available beginning **October 3**. The date for completed applications is **Monday, October 24**. Please go to the TCSRA website — www.wssra-units.org/thurstoncounty/—to fill out and submit your application online.

Applicants are asked to describe their project, detail the costs, and summarize how the project promotes student learning while meeting district goals.

Grants will be awarded at the beginning of November 2022.

Nancy Zabel & Patti Colombo, Elementary Co-chairs

Karen Keller, Secondary Chair



TCSRA members attended the WSSRA 2022 convention at the Great Wolf Lodge in Grand Mound. Among those attending are (from top left): **Nancy Zabel, Keitha Bryson, Sally Jones, Will Gentz, Ron Crawford, Gail Feagins, Sally and Duane Olson, and Ann Chenhall.**

***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: Pat Slosson, 360-561-3232. Information for the November 2022 issue is due by October 13. Please email copy to pslosson1@comcast.net**