



Bits & Pieces

www.wssra-units.org/thurstoncounty/

October 2023

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

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Increasing membership is a priority for WSSRA and TCSRA, so our unit is participating in the WSSRA incentive program. As Unit 28 president, I am encouraging current members to help our membership committee in recruiting members.

Here are features of the incentive program you may use in that effort. In an ongoing program, WSSRA gives a \$10 incentive for each new member who joins as a result of active recruitment. Also, the unit earns \$100 from WSSRA for adding over 25 new members.

Two options are offered this year to new members: they may select *either* a coffee gift card or a six-month free membership. It works as follows:

1. Unit 28 will give a \$20 Starbucks card to new members who join this year and select this option. Cards are available for current members to give to a new member. Contact Dorn Barr, membership chair. WSSRA will reimburse the unit for the cards.

2. New members who join through payroll deductions or DRS may elect the six-month free membership option. WSSRA will begin collecting the membership fee at six months from date of joining.

Also, TCSRA is offering a third incentive, a finder's fee of sorts. When a current member recruits a new member, the current member will be given \$10. A voucher must be presented with the membership form in order for the recruiter to be awarded the finders' fee. Forms are on the WSSRA website, www.wssra.org.

TCSRA's mini-grant program also offers a premium for membership. This year, members are eligible for mini-grants of \$400. Non-members may apply for grants of \$200. Information is on the TCSRA website.

As a TCSRA member, will you please invite new folks to join during the year?

Sue Shannon, TCSRA President

WELCOME ANNETTE WELLS: BLIND DATE

A *Boo!* BOOK



We are so pleased to welcome **Annette Wells** as our luncheon guest and speaker this month. Annette's passion is getting books into the hands of readers of all ages, particularly younger readers who are exploring and developing their interests.

Annette is currently in her 28th year in the North Thurston Public Schools. After teaching English/Language Arts for 7 years at the high school level, she moved to middle school. Eight years ago, she helped open Salish Middle School as the teacher-librarian.

Annette can often be found wandering the aisles at Browsers Bookshop and on her deck reading the treasures she finds there. She is a voracious reader, who credits her mom for her passion for books and libraries. She also loves to kayak, golf, camp, and write poetry.

At Salish MS, Annette prioritizes helping students feel seen and heard while creating a safe community.

We are excited to host Annette Wells for the October luncheon. We can expect an interactive presentation with an opportunity for us to explore books! Bring a friend and be sure to make reservations for your entire party. [See page 2 for reservation information]

Pat Slosson, Hospitality Committee



Friday, October 20, 2023—12 noon

The Ember's Restaurant

Indian Summer Golf and Country Club
5900 Troon Lane SE, Olympia

Broccoli Beef with Rice

OR

Tofu Vegetable Stir Fry (V, GF, DF)

(\$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. We need our reservation count by **noon on Friday, October 13.**

If you **do not receive an email**, or if you **need to cancel or add to your** reservation, email me at dazicar88@gmail.com, or call me **no later than noon on Friday (253-381-2592)**. 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



It's time for Plan 1 retirees to get involved again. The Select Committee on Pension Policy (SCPP) is scheduling Plan 1 COLA hearings for their October 17 and November 14 meet-

ings. They may also study restoration of a permanent, automatic COLA at the December meeting. This committee meets in the legislative interim and makes policy recommendations to the full legislature.

The October 17 Select Committee on Pension Policy meeting will have a public hearing on a 3% COLA proposal that would take effect July 2024. It would match this year's 3% COLA that was capped at \$110 per month. WSSRA is working on increasing that monthly cap to \$125 or higher. In November, the SCPP is expected to vote on the legislation being reviewed at the October meeting. If passed, the COLA would become official request legislation of the SCPP.

The 2023 Plan 1 COLA bill included a provision stating that the SCPP must study and make a recommendation to the legislature on restoring the permanent, automatic Plan 1 COLA. A study date has not been set, but WSSRA is lobbying for an initial presentation at the December 2023 SCPP meeting. The SCPP is required to make its report by December 2024. The lobbying plan is to push full annual COLA restoration at the 2025 Legislative Session.

Please keep an eye out for advocacy messages from WSSRA. Messages to the SCPP can be sent to state.actuary@leg.wa.gov.

Peter Diedrick, WSSRA Legislative Coordinator

In Memoriam

We note the passing of **Elizabeth Egge, John Mallery, Hugh Moody, and Edith Pill**, and we offer sincere condolences to their families and friends.

MATH SCORES TAKE A DIVE



Math scores haven't improved much in the last 20 years, and they took a big dive during Covid. State-wide only 38 percent of our students meet the math standard.

When state and district officials look for causes and correlations of the test scores, they find multiple factors that might predict a student's score. Not surprisingly they find that, in general:

- Affluent districts have higher test scores.
- Schools with high mobility rates have lower scores. (In Thurston County we have one middle school with a mobility rate—kids moving in and out—of more than 100 percent.)
- Children with college-educated parents score higher than kids whose parents did not attend college.

As a district math coordinator, I wondered if things might be less complicated than our research suggested. I had some time on my hands and tried a simple action-research project. I tested all the kids in our district, grades 5 through 10, with a one-minute multiplication test. There were 25 problems, 5 x 5 through 9 x 9. I gave every one of the 2000 students a candy bar just for trying to complete the test. Almost all of them gave it their best shot.

The results were startling. The data clustered into two distinct groups. One group, about 35 percent of the students, knew 18 or more math facts. The other 65 percent knew 17 or fewer math facts. Those numbers exactly matched our students' pass rate on the state math test.

With some help from our stats guy, I checked to see if our initial impression was correct. We found that students who scored less than 17 out of 25 multiplication facts had never passed any standardized test, ever! We ran the data a different way and realized that we could not tell, based on the test, who would pass. But we could with near certainty predict who would not pass the state test.

I have replicated this little research project many times on a smaller scale. After testing about 3000 students, I did find one student who scored 17 and did pass the state test. But this youngster was clearly an outlier. He spent three full hours on day one taking the most recent state test.

We all know that correlation does not equal causation, but to me, these results seem to indicate that maybe we should rethink the place of drill and practice in the elementary math program.

Jim Slosson, Education Co-Chair

SWEDISH DEATH CLEANING ... WHAT IS IT?

"The Swedes know the secret to happiness: You are not your stuff," Michael J. Coren writes in an August 1, 2023 *Washington Post* article about the daunting task of sorting through years of his mother's stuff after she passed away. He heard from readers that many of them had also faced an overwhelming accumulation of stuff to deal with. So, how can we change our own lives so that we don't leave this situation for our partners, children, other family members and friends when they are grieving our loss?

Margareta Magnusson gives us inspiring advice in her book, *The Gentle Art of Swedish Death Cleaning*, (SDC) available on Amazon or at the library. This book inspired 8 episodes of a 2023 Reality TV-14 show by that name that one can stream on Peacock. With hope and hilarity, Amy Poehler (and Scout Productions) tells the stories through real life interviews and experiences with individuals, families and friends using the SDC principles to face their mortality, to speak honestly about death, and to confront all their material possessions that must be sorted through. A designer, an organizer, and a psychologist came from Sweden to America to help these people.

SDC is "about rethinking our relationship with things. Rather than making do with less, it's about getting more from the things that make you happy," says Coren. Our possessions can become "physical barriers to ward off feelings of insecurity and loneliness," instead of "a vital receptacle for our memories and identities."

Research shows that materialism defines a tendency to buy possessions for status or approval and that it is associated with more loneliness and less happiness. But things "**acquired for their beauty, utility, or their association with positive experiences and social relationships**" can bring us happiness. Coren's great-grandmother's garden knife with the smooth hickory handle, reminds him of childhood hours spent with her in her riotous Florida garden of mangoes and sapodillas.

Here are Magnusson's basics on how one could proceed using Swedish Death Cleaning:

◆ "Start with the easy stuff. Begin with large or duplicate items first, then finish with the small and sentimental. Clothes are an excellent place to start since many of them have little practical or sentimental use. Photographs, personal papers, and letters are the hardest to clear out."

◆ "There's no rush, but start now. The more time you spend going through your belongings, the easier it will get... this is a reflection, not a weekend affair..."

◆ "Tell your loved ones. Does the process sound morbid? In truth, it's a gift. People you love will hear the stories about what makes these things important,

and why you're gifting them. That makes the job much more gratifying. And you can do it at any age."

◆ "Keep the things that make you happy. After cleaning, your home should feel more beautiful and functional, with every item in its place..."

Coren reminds us that "each product we buy on average, accounts for 6.3 times its weight in carbon emissions. Together, our household purchases of goods and services account for between 26 and 45 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions. Clutter is hard on our world." Before he brings something new into his home, he now asks himself: "How will I feel living with it? Will someone else ever want it?"

Pat McLachlan, Member and Health Services



MINI-GRANT APPLICATIONS

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 2**. The date for completed applications is **Monday, October 27**. Applicants should go to the TCSRA website — www.wssra-units.org/thurstoncounty/—to fill out and submit your application online. TCSRA Members are eligible for up to \$400. Non-members may apply for \$200. Grants will be awarded at the beginning of November 2023.

*Nancy Zabel, Elementary Chairs
Karen Keller, Secondary Chair*

THINKING ABOUT RETIREMENT?

Certificated and Classified Employees: If you are within 1-5 years of retirement, you will want to attend these free virtual webinars:

*Wednesday, October 18 at 4:30PM: Dept. of Retirement Systems and Health Care Authority/PEBB

*Thursday, October 19 at 4:30 PM: Social Security/Medicare and VEBA

Visit www.wssra.org and register under the webinars tab.

Each month we randomly draw the name of an "active" (not-yet-retired) member, who will receive a Starbucks gift card in the mail.

This month's winner is:

**Linda Crawford
Yelm Community Schools**

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

Thurston County School Retirees' Association
P. O. Box 3051
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*.



COMMUNITY SERVICE NEWS

Having received positive feedback from those who volunteered at the South Sound Reading Foundation (SSRF), I decided to schedule us to volunteer again:

Date & Time: October 6, 10 a.m. – noon
Where: 2830 Willamette Drive NE Suite A, Lacey

SSRF's goal is to ensure that all children have access to FREE books. To that end, more and more programs and activities have been developed since its inception in 2001.

A Book Van visits low income housing units, schools, after-school programs, and community events; every child present receives a free book.

Bag O' Books offers books for children of anyone who requests them. Parents fill out a simple form, and SSRF prepares a special bag of books to be picked up. Families may request books for all their children.

Other programs include Books for Babes, Born to Read, Ready! for kindergarten, scheduled story times, and literacy programs that engage children in reading. Groups can request a program tailored to their needs.

As volunteers, we will skim donated books for dam-

age, wipe them down, apply stickers, and enjoy each others' company.

If you have kids' books at home that are "shelf-sitters" bring them along to donate. If you need an excuse to go to garage and estate sales, as I do, it is often possible to pick up books for very little money or even for free if you explain that they're for the SSRF.

As always, I will deliver to The Other Bank any toiletry items brought to the luncheons.

We are already gearing up to prepare Moms' Bags for the Salvation Army moms, so think about that when you go to the above-mentioned garage and estate sales. Items must be new or look like new.

See you on October 6!

Sally Jones, Community Service Chair

BITS & PIECES, the newsletter of the Thurston County School Retirees' Association, is published nine times a year, September through May, as a membership service. **Information for the November 2023 issue is due by October 16.** Please email copy to editortcsra@gmail.com;
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