



Bits & Pieces

www.wssra-units.org/thurstoncounty/ November 2023

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

GRATEFUL FOR RELATIONSHIPS

Sitting on the deck of Waves and Whales, a vacation house above rocky cliffs on the ocean near Depoe Bay, Oregon, I reflect on the important relationships in my professional life. I had the good fortune to spend most of the first week of October with longtime friend and colleague Patt Hawthorne. We remembered our shared experiences as teachers at Timberline High School, as well as saluted our recently deceased mentor and friend Sharon Thomas, former English department chair and a TCSRA member. Many of my most profound professional experiences are associated with my years at Timberline. We opened the new school in 1970 amid the finishing touches of construction. We taught in open-concept spaces, with a modular schedule of small, middle, and large groups, and sought to make connections with students and subject matter through interdisciplinary and individualized instruction. These shared experiences created bonds among many of the staff that are still strong after 53 years.

Most of my closest friendships grew out of that experience. I am grateful for those opportunities and relationships. I am missing colleagues and friends who have passed: Billie Williams, Iris Green, Jerry Bennett, and now Sharon Thomas, among many others including TCSRA members.

At this season of Thanksgiving, I am even more aware of how important it is to tell those special friends, colleagues, and family how much they mean to us. I hope Sharon knew the high regard and affection with which she was held. She impacted the lives of so many students and fellow staff.

Enjoy your Thanksgiving holiday with those special folks in your lives and be sure to tell them how much you care. I intend to do so.

Sue Shannon, TCSRA President

LEGISLATIVE REVIEW & PREVIEW

We are pleased to once again welcome **Peter Diedrick**, WSSRA Legislative Director, to our November luncheon.



Reviewing last year's legislative session and getting a preview of the upcoming session has become a yearly TCSRA program. Why? Because one of the most important tasks of our organization is to monitor the actions of the legislature and to promote legislation which benefits our members. We can expect Peter to give us the knowledge and the tools to reach out to our representatives, enabling us to be part of the important work ahead.

Peter 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.

Pat Slosson, Hospitality

[Bring a friend, and be sure to make reservations for your entire party. See page 2 for reservation info.]

Friday, November 17, 2023 – 12 Noon

**The Ember's Restaurant
Indian Summer Golf and Country Club**

Menu: Turkey with mashed potatoes
and green beans

OR

Stuffed Squash (V)

Dessert: Chef's choice

(\$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, November 10.**

If you **do not receive an email**, or if you **need to cancel** or if you **need to add** to your reservation, email me at dazicar88@gmail.com, or call me **no later than noon on Friday, November 10, (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, Email Committee Chair



LEGISLATIVE REPORT



TRS 1 & PERS 1 members take note: The Select Committee on Pension Policy (SCPP) will soon act on Plan 1 COLA legislation for 2024. On November 14, the committee will determine if a Plan 1 COLA for 2024 is an appropriate recommendation to send to the legislature. Since a COLA next summer is certainly the right policy, please extend your support. Legislators need to hear from their constituents, not just lobbyists.

The recent Plan 1 COLAs have been capped. The first increase was capped at \$62.50 per month. We negotiated a plan to tie the COLA cap to the senior property exemption levels, making the next COLAs 3% up to \$110 per month. We are again pushing for an increase to the cap, making it 3% up to \$125 per month. That number provides a full 3% increase to nearly all Plan 1 retirees and is politically palatable for legislators not wanting to be seen giving money to a few high earning, high profile Plan 1 retirees.

Legislators need to hear from you! If you read this before November 14, please write to the SCPP at state.actuary@leg.wa.gov Tell them you support a Plan 1 COLA and raising the COLA cap to 3% up to \$125 per month. Please **DO NOT** call the Actuary's office. Their administrative staff is not set up to handle a large volume of political communications. You can

Continued on page 4; see "Legislative Report."

HELP A CHILD AND MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Kudos to all in our schools trying their best to help students achieve, believe, grow intellectually, emotionally and physically, get to school safely, get good nutrition, get respect and support, and thrive.



All of this is following a tsunami composed of COVID's effects on students' progress and attendance, politicizing of public education by folks who've made our schools a target, and looming threats of gun violence.

Every player in public schools did their best to adapt and deliver quality education and services during the pandemic. With little time and insufficient resources, they metaphorically changed the tire on the bus while it was driving on the freeway.

Specific to one area, it's often cited that reading test scores and literacy have "plunged" in standardized tests, especially it seems in middle-school-aged students. It's noted that the trend is better or worse depending on one's zip code, community support, and funding base. (Equal education for all?)

If we accept trends as true, then reading comprehension is the goal post. As noted by Susan Engle and Catherine Snow in the *Washington Post*, the definition of comprehension differs with each discipline. But common to all is the desire that all students not only understand what they're reading, but are also able to critique it by employing prior knowledge to analyze, question, and apply what they've read.

SO, good reading pairs with knowledge acquisition which must start early; both go beyond phonics and test scores. And this is where YOU, WE, come in.

Research shows that young children who have conversations with older people learn to read more easily than those who do not. It's about human connection, because it not only leads to skills, but it is also an affirmation that someone cares and that the child has value, needs that all kids share. So whether it's with a family member, in a youth group, or in a classroom, please consider being a reading buddy. Help a child gather information or dialogue about a topic they're studying or reading. It only takes one person in a child's life to make that difference. It could be you!

Gery Gerst, Education Co-Chair

In Memoriam

We note the passing of **Dorothy Goodrich** and **Sharon Thomas**, and we offer sincere condolences to their families and friends.

HEALTH INSURANCE OPEN ENROLLMENT FALL VACCINES

Open enrollment for PEBB insurance plans is November 1-30. For non-PEBB plans it is October 15-December 7. Open enrollment for SEBB plans is October 30 through November 20. All plans are seeing price increases for 2024. Information can be found on the Health Care Authority website at hca.wa.gov. The plan phone numbers are as follows:

Kaiser NW Senior Advantage	1-800-813-2000
Kaiser WA Original Medicare and Medicare Advantage	1-888-901-4600
Premiera Plan G	1-800-816-3049
United Health Care	1-855-873-3268
Uniform Medical Classic	1-888-849-3681

If you missed the PEBB plans webinar on September 26, you can view it by going to wssra.org and clicking on webinars. There will also be an in-person benefit fair on Friday, November 3, at South Puget Sound Community College, Lacey Campus Building, Rooms 186 and 188, 4220 6th AVE SE, Lacey from 11:00 AM to 3:00 PM (retirees) and 4:00-7:00 PM (employees) as follows:

Retiree presentations:

PEBB retiree insurance	11:30 AM to noon
Kaiser Permanente	12:30 to 1:00PM
United Healthcare	1:30 – 2:00PM
Premiera	2:30 – 3:00PM

Employee presentations:

Novia (FSA/DCAP)	4:30 – 5:00PM
Kaiser Permanente	5:30 – 6:00PM

VACCINES

COVID-19 shots, which target variants that are presently circulating, are recommended for those 6 months and up who have not had a booster in the last two months. If you've had COVID recently, wait three months. Free COVID tests (4 per family) can be ordered from [covid.gov/tests](https://www.covid.gov/tests). COVID-19 shots are covered by Medicare Part B.

FLU shots are recommended for everyone 6 months and up. The southern hemisphere had a severe flu season, and it's expected to be the same here and to arrive early. It's OK to get the COVID and flu vaccine at the same time. Flu shots are covered by Medicare Part B.

RSV shots are recommended for those 60 and up. These may be good for two seasons. It's recommended to space this one apart from the COVID and flu vaccines. RSV shots are covered by Medicare Part D) ***NOTE: If you have a plan other than Medicare Part D, check first as your plan may not cover the vaccine's cost.**

The Washington State Department of Health's website (doh.wa.gov) has a dashboard tracking the prevalence

of COVID, flu, and RSV.

OTHER

If you are 65+ and haven't been vaccinated for pneumonia, or 50+ and haven't been vaccinated for shingles, you should consider it. Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis) needs to be updated every 10 years. Pneumonia is covered by Medicare Part B and Shingles and Tdap by Medicare Part D.

Gail Feagins, Member & Health Services Committee

COMMUNITY SERVICE

TCSRA recently donated 66 items and a few shopping bags to The Other Bank, located at the Thurston County Food Bank. The food bank can always use shopping bags and egg cartons, so feel free to bring those items to any luncheon along with the toiletries.

The people who volunteered at the South Sound Reading Foundation work party in October enjoyed the work and learned a lot about the many programs of the SSRF. Free books are given to kids of all ages via an amazing array of delivery methods. (photo p. 4)

Our traditional monetary donations will be collected at the November and December luncheons for the Food Bank and the Salvation Army respectively.

This December will be our third year of assembling "mom bags" to go out with the Salvation Army's gifts for families. These bags of 5 to 7 small items are meant to show special appreciation to the moms who often ask for very little personally in order to make the holiday happier for their kids. A collection basket will be available at the November and December luncheons for "mom bags" items. Suggestions include special lotions and bath products, candles, holiday ornaments, holiday-themed (or not) tea or hand towels, pot holders, mugs, small dishes, special non-perishable food or candy items such as tea, coffee, cocoa or cider mixes, small note pads or stationary, gloves, mittens, scarves, socks or slippers. Some generous members have included gift cards. Anything you would be pleased to receive is appropriate. Re-gifting is perfectly acceptable, but the items must be in new or like-new condition. We will assemble the bags in December.



Sally Jones, Community Service Chair

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:

Kailee Houlihan

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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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



REMINDER: LUNCHEON MEETING
The Ember's Restaurant
Indian Summer Golf and Country Club
5900 Troon Lane SE
Friday, November 17
LUNCH AT 12 NOON

LEGISLATIVE REPORT (Continued from page 2.)

also carbon copy (cc) your own legislative delegation.
Here is a sample letter:

DATE

To the Select Committee on Pension Policy:
Please support a Plan 1 COLA for 2024 and an annual, permanent COLA. I am a TRS/PERS 1 retiree and due to lost purchasing power, my income no longer meets my needs. I am also too old to return to work. If previous COLAs had not been removed, my retirement income would have been sufficient.

I also ask that you raise the COLA cap. The past few increases have been limited to \$62.50 per month and \$110 per month. Because this number is tied to senior property tax levels, and those have also increased due to inflation, I believe a COLA cap of \$125 per month is appropriate.

Thank you for your work and service. Please support my request.

NAME

ADDRESS

PHONE NUMBER

Peter Diedrick, WSSRA Legislative Director



Sally Jones and **Diana Kildow** mark books at the South Sound Reading Foundation. Stay tuned for the date of our next work party and join the fun!

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 December 2023 issue is due by November 13.

Please email copy to pslosson1@comcast.net