



# Bits & Pieces

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

March 2026

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

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The first six months of our Thurston County School Retirees' Association's 2025-2026 budget year has been filled with activity.

The highlight of the last quarter was receiving a \$15,000 grant, awarded to our unit by the Nisqually Tribe. That grant funded our 37 mini-grants at \$400 each and a gift of money to four school principals for their libraries. During January, the mini-grants were distributed to Thurston County schools. Also during this time, TCSRA membership information was presented and active employees were encouraged to join. Members who participated in attending a staff meeting to present the awards were: **Karen Keller** (chair), **Dennis Crisp**, **ZiNita Carrell**, **Toni Demme**, **Kevan Hagen**, **Erin Mann**, **Lorene Rang**, **Alan Burke**, **Colleen Taylor**, **Ann Chenhall**, **Jerome Gee**, and **Patty Gee**.

The Community Service committee, chaired by **Sally Jones**, was busy in November and December collecting items and money for the Thurston County Food Bank and the Salvation Army's Adopt-Family program.

The less positive note for the unit is that for various reasons our treasurer needed to resign and the secretary position remains unfilled. TCSRA board members are stepping up to share the responsibilities temporarily. We need new volunteers for these positions!

The 2026 WSSRA Convention will be held at the Great Wolf Lodge in Grand Mound, June 8 to 10. Our unit will be able to send at least 20 delegates, who will receive registration, lodging, food reimbursement, and travel expenses. We invite people who have not participated in the past to consider attending. Reservations begin in April, so please think about it. If interested, email President Patty at [tcsrapatty@gmail.com](mailto:tcsrapatty@gmail.com).

*Patty Gee, TCSRA President*

### *In Memoriam*

We note the passing of **Margit Stakkestad**. We offer sincere condolences to her family and friends.



We welcome Susan Fiksdal, a co-president of the League of Women Voters of Thurston County, to our March luncheon.

The League of Women Voters is a non-partisan organization that empowers voters to be informed and active in government and works to increase understanding of issues through education and advocacy. Susan is the chair of voter services.

Susan Fiksdal grew up in Olympia and graduated from OHS. She studied in France to earn a master's degree in French, and she joined the faculty at the Evergreen State College in 1973. After 7 years of questions from students about language learning, language structure, and language origins, she moved her family to Ann Arbor, Michigan, to complete a PhD in Linguistics. Susan has written two books and numerous articles, worked as an academic dean, and had a Fulbright in Hong Kong. She never lost her love of interdisciplinary teaching and book seminars.

After several years of retirement, Susan joined the League of Women Voters where she has found another passion, defending democracy. Reaching out to students and adults is what she has always done, but now it seems absolutely crucial to our future.

We look forward to hearing about the ways the League of Women Voters is reaching out to students in high schools as well as about the League's work with the legislature.

*Vicki Carter, Hospitality Committee Chair*

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

**Friday, March 20, 2026—12 noon**  
**Indian Summer Golf and Country Club**



Honey Dijon Chicken  
OR  
Stuffed Pepper (GF,DF, 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, March 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](mailto:dazicar88@gmail.com), or call me **no later than noon on Friday, March 13 at 253-381-2592.**

To be added to the email list for notification, please send me your email address.

*ZiNita Carrell, Email Committee Chair*



## LEGISLATIVE REPORT



This article was written on February 12, 2026. By the time you read it, more up-to-date information might be available. To get the latest news, please go to [www.wssra.org](http://www.wssra.org).

We are halfway through a difficult legislative session. Lawmakers are trying to close another multi-billion dollar budget deficit. Despite the lack of available funds, Senate Bill 5862, which would provide a one-time 3% COLA to TRS 1 and PERS 1 retirees, looks like it is on track to pass the Senate. The bill is sponsored by State Senator Perry Dozier, a Republican from Waitsburg. He introduced it after attending a meeting of the Walla Walla-Columbia School Retirees' Association (WSSRA Unit 31) last year. The bill also appears to be an important priority for the Senate Democratic caucus, who fought unsuccessfully to restore an ongoing COLA for TRS 1 and PERS 1 retirees last year.

While we are hopeful that our bill will clear the Senate, it faces a difficult journey in the House. If you are reading this before March 10, please help us by calling the legislative hotline at 800-562-6000. An operator will ask you for your name and address and then transcribe your message, which will be passed along to your legislators. Please tell your legislators to pass Senate Bill 5862 to provide a COLA for TRS 1 and PERS 1 retirees.

Thank you for your support!

*Emmett Mills, WSSRA Legislative Coordinator*

## EDUCATION AND POLITICAL

### WORLDS INTERSECT

Here's the current wave we might find interesting or compelling:



- Average teacher pay nationwide rose almost 4%, even more for new teachers. In one Massachusetts town, the new contract with the union doubled the pay for paraprofessionals.
- Nationwide, billionaires continue sponsoring bills to get unchecked voucher programs, which drain public school revenues to private schools with no public accountability. So far 18 states passed such laws.
- Seven states now have cell phone bans during school hours.
- Several conservative WA state legislators currently have bills alive that deprive non-gender conforming students from receiving appropriate medical services, even if parents want it, and other bills that target non-binary and non-gender conforming students from participating in the athletic programs appropriate for their self-identities.
- Another bill would prevent a student from choosing the name they wish to be known by at school.
- One bill would strip OSPI's statewide guardrails/standards on curriculum so each district would have free reign on what's taught or not and on how it is taught.

I share this now so we can be on board, learn, act in this session (ending March 12) and in upcoming elections. The fate of kids and of the profession we love are in the legislature now or on future ballots via bills, initiatives, or candidates.

*Gery Gerst, Education Committee Chair*

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:



**Kaitlyn Beesley**  
**North Thurston Public Schools**



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

## WEST COAST HEALTH ALLIANCE NETWORK

Washington, Oregon, Hawaii, and California have formed the West Coast Health Alliance (WCHA). The purpose of the WCHA is to “uphold the integrity of effective public health strategies that protect the health of our communities.” One can find the scope, objectives, and principles of the alliance by going to <https://doh.wa.gov>, our Washington State Department of Health (DOH) website, and searching for West Coast Health Alliance.

Public health leaders and subject matter experts from these four states' health departments work to coordinate health guidelines by aligning recommendations from respected national medical organizations, based on scientific evidence.

For example, the WCHA and DOH base current guidelines for immunizations and vaccines “on the following professional resources:

Children (18 years or younger): American Academy of Pediatrics;

Pregnant Persons: American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists;

Adults (19 years or older): American Academy of Family Physicians.”

These guidelines for the “Respiratory Season Vaccine Recommendations” are on the DOH website and in alignment with the WCHA. You can search for them with that title. They are easy to understand and can then be used in discussions with one's physician.

It is important to realize that the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as a recommending federal agency has been replaced by the WCHA as a resource for these particular immunizations and some other associated recommendations. The CDC is no longer recommending certain vaccines for all children in the U.S. Parents and caregivers may now need to engage in shared clinical decision-making to access these vaccines for their children.

*Pat McLachlan, Health and Member Services Co-chair*

### 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 [sed6501@outlook.com](mailto:sed6501@outlook.com).

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

## DELIVERING MORE MINI-GRANTS



Top: Parkside Elementary, Tenino, L to R, Dennis Crisp, Karen Keller, ZiNita Carrell, and Colleen Taylor present to Brock Williams, principal, and Noreen Ryckman, intervention specialist. Mr. Williams is a member as were both his parents.

Below: Erin Mann presents a grant to Carly Stigall, South Bay Elementary, North Thurston Public Schools. Kevan Hagen presents to Scott Rang, Tumwater School District.



## COMMUNITY SERVICE

What do you fear? Do you fear torrential flooding rain, fire, tornadoes, hurricanes, thunderstorms, avalanches, earthquakes, or war? I fear a volcanic explosion of plastic in the future. I imagine visible, yellow, plastic rivers.

Over 9 billion tons of plastic have been produced since it was introduced in the 1950s, and 79% of that is still in landfills or in the natural environment. It takes between 100 and 1,000 years to decompose. Tiny pieces called microplastics and even smaller bits called nanoplastics are found in every ecosystem from the Antarctica to tropical coral reefs. These toxic particles are in the soil and waterways and, subsequently, enter the food chain for all living things. Furthermore, the production of new plastic products emits greenhouse gas contributing to climate change. Plastic pollution harms all life.

What can we do? May I suggest that we commit as an organization to recycling plastic products through the Lions Club program which we heard about at a recent luncheon. As the official collector, I will see that anything collected will be delivered to the Lions Club. Please bring only clean and dry, stretchable plastic. For more information, check the Lions Club website.

*Sally Jones, Community Service Chair*

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**GOVERNOR FERGUSON PROCLAIMS  
MARCH 16-22, 2026  
AS SCHOOL RETIREES' APPRECIATION WEEK**



***BITS & PIECES***, the newsletter of the Thurston County School Retirees' Association, is published nine times a year, September through May, as a membership service. It is a means of communication between officers, committees, and both retired and active (not-yet-retired) members.

Letters to the editor from members are welcome and will be published when space is available. The editor will determine when letters will be published and when in doubt, shall consult with the president. The following guidelines are specified for letters to the editor:

- Letters must not exceed 150-200 words.
- Only one letter per year from the same writer will be accepted.
- Information must be accurate.
- Language must be appropriate.
- Content should be of general interest to the membership.
- Opinions expressed by the writer do not necessarily reflect policies or positions of WSSRA or TCSRA.
- Name, address, phone number must be included.

Editor: Pat Slosson, 360-561-3232.

**Information for the April 2026 issue is due by March 12.**

Please email copy to [pslosson1@comcast.net](mailto:pslosson1@comcast.net).