

A MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Some years ago, I had the opportunity to visit my parents, who were living in Buenos Aires, Argentina. On one of our afternoon walks, I found myself standing at the edge of the Hipódromo Argentino de Palermo, a beautiful horse racing facility that spans over 150 acres. Opened in 1876, the dirt course at the Hipódromo Argentino de Palermo is considered one of the finest in the world and hosts over 1,400 races a year.

As I stood at the side of the track, I closed my eyes and breathed in the smell of freshly turned dirt that mingled with the tang of grass and hay from nearby stables. In the distance, the sound of thundering hooves and the rhythmic cadence of a jockey urging his mount forward rolled and crescendoed until the sounds were all-consuming. And then suddenly, from one moment to the next, all was silent as horse and rider vanished into the distance.

It was exhilarating! It was magical! My heart beat so loud that I felt it in my head, and for a moment, I was overcome by a sense of awe at the sheer power and grace of the horses. It was an experience that I will never forget.

I had a similar experience the first time I stepped into a classroom. One afternoon, by invitation from Dr. Richard Aslett, I visited a Kindergarten classroom at Timpanogos Elementary School. Dr. Aslett, who was a family friend, taught elementary education classes part time at Utah Valley University and part time Kindergarten.

As I sat at the back of the classroom, I watched, captivated, as Dr. Aslett taught a reading lesson to a class of multilingual Spanish-speaking students. The students gathered around him on the carpet and practiced letter sounds and words in English. The lesson progressed from simple skill practice to students reading sentences, learning vocabulary, discussing ideas, and making real-world connections.

It was exhilarating! It was magical! Like at the Hipódromo Argentino de Palermo my heart beat so loud that I felt it in my head, and for a moment, I was overcome by a sense of awe at the sheer power and grace of the learning process. It was at that moment that I realized my calling in life was to become a teacher. Years later, Dr. Aslett would tell me that he

knew if I had the opportunity to witness learning in its purest form I would choose a career in education. He was right.

As I enter my 29th year as an educator, I reflect upon the many experiences and defining moments that have given me opportunities to lead and serve. I am extremely grateful for this journey!

Within the next few weeks, thousands of students and staff will enter our schools, filled with excitement and anticipation of what this school year will bring. Anchored in leadership, trust, and advocacy, WASA members have the opportunity to lead and influence in long-lasting ways. Let us reflect upon our defining moments and remember why we chose this career path. This is important work, and the work we do changes lives!



Mike Villarreal,
WASA President and
Superintendent of
Hoquiam SD.

A MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Who Will Say, "YOU Are My Lighthouse?"



WASA Friends and
Colleagues,

Congratulations on the successful launch of another school year! While getting school started each year is "what you do," success

in this regard does not happen by accident—effectively organizing, leading, and mobilizing staff to welcome hundreds, if not thousands, of students back to school is no small feat.

Now that school has started, the real work begins—forging the kind of connections with students that poise them for success. The foundation of this work is rooted in relationships and putting forth extra effort to make a difference in the lives of students and even the staff with whom you work. These "differences" may seem small or inconsequential at the moment, but they are often life-changing. Steve Pemberton calls this the Lighthouse Effect, and his book, *The Lighthouse Effect: How Ordinary People Can Have an Extraordinary Impact in the World*, is fully applicable to the work of educating children and young people.

Just as the Lighthouse stands tall, lighting the way for fatigued sailors, you, too, have the potential and opportunity to be beacons for students, teachers, staff, and colleagues. Pemberton's book reminds us that ordinary people with a genuine desire to make a difference can have an extraordinary impact on the lives of others. All of you serve as a Lighthouse to those you interact with, if for no other reason than the position you hold. You are a guiding light, even when you're not fully aware of the influence you have on others.

This year, I encourage you to take advantage of the opportunity to be a Lighthouse. And check out Pemberton's book. Ordinary people, by simply taking time to encourage and support others, can be life-changers. As leaders, remember that you can make an extraordinary impact. *The Lighthouse Effect* teaches us that small acts of kindness and compassion can have far-reaching consequences. As school district leaders, you can promote a culture of appreciation and acknowledgment, celebrating the achievements of students, staff, administrators, and colleagues.

The Lighthouse Effect serves as a powerful reminder of the impact we can have on the lives of those we serve. As you begin this new year, I challenge you to renew a commitment to being beacons of light for students, staff, and fellow administrators—guiding those with whom you come in contact toward brighter and more promising futures.

*You are a guiding light,
even when you're not fully
aware of the influence you
have on others.*

Much of leadership is about bringing out the best in others. What an opportunity you have to be a bright and shining Lighthouse. This year, who will say, "YOU are my Lighthouse"?

Respectfully,

G. Joel Aune
WASA Executive Director