

EMBRACING THE SWING

ROWING TOGETHER TOWARD LEGISLATIVE SUCCESS

"There is a thing that sometimes happens in rowing that is hard to achieve and hard to define. Many crews, even winning crews, never really find it. Others find it but can't sustain it. It's called "swing." It only happens when all eight oarsmen are rowing in such perfection that no single action by anyone is out of sync with those of all the others. It's not just that the oars enter and leave the water precisely the same instant. Sixteen arms must begin to pull, sixteen knees must begin to fold and unfold, eight bodies must begin to slide forward and backward, eight backs must bend and straighten all at once. Each minute action—each subtle turning of wrists—must be mirrored exactly by each oarsman, from one end of the boat to the other. Only then will the boat continue to run, unchecked, fluidly, and gracefully between pulls of the oars. Only then will it feel as if the boat is a part of each of them, moving as if on its own. Only then does pain entirely give way to exultation. Rowing then becomes a kind of perfect language. Poetry, that's what a good swing feels like." Brown. J. D. (2023). p. 161, The Boys in the Boat.

As we draw close to the end of the 2023–24 school year, I'm reminded of the powerful metaphor of rowing, as vividly described in Daniel J. Brown's bestseller *The Boys in the Boat*. This story of nine young men who rowed their way to victory at the 1936 Olympics is more than just a narrative of athletic triumph; it's a testament to the spirit of collaboration and perseverance.

"SWING"...This term has resonated with me deeply, altering my perception of rowing from a mere physical activity to a profound lesson in unity and purpose. In rowing, as in our work, true swing is not merely about the mechanics of movement, but about finding that perfect harmony where every oar moves in sync, propelling the boat forward smoothly and efficiently.

As educational leaders, we too are in a boat, albeit metaphorically, navigating the turbulent waters of education uncertainties. This year has brought its share of challenges: budget shortfalls, staffing crises, dwindling student enrollment, and political hurdles. Yet, like a skilled coxswain, WASA is prepared to guide our 295 school districts through these rough waters by focusing on crucial legislative priorities: Special Education, Pupil Transportation, and adequate funding for Materials, Supplies, and Operating Costs (MSOC).

What does this mean for us as members of WASA? It means that now, more than ever, we need to listen, focus, and coordinate our efforts. Every one of us must engage fully, advocating for public education and lobbying for equitable services. We cannot afford to have anyone sitting idly by; the swing we seek requires all 295 districts and 1,900 members working in concert.

I confess, there have been moments this year when I felt like I was merely riding in the boat rather than rowing. But in a rowing race, as in our efforts, disengagement is not an option. Our swing—our collective effort—arises when each of us understands and embraces our role and its impact on our shared goals. Today is your day to engage elected officials and community members to about rowing in alignment with WASA's Legislative priorities. Together, we will change the lives of students across our state. Row and don't sit idle.

Serving as your WASA President has been a profound honor. As we face the challenges ahead, let us commit to rowing harder and together, ensuring that we not only face the challenges but overcome them, united in our purpose and resolute in our efforts.

Let's keep finding our SWING.



Mike Villarreal is WASA President and Superintendent of Hoquiam School District.

INSPIRING HOPE

CELEBRATING WASA MEMBERS AS BEACONS OF LIGHT



Friends and Colleagues,

As we reflect on the past year, I am reminded of the resilience and dedication that each of you has shown.

Last fall in the September *Hotline*, I shared a message emphasizing the importance of being a "Lighthouse"—a beacon of hope and guidance for the students, staff, and communities we serve and lead. *The Lighthouse Effect*, as described by Steve Pemberton, reminds us that ordinary people with a genuine desire to make a difference can have an extraordinary impact on the lives of others.

I am incredibly proud of the "collaborative spirit" that defines WASA and its members. This sense of community and shared purpose makes WASA strong and effective. By embracing this spirit—whether through innovative educational programs, community engagement initiatives, or simply supporting a colleague in need—you

have all shown what it means to lead with hope. The importance of providing hope cannot be overstated. In times of uncertainty and challenge, hope is what sustains us and drives us forward. The past year has presented extreme challenges to most if not all school district leaders. It seems budget constraints, controversial issues, partisan politics, community division, addressing the diverse needs of students, highly assertive unions, and incivility are ever-present. And yet you have risen to the occasion with remarkable strength and unwavering determination. You have been a guiding light for so many, often without fully realizing the profound influence you have had on those with whom you've come in contact.

As leaders, you have instilled hope in your students, showing them that their dreams are within reach. You have provided hope for your staff, inspiring them to persevere and innovate. You have given hope to your communities, demonstrating that together we can overcome any obstacle. And you have supported one another, reinforcing that even in the toughest times, WASA members are not alone.

As a new school year comes into view, I urge you to renew your commitment to being beacons of light. Your work is difficult, stressful, and often thankless. And yet you are privileged to have been gifted the opportunity to make a difference for people—to have, as Pemberton says, "an extraordinary impact on the lives of others".

Thank you for your unwavering dedication, and for the incredible work you do every day. At WASA we are grateful for the opportunity to serve and support your work; work that is making a huge impact on students and the staff working with them.

Wishing you a restful and rejuvenating summer break. No one deserves it more than you.

Respectfully,

G. Joel Aune
WASA Executive Director