

LEADING AMIDST POLARIZATION:

A FINAL MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Over the past few months, I've spent a good deal of time reflecting on my career as an educator. And today, as I step away from this role, I find myself especially mindful of the profound responsibility—and privilege—it has been to walk alongside you in leadership the past seven years. Serving as your Executive Director has been the greatest honor of my professional life. In addition to your brilliance and integrity, what has always inspired me most is your collective resolve to do what's best and right for kids, even when the path is difficult or dangerous.

Today, that path may feel more grueling than ever. We are leading in a time marked by division, polarization, and ideological strife that all-too-often spills into our schools and board rooms. Public education—once a cornerstone of unity where communities come together around a shared belief in the power of learning—is increasingly a flashpoint in cultural and political conflict.

And yet, I remain convinced: schools can still be the bulwark that brings our communities together. Schools are one of the few remaining places where people of all backgrounds, beliefs, and experiences come together around a singular purpose—our children.

That's where you come in.

Leadership in this environment requires strategy and vision. It requires courage, clarity, and a deep commitment to building unity. Your role is not just to manage schools, but to lead people—to bring them together, build connections, and inspire collective action in service of something far greater than any single perspective.

You do this by running to the fire. By listening deeply. By centering your decisions on what is best for students. By cultivating trust and modeling dignity. And by creating spaces where people feel a strong sense of belonging. Spaces where hope can grow—even amidst conflict.

We don't get to choose the times we live in, but we do get to choose how we lead. And the choice to lead with integrity, empathy, and resolve is one you've made again and again.

As I step away from WASA, I do so with full confidence in your leadership. You possess the strength, toughness, wisdom, and moral compass to navigate whatever comes next—and to do so in a way that keeps kids at the center of everything.

Though I'm leaving this role, I look forward to continuing to support leadership in public education—just not 65 hours a week anymore. I love WASA. I love public education. And know that I have immense respect and admiration for each of you.

Thank you for your tireless commitment, your partnership, and your belief in what public education can be. It has been an honor and a privilege to serve and support you. And never forget—you ARE making a difference.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "G. Joel Aune". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "G" and a stylized "Aune".

G. Joel Aune
WASA Executive Director