

# A CALL TO WASA MEMBERS

## PURSuing AND PROMOTING LEGISLATION THAT SUPPORTS PUBLIC EDUCATION

During the 1994 school year, I transitioned from being a classroom teacher to an elementary assistant principal. During the early years of my administrative journey, I remember how I was confronted with unfunded mandates, and challenging legislative bills resulting in additional costs, all while trying my best to manage and balance funding requests for classroom materials, staffing, maintenance, and operations. I was great at complaining and expressing my frustration each year to my spouse, staff, and friends, and unfortunately that was about the extent of my professional responsiveness to education funding. As a young administrator, I always had a list of excuses of why I couldn't do more, I was busy with "administrative duties" and did not have time to get involved with educational advocacy, especially at the beginning of the school year when administrators are overwhelmed with so many requests and items to complete on the to-do list.

Fast forward to the present, and I have learned that there are always "administrative duties" and more things to be added to-do list. Most importantly, I come to understand that the best way to engage in educational advocacy is to move beyond complaining and act, by leaning in and identifying, pursuing, and promoting legislation that supports public education. I discovered that when I began writing letters, meeting with local legislative representatives, and testifying on various education related bills, I was utilizing my time and energy in a more meaningful and impactful way. I developed working relationships with various legislators that, in some cases, resulted in favorable language and/or support for critical education bills. You can also make a difference by sharing your stories, data, and examples of how bills support or are a barrier to school funding and operations with your local, state, and federal representatives.

I know the start of the school year is a busy time, however political campaigns are in full swing and draft bills will soon appear as the next legislative session is just around the corner. I encourage each of us to become involved in educational advocacy at some level and move beyond complaining to acting by speaking with your local legislative representatives and providing feedback on upcoming educational bills. Please reach out to other administrators and visit the WASA website for more information and [Washington School Funding](#) for resources that you can use to help advocate for your school, district, and public education.

Have a great start to the school year.



*Bob Maxwell is WASA President and Superintendent of Pullman Public Schools.*

## A MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



**As educational leaders, we are facing an unprecedented challenge: the increasing politicization of our schools and communities, particularly in this election season.**

This issue goes beyond the classroom and community—it strikes at the heart of our democracy. But rather than shy away from these divisive times, schools are uniquely positioned to confront and seize opportunities that empower students to effectively wrestle with complex issues in their educational journey toward adulthood.

Schools are not just spaces for learning—they are the foundation of our democratic values. It is here that we introduce and reinforce the principles that sustain our democratic institutions and prepare students for civic life. In a time of political division and the overwhelming spread of misinformation—fueled in large part by biased media coverage—schools remain one of the few places where students can be taught how to discern fact from fiction. In fact, schools are places where students must be taught how to make the distinction between reliable information and misinformation.

Schools should play an essential role in fostering critical thinking, teaching students to assess information, identify credible sources, and navigate the increasingly complex landscape of AI-generated content and disinformation. Granted, these skills have always been the focus of good teaching. And yes, we know they are essential for the preservation of democracy.

However, this is a new day in America. We must ask ourselves: Have we lost the ability to engage in civil, thoughtful discourse? Are the divisions in this country beyond repair? Who or what can turn the tide? I believe public education can and must double down in our commitment to modeling and teaching our students how to embrace diverse perspectives and engage in substantive, sometimes difficult conversations that are respectful, even when spirited.

Are we fully committed to developing critical thinking skills, empathy, kindness, and respect? Is the system really teaching students to listen, to seek understanding rather than deepen division? As leaders of public schools, it is our duty to build this capacity in our students—because the future of our nation depends on it. The Founding Fathers believed that an educated citizenry was crucial to the sustainability and success of American democracy. They feared that without

widespread education, citizens would be ill-equipped to participate in self-governance, making democracy vulnerable to corruption, manipulation, and tyranny.

The stakes have never been higher, and public education is the key. School district leaders must continue to lead with purpose and conviction. Yes, this work is difficult. Yet if we are not leading, then someone else will. The work you do today in your schools will shape the future of our country. I implore you to keep striving to prepare students for a world that is increasingly complex and challenging—a world where our fragile democracy may be wobbling a bit.

As it always has, America's future will soon rest in the hands of the young people we have the privilege of educating. This is your leadership challenge—to sharpen their minds, instill in them the values of democracy, and equip them with the critical skills they need to navigate an increasingly complex world.

I have no doubt you are up to that challenge.

Respectfully,

G. Joel Aune  
WASA Executive Director