

DECEMBER 2024



NEWS

The WASA News is a monthly publication that provides key information to you in a concise, quick-read format. We hope you find WASA News to be an efficient way to keep abreast of new information, emerging issues, and timely resources. Be reminded that previous issues of the WASA News can be found on our [website](#).



"The future of our nation depends on our ability to find common ground despite our differences."

– John Lewis

Promoting Civil Discourse: A Leadership Imperative for School District Leaders

Over the past decade, we have experienced two contentious presidential elections, a global pandemic, and a host of controversial, deeply divisive issues. The splintering of our society and the erosion of civil discourse have become alarmingly apparent—from national politics to local school board meetings, and everything in between. It seems the tone of our interactions has become increasingly harsh, personal, and polarized on many fronts. Personally, it feels as though we may be losing our way as a nation, and I fear that without the ability to engage in spirited dialogue that is civil, substantive, and productive, our democracy could ultimately be at risk.

So, what does this mean for school district leaders? I believe it presents both a considerable challenge and an urgent opportunity. Can we—and should we—leverage our leadership positions to work on this problem? I say the answer is yes. The responsibility for restoring civil discourse may well rest with leaders in public education and the students we serve. Our leadership can set the tone—not only for our school districts but also for the broader community.

Now more than ever, it is imperative that we teach young people how to listen, engage thoughtfully, and respectfully disagree. We must create opportunities for spirited debate on issues of import and magnitude, where students think deeply, and develop well-informed positions based on fact. We must aim to construct an environment where diverse perspectives are valued, and kindness is not viewed as a weakness.

This is not just a moral imperative; it's a leadership responsibility. Public education plays a critical role in preparing the next generation to uphold the democratic values of empathy, compromise, and mutual respect. These skills are as essential as any academic subject and are fundamental to the future well-being of our nation.

WASA members share a commitment to the well-being of our students, the integrity of public education, and the strength of our democracy. Together, WASA members can lead by cultivating a culture of civility in our schools and communities—where healthy, respectful debate is the norm. This is an aspirational yet achievable goal for school district leaders. Through effective leadership, sound policies, and intentional focus, WASA members can lead this vital work and alter the trajectory of America through the students under your care.

Public education has always been a cornerstone of our democracy, shaping the leaders and citizens of tomorrow. We find ourselves once again, in a moment that calls for vision, courage, integrity, and decency—a moment that

calls for **Leadership, Trust, and Advocacy**. Together, WASA members can meet this moment, guide communities, and help restore the civility our nation so desperately needs. If we don't answer the call, who will?

With deepest respect and admiration,



G. Joel Aune
WASA Executive Director

[CLICK HERE FOR RESOURCES FOR PROMOTING CIVIL DISCOURSE IN SCHOOLS](#)



Marissa Rathbone Named New Assistant Executive Director for Government Relations

We are pleased to announce the selection of Marissa Rathbone as our new Assistant Executive Director for Government Relations here at WASA. Marissa will succeed Dan Steele, who recently announced his intent to retire at the end of this year—June 30, 2025.

Rathbone, currently serving as the Director of Strategic Advocacy for the Washington State School Directors' Association (WSSDA), will join the WASA leadership team on July 1, 2025. Marissa has over twenty years of experience in education as a classroom teacher and program manager, as well as serving at OSPI as a program supervisor and director. With a wealth of experience in legislative advocacy and background in K-12

education, she has earned widespread respect across the education community here in Washington state.

Marissa's stellar work at WSSDA over the past six years has showcased her capacity to navigate complex policy issues and effectively advocate for educational priorities. Her knowledge of the state legislature, coupled with the strong relationships she has built with legislators and her colleagues, makes her uniquely qualified for this critical role. Her long-time commitment to K-12 education, combined with her legislative advocacy expertise, positions her to build on the remarkable legacy of Dan Steele, whose distinguished tenure at WASA has set the gold-standard for legislative leadership.

We are thrilled to welcome Marissa to the WASA team, as her experience and passion for public education will serve WASA members well as we continue our work to advance policies and advocate for resources that support students, educators, and school systems across Washington state.

Please join us in congratulating Marissa Rathbone on her new role here at WASA.

UPCOMING WASA EVENTS



Leading Your District's AI Integration

Virtual
December 6 | 12–1 p.m.



Winter Conference

Virtual
December 10 | 8:30–11:30 a.m.
Follow up: December 17 | 12–1 p.m.



Finding Your Voice: 2025 Leg Session Preview

Virtual
December 11 | 12–1 p.m.



AASA Lunch and Learn What to Expect in the 119th Congress

Virtual
December 12 | 12–1 p.m.



Lunch & Learn: Navigating Difficult Bargains and Strikes

Virtual
December 17 | 12–1 p.m.



Legislative Conference

SeaTac Hilton
January 11 & 12

REMINDERS

Update Your Profile

If you haven't already, please help us keep our membership directory up to date by taking a moment to upload your photo to your WASA member profile page. Contact Heather Chard at hchard@wasa-oly.org if you have questions or need assistance.



Connect with Us

Be sure to follow us on **Facebook**, **Instagram**, and **Twitter** for information on upcoming conferences and workshops, legislative news and updates, and school news.



In case you missed the most recent edition, a link to the September WASA *Hotline* can be found [here](#).

The most recent edition of the *Hotline* features:



- Advocacy Article from Dana Rosanbach
- Inclusion article from Joey Castilleja
- Ron Banner on Student Youth Councils
- AASA Board Updates
- WA Purple Star Award articles from Kathi Weight and Ben Ferney
- Staff Spotlight on Heather Chard



WASA Office Schedule

Happy Holidays!

The WASA office will be closed for the holidays beginning Friday, December 20 and will reopen Friday, January 3.



WASA Equity Statement

WASA's Educational Statement was adopted by the Board back in April, 2022. The purpose of the statement is to publicly clarify our beliefs and vision, while reinforcing WASA's commitment to supporting you in this important work. We hope the statement will help launch or extend essential conversations in schools and districts about the kind of leadership, culture, and support needed to ensure opportunity and success for every student. View the statement [here](#).

STAY IN THE KNOW

Are Your CBAs Current with the Law?

As you begin to prepare for another bargaining cycle, it is considered best practice to have current CBAs reviewed by legal counsel. Much has changed over the past few years, and there may be portions of your current CBAs that are not current with the law or contain problematic language.

FAFSA is Now Available

The 2025-26 Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is now available to students, earlier than expected, thanks to successful beta testing. It's essential to support students in preparing for the FAFSA. Unfortunately, we're on track for **a shortfall of nearly 600,000 credentialed workers**, including a significant

gap in bachelor's degrees, apprenticeships, and other key certifications. Completion of the FAFSA is **one of the best predictors** of whether a high school senior will go on to college. **Click here** to learn how to get FAFSA-ready!



Frontline Webinar

Using Research-Backed Data to Drive Student Success and Boost Teacher Retention

December 5th, 2024 @ 12pm ET

Join WASA and Frontline for a webinar, designed specifically for district leaders who are committed to using data more strategically to improve student success and enhance teacher retention. Led by Kevin Agnello, PhD, Sara Thomas, M.Ed., this session will focus on two of the most critical challenges facing school leaders today: preparing students for post-secondary success and retaining top educators.

This webinar will help you:

- Focus on the right metrics
- Prioritize with purpose
- Hear from the field

Register today!

Toolkit: Moving from Conflict to Conversation

View our latest toolkit! **This webpage** offers a comprehensive suite of resources designed to support educational leaders in navigating controversial topics with confidence and clarity.

Developed by experts in communications, depolarization, and public engagement, these tools provide actionable strategies for managing difficult conversations, improving public perceptions of K-12 education, and fostering constructive dialogue within school communities.

Featuring courses, research-based practices, and frameworks like the Dignity Index and the Leadership



Next Level Leaders

Now Accepting Applications for Next Level Leaders – Cohort 2

Applications are now open for the second cohort of the Next Level Leaders (NLL) program, set to begin in the summer of 2025. Next Level Leaders is a Leadership Development Academy, specifically designed to prepare educational administrators to succeed within today's demanding environment.

This two-year learning community focuses on developing both individual and system leadership behaviors while providing a professional learning network that fosters a collaborative culture and system-wide commitment to equity.

For more information and to apply, visit

www.nll.academy or contact Ashley Barker, Project Lead at **ashley@nll.academy**.



Summer 2025: Call for Presenters

AWSP and WASA are thrilled to announce an opportunity to present at our annual Summer Conference for educational leaders on June 22-24, 2025 in Spokane! The call for presenters is now open. This is your chance to shine at an event designed specifically for those who are passionate about shaping the future of education. Under the theme "Leadership for a New Era," we invite school and district leaders to share their insights and experiences in one of the following impactful areas:

Listening Cycle, these resources empower leaders to build trust, uphold dignity, and engage stakeholders effectively in today's complex educational landscape.

Your Voice, Our Mission: Member Survey Coming Soon

At WASA, we are committed to serving, supporting, and leading our members in ways that help you excel as a school district leader. To inform our work and future planning in this regard, we will be launching a survey mid-January to gauge member perceptions and secure your feedback. Thank you in advance for responding to the survey. Your input is invaluable, and we appreciate you taking a few minutes to share your thoughts.

Keep an eye out for the survey next month—we look forward to hearing from you!



Purple Star Recognition—Application Now Available

This is the second year of Washington State's Purple Star award program. The Purple Star program is designed to recognize school districts that support military-connected children and families. OSPI has asked WASA to design and execute implementation of the Purple Star recognition program here in Washington. Applications for the 2024–25 school year are being accepted through February. To learn more about award criteria and how to apply, visit [our website](#).

- Fostering Collaborative Cultures
- Technology Leadership in Education
- Building Resilient Schools
- Culturally Responsive Leadership
- Transformative Leadership

The submission deadline is **Friday, December 20, 2024**.



WASA President Nomination Period Now Open

WASA Past-president Mike Villarreal is seeking nominees for the 2025-26 WASA President-elect. Nominees must presently serve on the east side of Washington state (WASA

Regions 101, 105, 123, and 171). The candidate elected by the membership will serve three years on the WASA Board: president-elect in 2025-26, president in 2026-27, and past-president in 2027-28. If you, or someone you know is interested, connect with [Mike Villarreal](#) or Executive Director [Joel Aune](#) to nominate, self-nominate, or learn more about this leadership opportunity. The deadline for nominations is January 3, 2025.



Banner Named Superintendent of the Year

Clover Park School District Superintendent Ron Banner has been named the 2025 Washington State Superintendent of the Year by WASA. The **announcement** was made last month during WASA's Fall Superintendent Component meeting in Spokane.

TIMELINE

Selection of Candidates for Interviews:

March 3–4, 2025

Preliminary Interviews:

March 12–15, 2025

Final Interviews:

March 20–22, 2025

Selection of New Exec Dir:

March 26, 2025

Search for Executive Director

APPLICATION DEADLINE: FEBRUARY 23, 2025



www.wasa-oly.org/ExecDir2024

Search for Executive Director

Last September, Executive Director Joel Aune announced his plans to retire from WASA effective June 30, 2025. Partnering with Northwest Leadership Associates, the WASA Board has launched the search for the next Executive Director. The official announcement of the opening was issued last month. To learn more about the position, including the application process, [click here](#). Reach out to **Dennis Ray**, **Tom Rockefeller**, or **Joel Aune** if you have questions about the position.

Thank you to Dennis Ray, Northwest Leadership Associates, for offering to conduct the search free of charge.



The upcoming 2025 Legislative Session is set to convene in just over a month (January 13). WASA, along with other education associations who have partnered with us in a system-wide coalition (including AESD, WSSDA, WASBO, ASWP, WSPTA, AEA, and WACTA), have been working with legislators since April to educate them about—and advocate for—the key funding issues contained in **WASA's 2025 Legislative Platform**: amply funding Special Education, Materials, Supplies and Operating Costs (MSOC), and Pupil Transportation.

Legislators' reception to our messages have been generally positive and there is a level of optimism in 2025 that we have not seen for quite some time. In the next few weeks, legislators will be "pre-filing" legislation to be addressed in the 2025 Session—and we expect bills to be introduced addressing each of our priorities.

Unfortunately, even though many key legislators have indicated support for the appropriate funding of the "Big Three," there has been a growing conversation in the last few months about a potentially substantial budget shortfall in the 2025–27 Operating Budget that must be drafted and adopted before the upcoming session adjourns. The size of the shortfall is heavily disputed, with discussion of anywhere between a \$5.0 billion to \$12 billion gap between state revenue and required expenditures. Understand that state revenues continue to climb; however, state expenses continue to rise at a faster clip. Even though the size of the funding gap continues to be debated, legislators typically hedge towards the higher number. Regardless of what the facts turn out to be, it is apparent legislators have two motives in discussing the unusually large shortfall: (1) to temper the expectations of advocates, agencies, and legislators; and (2) to lay the groundwork for a revenue package (i.e., taxes).

We understand the state's financial situation; however, our message to legislators continues to focus on the urgent need to shore up school district budgets. With a majority of school districts currently in financial distress, it is clear the state has a systemic K-12 funding problem and the chronic underfunding of basic education programs **MUST** be addressed. 2017 and 2018's so-called McCleary "solution" (legislation adopted to appease the Supreme Court in the *McCleary v. State* funding lawsuit) exacerbated the state's funding inequities between school districts. The pandemic just made the situation even worse.

Since the McCleary case was discharged, the education community has pleaded with legislators to ensure basic

education was amply funded—as required by the constitution and reaffirmed by the Court in the lawsuit. However, legislators in large part have dismissed our concerns. Now, with the continued under-funding of basic education programs—specifically Special Education, MSOC, and Pupil Transportation—legislators are starting to recognize their “solution” has fallen short. In fact, Special Education funding did not just fall short; as the McCleary solution was being adopted, legislators consciously put off addressing the issue because it was “too complex.” Today, they are facing a growing funding problem that cannot be ignored.

All school administrators are strongly encouraged to be engaged in the legislative process in the 2025 Session. Even though the majority of the education associations are aligned in our efforts for basic education funding, we need our members to “tell your story” to your local lawmakers. WASA will continue to provide you with the resources and tools to effectively advocate—and advocate with “one voice” with your colleagues; however, it is incumbent upon you to carry the message. In addition to our weekly legislative newsletter (*This Week in Olympia*, or *TWIO*) and our weekly legislative podcast, we have established two other key resources this year: our education funding website and our school funding Tool Kit. The website, located at: www.waschoolfunding.org, provides useful—and easy to understand—information on the current funding dilemma so many school districts currently face. This website is intended to be “informational” and not a specific advocacy tool, so we encourage you to share this with your school board, parents, and community members.

The second resource is a **Tool Kit**, complete with talking points, videos, social media content, and other communication resources—to assist and align our members as you engage with your own legislators. You are encouraged to regularly review the Tool Kit, as it will evolve as we continue to add resources. Recently, we added **sample templates** to help you display funding shortfalls (state funding vs district expenditures) of Special Education, MSOC, and Pupil Transportation in a common form. Our effort is to ensure WASA—and our partners—not only regularly engage, but also speak with one voice as much as possible. We encourage you to use the resources in the Tool Kit to advocate for WASA's 2025 Platform.

This fall, we also put together an advocacy Lunch & Learn series. The Finding Your Voice series includes three components. Part I, presented September 25, provided a comprehensive review of WASA's Platform. Part II, presented October 25, was an advocacy training program to assist you in being an effective advocate. Recordings and PPT presentations of each session are available on the **Conference Resources** section of the WASA website.

The third Lunch & Learn will provide a preview of the 2025 Legislative Session. It is scheduled for December 11; details and registration information is available **HERE**.

Finally, we encourage you to participate in the annual WASA/WSSDA/WASBO Legislative Conference. The 2025 Conference will have a new location, new format and new timing. The Conference will be held at the Hilton Seattle Airport & Conference Center on Saturday and Sunday, January 11–12, immediately prior to the Legislature's convening. Additional information and registration is available **HERE**.



One of the most rewarding aspects of WASA membership is the chance to connect with professional colleagues who share your commitment to educational excellence. Through a variety of events, forums, and collaborative spaces, WASA brings together education leaders to:

- Learn together, and from one another
- Share best practices and innovative solutions for today's challenges
- Engage in meaningful discussions to advance the work of school district leaders
- Build and strengthen a professional community grounded in shared values and goals to advance educational

equity

Be Part of a Connected Community of Leaders ...

WASA's networking opportunities provide school administrators with a platform to foster lasting relationships, exchange insights, and collaborate on impactful initiatives that shape the future of education in Washington. Expand your network and enrich your journey in leadership by joining WASA's dynamic community today.

Do you know of an individual who would benefit from a WASA membership? Reach out and invite them today: [Link to Application](#)

RESOURCES

This month's featured resources include the following:

- [How Students Say School Policies That Target LGBTQ+ Youth Affect Them](#) | Education Week
- [How Teachers Can Help LGBTQ+ Students With Post-Election Anxiety](#) | Education Week
- [How to use Election Outcome to Teach About Regulating Emotions](#) | K-12 Dive
- [Students Learn the Value of Civic Engagement and Constructive Dialogue](#) | K-12 Dive
- [What would it mean if President-elect Trump dismantled the US Department of Education?](#) | The Conversation
- [How School Leaders Can Tap into the Education Department's AI Toolkit](#) | K-12 Dive
- [Should Schools Have Cellphone Restrictions for Teachers Too?](#) | Education Week

Resources for Martin Luther King Day and Black History Month:

- [The Best of Our Resources](#) | Southern Poverty Law Center
- [Teaching About Martin Luther King Jr.](#) | Civil Rights Teaching
- [Resources for Martin Luther King Jr. Day](#) | Edutopia
- [Black History Month Resource Guide for Educators](#) | Center for Racial Justice in Education
- [Classroom Resources for Black History Month](#) | PBS

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING CALENDAR

December

- 12.06.24** Leading Your District's AI Integration | 12:00-1:00 p.m.
- 12.10.24** Winter Conference 2024: Leading with Intention | 8:30-11:30 a.m.
- 12.11.24** Early Career Superintendent Academy | 9:30-11:30 a.m.
- 12.11.24** WA Legislature 2025 Session Preview | 12:00-1:00 p.m.
- 12.12.24** Global Instructional Leadership Network | 8:30-10:00 a.m.
- 12.17.24** Winter Conference Follow-Up Session | 8:30-9:30 a.m.
- 12.17.24** Navigating Difficult Bargains and Strikes | 12:00-1:00 p.m.

January

- 01.09.25** Special Education Directors Academy | 8:30-10:00 a.m.
- 01.11-12.25** WASA • WSSDA • WASBO Legislative Conference | Seatac
- 01.13.25** Mentor Academy | 8:30-10:30 a.m.
- 01.13.25** Early Career Superintendent Academy | 9:30-11:30 a.m.
- 01.16.25** Stevens Clay Lunch & Learn: Public Records | 12:00-1:00 p.m.
- 01.23.25** Global Instructional Leadership Network | 8:30-10:00 a.m.
- 01.23.25** Aspiring Central Office Leadership Academy | 9:00-11:00 a.m.
- 01.24.25** Leading Your District's AI Integration | 12:00-1:00 p.m.

February

- 02.03-06.25** Artificial Intelligence Innovation Summit | Seatac
- 02.04.25** Building Bridges in Education Lunch & Learn | 12:00-1:00 p.m.
- 02.05.25** Special Education Directors Academy | 8:30-10:00 a.m.
- 02.10.25** Early Career Superintendent Academy | 9:30-11:30 a.m.
- 02.10.25** Mentor Academy | 8:30-10:30 a.m.
- 02.13.25** Global Instructional Leadership Network | 8:30-10:00 a.m.
- 02.21.25** Leading Your District's AI Integration | 12:00-1:00 p.m.
- 02.27.25** WSSDA Annual Conference
- 11.22.24** WASA Superintendent Component Breakfast at WSSDA | 7:00 a.m.
- 11.23.24** 2nd & 3rd Year Superintendents In-Person at WSSDA | 7:00 a.m.



SPONSOR SPOTLIGHT



OAC

This month's Sponsor Spotlight features WASA's Diamond-level sponsors—**OAC**. We are grateful for their

unwavering support of our members and programs!
Click their link to learn more about them. View all of our
amazing Diamond-level sponsors [on our website](#).



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