

A MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT

This is an exciting yet intense time of year for football fans, as college athletes pursue their dreams of being drafted by an NFL team. Teams are making moves — releasing, trading, and positioning themselves for another season with hopes of reaching the big stage.

I'm reminded of a powerful story involving former Seattle Seahawks kicker Steven Hauschka. In the 2013 season, the Seahawks paid Hauschka \$715,000 to do one job — kick the ball through the uprights. That year, he made an impressive 33 of 35 field goal attempts over 16 games, ranking 2nd in accuracy in the NFL.

Hauschka's success continued into the 2014 playoffs as the Seahawks battled toward the Super Bowl. But it was the NFC Championship game against the San Francisco 49ers that provided an unforgettable leadership moment. With the game tight, Head Coach Pete Carroll called on Hauschka to attempt a 53-yard field goal that could pull the Seahawks within one point. As Hauschka took the field, he noticed the wind markers indicating a strong crosswind. Despite being paid handsomely as a kicker to simply follow instructions, Hauschka knew attempting this kick wasn't the right call. He approached Carroll and stated, "We shouldn't kick this."

In that intense, defining moment, Carroll could have disregarded his kicker's input and let him kick the ball anyway. Instead, he called a timeout and listened. The Seahawks didn't attempt the long field goal. Instead, Russell Wilson soon threw a 35-yard touchdown to take the lead, which they never relinquished on their way to the NFC Championship.

This story resonates with me because it highlights the power of leadership and active listening, even in pressure-packed environments. Carroll checked his ego, sought out a different perspective, and trusted the judgment of someone witnessing a specific situation up close.

As educational leaders, we are facing our own intense challenges with financial difficulties impacting many districts. This is precisely when we need to exemplify humble leadership — seeking out diverse viewpoints, empowering others' ideas, and truly listening to those closest to the issues. Our strength comes from this openness and collaboration. With WASA's 1,300 members across Washington, we have an opportunity to guide school systems by listening to the insights of those around us proposing solutions.

As John Cantwell stated, "A great leader understands that true wisdom and strength come from humility and listening...empowering others to contribute ideas fully, and actively listening to those they lead. True leadership serves a greater purpose, bringing people together with compassion and open minds and ears."

During even the most stressful, high-pressure times, humble leadership paired with active listening will guide us toward wiser choices.

Like Coach Carroll, we must pause our instincts and genuinely absorb different perspectives that may illuminate new paths forward. Exercising humility and priming our ears is a sign of remarkable strength — demonstrating a growth mindset and fostering trust among teams invested in finding successful solutions together.

Best of luck as you LISTEN to your players!



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

The AI Revolution EMBRACING OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES WITH WASA'S SUPPORT



Over the past nine months, the explosion of Generative AI has been presenting both opportunities and challenges for educators and school district leaders.

The potential to significantly personalize the learning experience for students along with enhanced accessibility for all students, may ultimately be a game-changer. AI also presents exciting opportunities to increase operational efficiencies, as well as a more proficient and sophisticated use of data to inform instruction and improve student performance. And finally, integrating AI in education prepares students for a future where digital literacy and AI familiarity are indispensable, equipping them with essential skills for life after high school.

At the same time, AI is presenting challenges

to school district leaders. Questions concerning academic integrity, as well as ethical considerations including privacy and data security are top of mind. As with any change, ensuring all students have access to AI tools and resources poses a challenge, highlighting the digital divide between different communities and socio-economic backgrounds.

These opportunities and challenges underscore the complex landscape of AI in education, demanding a balanced approach to leverage benefits while addressing potential drawbacks.

At WASA, we have been preparing since last fall to support you in the work of learning and leveraging the power of AI in your schools—to meet students where they are and where they need to be at the time of graduation, consider changes to the instructional delivery system, and improve teaching. We also intend to support you in utilizing AI to increase system efficiencies on the operational side of your school district.

Kim Fry, whose title was changed to *Assistant Executive Director of Learning Innovation and AI* shortly after January 1, is on point for this important work (see Kim's piece on page 14). This move will ensure WASA is positioned to provide support and leadership in your work to bring AI into your school districts. We aim to be at the forefront, learning and visioning alongside you.

AI will be prominent in the future of education. We look forward to working with WASA members to ensure **you** are leading this work, and **not being led** by AI. We hope you will take advantage of the resources WASA, and our valued partners will make available to you in the months to come.

Respectfully,

G. Joel Aune
WASA Executive Director