

State and Federal Education News

I attended two days of training at WEA headquarters on October 16th and 17th that was very enlightening. President Obama and his Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan are playing hardball on the topic of educational reform. Their tactic is to withhold federal funding to states for Title 1 and state Education Reform efforts. Many of you may have heard of the Race to the Top program. What this is essentially is a thinly veiled attempt at holding educators accountable for student improvement by requiring state and local districts to demonstrate evidence of a link to educator's evaluations based on student outcomes. Another requirement for receiving these funds is proof that there are charter schools in the state.

As you know, Washington's coffers are badly in need of replenishing and Governor Gregoire is doing her best to demonstrate that Washington is in compliance with these requirements. The governor has been working with President Mary Lindquist and other WEA leaders to complete the application for the federal funds. The general consensus among WEA leadership is that it will be important to be an active participant while these changes are being discussed. There has been a good deal of work on the topic of Alternative Compensation and Educator Evaluation systems with a goal of contributing ideas to facilitate change of these processes without fully compromising Association principles.

Additionally, the Feds are meddling in the provision of funds designed to help low performing schools in the nation. There are 25 schools that have been identified nationwide to be the recipients of "assistance". It is somewhat likely that one or more of these schools are in Highline. Carla Jackson has not yet been notified, nor has Mary Lindquist. The reform assistance that is being suggested by the Feds involves drastic measures requiring that some of the terms be negotiated should any of the schools be Highline schools.

What does this mean for Highline educators? It means that these are challenging times to be leading our great organization. As president of HEA, it is my responsibility to keep lines of communication open and to follow the lead of WEA and NEA. This means in-depth conversations on the topic of creating a more effective evaluation system for all of our members. The evaluation system that we have currently outlined in our contract is outdated and not in keeping with our progressive practices. As with all contract changes, the evaluation process will be ratified by all members when a tentative agreement has been reached at the negotiating table. It is likely that it won't be until the spring of 2011 before a new comprehensive evaluation process will be presented for your approval. Regular updates of progress on this work will be communicated and your input will be solicited as the work progresses. I can assure you that compensation and evaluation of your effectiveness as educators will not hinge on a single (or a set of) standardized test scores.

Panasonic Partnership Update

A new team comprised of continuing and new HEA members will be traveling to Orlando, Florida on November 5th. New members on the team are Allison Reynolds of White Center Elementary, Jeb Binns of Highline High School, Paul Didier of Academy of Arts and Academics, and Megan Olson of Bow Lake Elementary. Returning HEA members are Steven Roiko and HEA vice-president Terry Carlson, both of Cascade Middle school. James Conlon will accompany the team as well.

The systems partners met on October 21st to identify new topics and discuss next steps for ongoing work. There was agreement to continue work on the implementation of the Accountability work (School Improvement Plans and Collaboration on identified goals at the building level), a continuation of the work of identifying school support for struggling schools, creation of shared definitions and practices around "Collaboration" among the many roles and levels of our system, and a district wide performance goal in the area of Math.

All these topics will be addressed when the Panasonic Partners (HEA, Central Administration, Principals, and School Board) meet 5 more times during the course of this school year. The Panasonic Foundation provides experienced facilitators for the purpose of assisting local leaders in reaching their goals, hence the name. I will update members on progress as the year progresses.

Call for Participants on HEA Work

Please consider becoming more active and help move the goals of the Association forward by stepping up to participate in work listed below.

Title	Commitment	Estimated Duration
Professional Development Support for Members Committee of 4-5	Two to three 1.5 hour meetings. Make a recommendation to Executive Board and Reps	Short term – terminate after recommendation Stipended chairperson
Survey lead	Use Survey Monkey tool to input questions (easy if tech savvy). President/Director to provide content	Three to four times this year. Stipended position
Facebook Association page Developer	Set up initial page, act as advisor when needed.	Depends on need and agreement. Stipend amount depends on above.
Ballot counters	Two Fridays this year February 26 and April 23	Twice for 2-3 hours Dinner provided

Contact me at shawkins@washingtonea.org to volunteer for any of these positions.

Bargaining Team Training and Team Renewal

An invitation only bargaining training will be held on November 19. We especially need Gen Ed Elementary, Middle School and High School representation. Please recommend strong, articulate and whole systems thinkers to be invited to the training on the sign up sheet. (At the Rep council meeting) Your recommendation will result in an invitation to the overview training and not an obligation by either party to be placed on the team.