

Unfilled positions show misplaced WEA management priorities

I was thinking back to my days in my school district working as a Speech Language Pathologist and about the day I decided to get involved in my union. One of my special education students was battering my colleagues on a daily basis. After three years of working with this student, my turn finally came — he bit my arm — hard. I was told by my Special Ed Director that “it was just a scratch — no big deal.” Subsequently, I watched as a bruise about five inches long and three inches wide emerged on my arm.

I reported the incident on an L& I report that mysteriously disappeared. My concern for my colleagues, as well as for the other students and the child himself, led me to try to make the situation better. I went to the parents and then to my principal, but no action was taken. Around that time, I was visited by a member of the association bargaining team and they asked me four questions:

- ◆ What gives you joy and energy in the work you do?
- ◆ What drains your energy?
- ◆ What can your union do to help you?
- ◆ What are you willing to do for your union?

Until this visit, it had not occurred to me to go to my union on this issue. Once I told my story to the interviewer, I was pointed to “Employee Protection” language

in the CBA —and guess who became grievance chair the next fall? As a grievance rep, I experienced first hand the power of WEA — and my power. WEA staff actually got on a plane or jumped in their cars and drove to Yakima to help me defend and advocate for the members of my union. In time, I realized I had the capability — and a responsibility to my colleagues — to pursue WEA staff work. I wanted to pay it forward and be there for my colleagues as WEA staff had been there for me.

I am coming up on my sixth year of staff work and I have to say I am sorely disappointed by what I see happening in the WEA. We are supposed to be focused on helping leaders and members organize and advocate for their issues. We are supposed to be the mediating institution where members can stand together and fight for what is right — for themselves, their students and for public education. Yet the priorities of the organization appear to now center around cutting costs, saving money, and

implementing a staff hiring freeze that is gutting the heart and soul of this organization.

I question the budgeting and spending organizational priorities that are emerging: the Advocacy and Organizing Center, in the last 1-1/2 years, has reduced or eliminated a number of member resources and staff positions, limiting our ability as an organization to effectively represent and provide appropriate resources to the leaders and members of WEA. The unfilled staff positions and programs referenced above include services provided in the following areas:

- ◆ WEA member-to-member conflict mediation (Lynn Baugh/Lynda Gebhard), allowing an internal process to work with our members rather than relying on school districts to address these issues which are usually ignored or handled through disciplinary action.

- ◆ Student WEA (Lynda Gebhard), which provides the foundation and establishes the relationship for union membership to college students who will graduate to work in the education field.



WEASO President Janet Beck.

◆ Bargaining/organizing specialist position (formerly held by Jim Fotter), whose job responsibilities included developing and coordinating member trainings in bargaining and organizing, oversight of the state bargaining program and bargaining crises in locals — one position has already been eliminated and the remaining position may not be replaced upon retirement of the current staff person (Jeff Wahlquist).

◆ At a time when we have a huge need for the Organizational Development work with our members in buildings with unhealthy work environments, which will only increase as the pressure mounts on the system with the anticipated legislative budget cuts, one staff position has not been replaced (Lynn Baugh) and the one remaining staff person is overwhelmed with this work — we have heard this position, and this resource for our members, may be eliminated when the current staff member (Kevin Ramsey) retires.

◆ The arbitration specialist staff position, which provides critical program oversight, feedback, support, and training for staff in contract enforcement for all our WEA locals, may not be replaced upon the retirement of the current-

ly assigned staff member (Joanne Christopher).

◆ Support for locals and districts statewide in training and resources for passage of levies and bonds. What used to be provided as a free resource (Rosemary Wolf) to our members and leaders has now been outsourced for this year and there is a question about whether it will continue beyond this year.

◆ The WEA Leadership Academy (WEALA) was cancelled last year and it is unknown whether this annual training opportunity for WEA members will be offered for 2010.

This work, if provided at all, is now expected to be done by the remaining WEA field and headquarters staff, at a time when the workload has dramatically increased due to impending WEA member RIFs, ongoing and extended bargaining crises, and the other devastating effects our members will experience from the actions of the Legislature this spring. In addition to the positions detailed above, we will also experience a number of retirements of UniServ field staff, and with their departure, WEA will suffer the loss of a wealth of experience and knowledge.

At the same time, WEA has spent millions of our members' dues dollars contracting out legal services when we could hire staff attorneys to do the work better and more efficiently and in a cost-efficient manner. A number of UniServ council offices are located in buildings within a few miles of each other, at a huge cost of members' dues, rather than consolidating expenses by sharing a building.

How can WEA continue to meet its objectives and ramp up to address new challenges through the Comprehensive Strategic Direction if it does not make it a priority to maintain the level of staffing that was barely adequate to address the environment of the past? As we struggle through these tough economic times, WEASO stands ready to work with WEA management and governance to ensure the members and leaders are provided with the support and resources they need and deserve — they deserve the WEA that I experienced when I was a member.

Janet Beck, WEASO President

Everything is political these days

Many WEASO members have been engaged in the political process in recent months. Soundview UnServ Director Toni Graf joined WEA members at a meeting with Senators Eric Oemig and

Rosemary McAuliffe regarding HB 2261.

WEA MidState UniServ Rep Sue Laib and WEA members met with Republican Sen. Curtis King of the Quality Education Council.

WEA Eastern Washington UniServ Director Sally McNair helped organize an anti-Tim Eyman news conference in Spokane.



Left to right: Sally McNair (WEA-Eastern), Toni Graf (Soundview), and Sue Laib (WEA MidState).

Off to WAR (College) for unionists

Key WEASO leaders are attending the National Staff Organization Winter Advocacy Retreat, often called WAR College. They include WEASO Exec Board members Janet Beck, Regina Redmond, Stephanie Mikos, Madeline Garland, Randy Paddock, Joanne

Christopher and Jace Borba; Bargaining Team members Mike Horner, Sharon Closson, John Hardie, Edna Barnhouse-Lopez and Dale Folkerts; and Organizing Committee Chair Jeff Wahlquist. They'll be learning and sharing the very latest in union organizing

and bargaining techniques and strategies.

Other WEASO Bargaining Team members include Lisa Lewison, Mike Boyer and Sally McNair.



Left to right: Madeline Garland (Kent), Mike Boyer (WEA-Eastern), John Hardie (WEA Legal) and Sharon Closson (WEA in Spokane) all volunteer time and energy to help WEASO in many ways.

WEASO members help ESP fight for a living wage

WEASO members from WEA MidState are fighting hard alongside education support professionals who seek a living wage. Other WEASO members joined their MidState colleagues at a recent rally in the snow for Yakima ESP

members. And WEASO President Janet Beck was quoted in a Yakima Herald-Republic story about local living wage campaigns for WEA education support professionals.

"The standard is sub-standard," Beck told the paper. "We

can push the issue with local bargaining to bring it to light, which is what we're doing." But, she says, "It has to be a conversation on a broader level: what work do people do, what are we paying them, and is that antiquated?"



Terry Fitzpatrick (North Central UniServ Rep) delivers donuts to members at a Yakima ESP rally. Rosemary Wolf (ESP Living Wage Coordinator) helped organize the event in Yakima.

What is a master teacher?

WEASO Bargaining Team member and WEA-Riverside UniServ Director Lisa Lewison, a former high school teacher, recently reflected on the push to change teacher certification.

What is a master teacher? It means more than the letters behind one's name, certificates, elitist education programs, educational dictates, or the current flavor of "mastery" of the day. A master teacher is one who embraces liberal arts education, music, the arts, education offered as a value to build inquiry, curiosity, the ability to question, and more. Master teachers are ready to offer encouragement, offer a book for a child based on his/her personal interests, challenge thinking, develop social skills, instill the value of citizenship and community service — and teach a child to believe in him/herself. A master teacher has little to do with

the WASL, assessment, and the accountability hype to which the Legislature and current governor seem to ascribe.

Public school teachers are accountable and are masters each day they show up in their classroom; they wipe noses, counsel, provide one-on-one connections, challenge our youth, make sure our kids have a lunch, teach compassion and model democracy. And, what I find most troubling? I worry for the future for a society which does not fully embrace and respect those who show up in the noble profession.

I value the masters who show up each day, and are the heroes of equality and opportunity for our children.

The real need is for courageous leadership to fulfill the paramount duty to adequately fund public education. Until the people and elected officials are willing to tackle progressive funding and taxation, our children will suffer the shortfall.



Lisa Lewison, WEA-Riverside UniServ rep.

WEASO helps raise cash for the cancer cure

WEASO members and other WEA staff in Federal Way raised more than \$400 for the Susan G. Komen for the Cure's efforts to fight breast cancer. "THANK YOU

for supporting our "Think Pink' day," said Dottie Watson.

"PINK gets all the attention this time of year [October], but we want to acknowledge all the other

colors of cancer as well as the many other debilitating diseases our loved ones face every single day."



Susan Pierce (top) chats with staff who wore the most pink — Left to right: A.J. Hoyla, Stephanie Mikos, Dottie Watson, Bethany Gordon and Zeny Fletcher.

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at www.weaso.org**

Just REWARDS

It's a monthly newsletter about the WEA Staff Organization, its members and our issues, and is distributed to WEASO members, WEA managers, WEA board members and local WEA leaders.

