

QUARTERLY
NEWSLETTER
SPRING 2020

WSSDA

direct

All hands!

How TEAM Riverside has rallied the community, *p.8*. Meet the keynote: a glimpse inside the life of an equity champion, *p.4*. Making budgets easy to understand, *p.6* Navigating Controversy—a mini-workshop at regional meetings, *p.4* School directors in Washington, D.C, *p.5* And more! >>

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DIRECTOR TO DIRECTOR

We're looking to spotlight WSSDA members who'd like to share their insights as veteran board members, newcomers or as exemplars of small, medium or large districts. If that's you, let us know!

PASSION PIECES

Is there a subject you feel strongly about that you'd like to raise with fellow school directors? Then submit a "passion piece" in which you share why the issue is important to you, what you've learned that others may not know, and explain how this issue has informed your work as a school director.

FOR THE GOOD OF THE ORDER

If your district has experienced success (or failure) that would be instructive to others, let us know so we can help you tell the story!

REVIEWED BY PEERS

Is there a book, a training or professional development event, software or even an app that has benefited you? Write a review about it.

For submissions, questions or comments, contact Sean Duke, Communications Officer, at s.duke@wssda.org.

To advertise in *Direct*, contact Josh Collette at j.collette@wssda.org.

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From the Executive Director

Building momentum

In this issue of *Direct*, community engagement takes the spotlight. First, in the feature story, Riverside School District gives us a great example of how public schooling is so foundational to our society. With persistent and systematic outreach to every corner of their unincorporated community, the Riverside School District becomes more than a district; they become TEAM Riverside.

On page 6, Washougal shares a little about their approach to rallying their community. After a well-received break out session at the WSSDA Annual Conference, we wanted to help share their experience with folks who may not have attended the conference or their session.

And school directors, themselves, are rallying for their communities by participating in NSBA's Federal Relations Network and our annual Day on the Hill with WASA and WASBO. In February, school directors and district leaders met with 134 elected officials in Olympia; that's over 90% of the Legislature! (Thank you for your time, legislators.) And in Washington D.C., school directors met with Congressman Denny Heck's staff to encourage his support for a bill that would fully fund the IDEA Act. Coincidentally, within hours of that meeting, our colleagues got an email saying that he signed on as a bill sponsor!

Looking ahead, several events are populating the calendar. First, we offered Board Boot Camps in February with WSSDA OnBoard trainings scheduled over the coming months. Additionally, WSSDA Regional Meetings will include a mini-workshop titled "Navigating Controversy." See page 4 for details.

And one more event coming up is the Equity Conference. On page 4, we introduce the keynote speakers. Don't delay registering for the conference because last year it sold out. The popularity of the conference is a testament to the commitment of WSSDA members and district staff to educational equity!

Thank you for reading this issue of *Direct* and I hope to see you at one of our upcoming events!

Tim Garchow

Tim Garchow, WSSDA Executive Director



Photo above: Legislative Committee Chair Sandy Hayes, Northshore (left), and WSSDA board member Siri Bliesner, Lake Washington (right), during Day on the Hill in Olympia.

FEATURE

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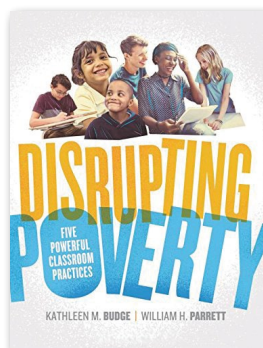
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From the Board President

Leadership Development

– Tricia Lubach

Spring is a time of growth and renewal, and not just for nature. In the coming months, school directors will have access to **training statewide**. Like sprouts pushing through soil, participants will exert themselves in order to grow. March through September, we're crisscrossing the state to offer WSSDA OnBoard training on multiple aspects of **school finance**—including funding and budgeting. Join us and grow the branches of your network by connecting with directors from neighboring boards. You'll gain a fresh perspective on your role as an education leader.

Government Relations

– Marissa Rathbone

The **2020 legislative session** has been fast-paced and full of diverse, impactful policy considerations. Your government relations team has been diligently tracking bills, responding to member concerns, sharing suggestions for amendments to bills, and providing testimony when more formal comments have been necessary. Though it landed me on the [counselor's couch](#) (see *InSession*, week two), we have also enjoyed building stronger relationships with legislators. We're thoroughly enjoying our work and are grateful for the opportunity to represent you! To keep up with all things legislative, be sure to visit wssda.org/InSession and subscribe to our weekly review and look ahead.

Left to right:
Logan Endres, Rick Jansons, Eden Mack, Rebecca Stillings, Danny Edwards and Sandy Hayes representing WSSDA at the NSBA Federal Relations Network in Washington, D.C. See more photos on p.7.



Policy and Legal

– Abigail Westbrook

Responding to legislative mandates to develop or revise model policies has been keeping us busy! These new or revised policies address **opioid-overdose reversal**, **school lunch scheduling** and **school-based threat assessment**. Look for these at one of your upcoming board meetings soon. As you know, our Legislature is in session and active, even in this short session. Policy and Legal has been working closely with Government Relations to analyze proposed legislation and provide feedback, including suggesting alternative language. We expect that the 2020 session will (again) impact school districts significantly.

It is in our DNA to regard spring as a time for hope.

In all cultures, throughout time and the world over, the season is seen as a time of rebirth and renewal.

This positivity and optimism not only helps us accomplish the goals that we set for ourselves, but is crucial to our own health and happiness.

The gardens of spring embody the season. Each of our communities' children is like a new flower, full of beauty and promise for our world. It is our obligation to cultivate the soil around them so each one may thrive.

I know every one of you works with patience and purpose, during every season of the year, to instill hope and opportunity in the schools for which you are responsible. You overcome obstacles and take risks, with courage, to provide opportunities for those who rely upon your leadership.

While we can never lose sight of the goals of rigorous instruction and academic excellence to which we all aspire, we must also be sure that our schools operate with compassion and provide a safe harbor for those who need it most.

Whatever you are working on in your districts, be it equity training, early childhood learning opportunities, safety, social and emotional learning, inclusionary practices, or any of the many other goals you have set for your organizations, we are honored to help you accomplish your objectives.

I hope you take advantage of the many opportunities your WSSDA provides to support you. Whether it is board training and leadership development, policy and legal support, legislative advocacy at the state and federal level, or the amazing work produced by the members of our committees, we try to offer multiple avenues to success for each of our school board directors.

I hope all of the changes you work so hard to bring to your communities are successful. I thank you for your efforts and immense hard work, and I thank you for being the kind of people who bring hope into my life, on sunny spring days, rainy spring days, and each and every day of the year.

Brenda Rogers, WSSDA Board President



Navigating controversy:

HOW TO REMAIN FAITHFUL TO THE LAW
AND AUTHENTIC WITH CITIZENS

The “catchy” title above refers to a mini-workshop that will be on the agenda for **WSSDA’s spring regional meetings**. We will walk attendees through the process of engaging with your community for input without compromising required legal components. We will explore best practices designed to increase confidence in your own ability to handle difficult topics during public comment periods at board meetings and while leading discussions out in the community. Starting March 25th in Kelso, school directors will gather at regional meetings to receive updates, discuss topics of local interest, and discuss strategies for navigating controversy.

EQUITY IN ACTION

Equity Conference speakers

Mirko J. Chardin’s journey to becoming a principal, friend, mentor and leader in his community was not an easy one. According to an article in Wheaton College’s newsmagazine, he hated school and was even thrown out three times. Now serving as principal at the Putnam Avenue Upper School in Cambridge, MA, Principle Chardin has a different outlook.

Mission-driven, he strives to create a safe space for his school and community to “promote social justice, intercultural understanding, academic excellence, and the honoring of each individual’s personal story.” Leading by example, he is not shy about telling his own story. In this way, his students, their parents, and teachers who have similar experiences know he understands. Chardin listens and teaches people to listen. Wheaton alum Basil El told the Wheaton newsmagazine, “He had an ability to really listen and hear what you were saying.”

Expanding his impact on the field of education, Chardin has collaborated with fellow Equity Conference keynoter, Dr. Katie Novak, to write a book and serves as a strategic partner at Novak’s education consultancy.

Dr. Novak has authored and co-authored a handful of books on Universal Design for Learning and provided training internationally. A practicing leader, Dr. Novak serves as Assistant Superintendent of Schools at the Groton-Dunstable Regional School District in Massachusetts.

Join us at the conference in May and engage with these outstanding educators.



Photo by Keith Nordstrom, courtesy of Wheaton College



Local school directors in Washington, D.C.



In early February, school directors trekked to Washington, D.C., to meet with members of Washington state's congressional delegation and to participate in the National School Board Federal Relations Network. Drawing school board members from around the nation, events included an equity symposium and a mini-conference on federal advocacy.

WSSDA members came prepared with specific and impactful data to share in meetings with legislators and the U.S. Department of Education. The group discussed the need to bolster school safety, mental health supports, full funding of IDEA/special education and other K-12 education issues.



COMMITTEE CORNER

Resolutions Committee

The resolutions committee acts as the shepherd of WSSDA's permanent positions. Permanent positions are different from legislative positions in that they represent WSSDA's beliefs and values, as adopted by membership. For this week's spotlight, we spoke with committee vice chair **Christine Chew** of Bellevue and committee chair **Bruce Richards** of Central Kitsap.

Why did you join the Resolutions Committee?

CC: I consider WSSDA's collection of positions to be one of the most powerful ways that we directors find our points of critical unity and articulate our collective voice on behalf of all the districts, so I wanted to help increase the power of that voice for all districts.

BR: I wanted to get involved in WSSDA and find out more about what the organization was about. Joining the Resolutions Committee was my way of doing that.

Is there anything you learned or insights you've had over the course of your tenure on the committee?

CC: Working with colleagues from across the state has surfaced just how much more we all have in common and how committed we all are to serving the students in each of our districts and across the state.

BR: It's just turned out to be such a rewarding experience due to the incredible members of the committee that I have been fortunate to work with. We've gone from working in isolation to reviewing permanent positions to collaborating with the Legislative Committee, improving and aligning all WSSDA positions. That will make directors and WSSDA staff far more effective when dealing with the public, legislators and school administrators.

What's it take to be an effective member of the resolutions committee? Can anyone do it? Can someone prepare?

CC: Any board director with passion for serving all kids, and a collaborative and open mindset about finding win-win solutions, would be an effective member of the resolutions committee.

BR: I believe that any person who is committed to being an effective school director can be an effective member of the resolutions committee.

What's on the horizon for the committee and what's your role in it? To see this answer, plus more details from the questions above, visit wssda.org/rcspotlight



Christine Chew
Bellevue



Bruce Richards
Central Kitsap



ONCALL: Making budgets easy to understand

Budget season for the next school year is around the corner, and now is a good time to prepare. School budgets are complicated, influenced by difficult-to-explain variables like federal and state mandates, and part of a long process that may seem daunting or inaccessible to members of the public.

Setting budgets is a key role for school boards. Your staff, parents and community may seem apathetic during the process, but you should continue efforts to educate and engage them, especially if there is a likelihood there will be complaints after it is adopted.

Be sure that the district calendar includes all budget meeting dates, locations and times. Make a note of meetings that will allow time for public input. Post it on your website and publish to your social media channels. Include a budget section on your website that has a list of budget committee members, links to policy, key dates—such as the adoption date—and links to past approved budgets. Summarize the process in a handout of infographics with clear, simple charts and graphs or a divided dollar bill.

Use plain language that is easy to understand and explain references to factors that affect the district's budget: program mandates, the status and amount of legislative appropriations and outside funds that are restricted, such as bond money for capital projects.

Relate the school budget to a household budget. Discuss income (revenue), expenses (bills) and contingency funds (emergency fund) in terms that everyone can relate to.

Avoid acronyms. This is a good rule for educational operations and programs in general. If you work at the district office, you are fluent in educationese; if not, you probably need a translator. Be aware of terms like APCs (associated payroll costs), FICA (Social Security), FTEs (full-time equivalents), etc.

Break costs down. Many people can't relate to the big numbers in school budgets. Translate million-dollar terms into single dollar terms. If \$60 million of your \$100 million budget is allocated to teaching and \$4 million is for administration, say, "Sixty cents of every dollar is spent on teaching and learning. Four cents of every dollar is spent on administration."

Continue to share information throughout the budget process. Post the superintendent's message and budget proposal as soon as it's available. Contact your local media to share information. And don't forget to talk to staff. They are trusted sources of information and relay information to parents and community members in their networks. Be sure they have the latest news.

This was excerpted from a longer article that appeared in WSSDA's OnCall. Subscribe to OnCall for ready-to-use district communication content, tools, and tips.

OUT AND ABOUT

Community engagement: TIPS AND TECHNIQUES

Representatives of the Washougal School District gave a breakout session on community engagement at the 2019 WSSDA Annual Conference. Their session received so many positive reviews that we asked them to share their experience with a broader audience. Pulling from their presentation, they have written about their district's successful efforts below. Thank you to Board Chair Cory Chase, Superintendent Dr. Mary Templeton and Communication and Technology Director Les Brown for sharing their work in Direct.

The Washougal School District team has worked with board leadership to focus on a positive communications strategy that includes community engagement to build a meaningful and trusting relationship with the Washougal community. We focused on developing ways to listen attentively to the needs and concerns in the community, working on being open and responsive. In Fall 2018, we began a Strategic Planning process, which was an ideal time to meet with stakeholder groups at all school sites and also with community groups, asking a simple question about what the district is doing well and what needs attention. The process culminated in a plan that centers around a shared vision of knowing, nurturing and challenging all students to rise. The Washougal community has rallied around the theme of "Washougal Rising" with a lot of excitement!

District leadership is also using other strategies to be open and inclusive. For example, the superintendent hosts a coffee talk at a different school site each month, which is an informal opportunity for family members to ask questions and get face-to-face answers. The district also created a series of videos that showcase excellent teaching and exciting learning activities happening in each school. The superintendent regularly posts additional videos to keep the community informed about things happening in schools and to create a personal connection with a broad audience. Overall, we've worked at setting an optimistic and hopeful tone in our communications while remaining focused on what is best for students, and pushing for outcomes that keep them at the center of our decision-making.

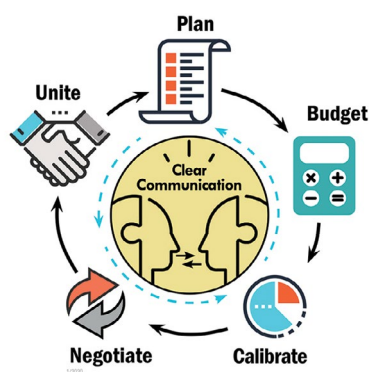
Another thing we do is encourage citizen participation during public comments, adding opportunities during the meeting agenda for comments focused on decisions being made. School board meetings are held at a different school site each month, not just in the central office, giving parents and staff an opportunity to interact with the board in a familiar setting. Additionally, we have recruited students to the board so we could incorporate their voice and perspective when making decisions. And finally, district leadership and board members spend significant amounts of time visiting classrooms during the school day and being present at after school activities, performances and sporting events.

Thankfully, members of the community routinely express appreciation for the efforts to be open, transparent and welcoming of input. All of these strategies have created a positive buzz in the community and energy to support hard work that is critical to the mission of seeing our students rising to their successful futures.

THE BUDGETING & BARGAINING CYCLE:

Where are we now?

During late winter and into spring, most districts are in the planning and budgeting stages of the cycle. The planning phase is the time to ask “big picture” questions, such as: **How does the board plan to engage in the budgeting process? Are we meeting our strategic goals and objectives? If not, what budget changes might we consider to yield our desired outcomes? What legislative, enrollment, labor or other issues may impact our future budget?** During the budgeting phase, the board will engage with the district’s financial team to review budget-impacting items, like projections for enrollment, revenues and expenses, as well as ending and beginning fund balances. This process will include



a formal public hearing and adoption of the district’s annual and four-year budget. Boards may want to ask: **How did the actual budget line up with what was projected? What changes to the previous budget are recommended by staff and why? What do four-year projections tell us about our district’s fiscal health?**

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The Making OF A Movement



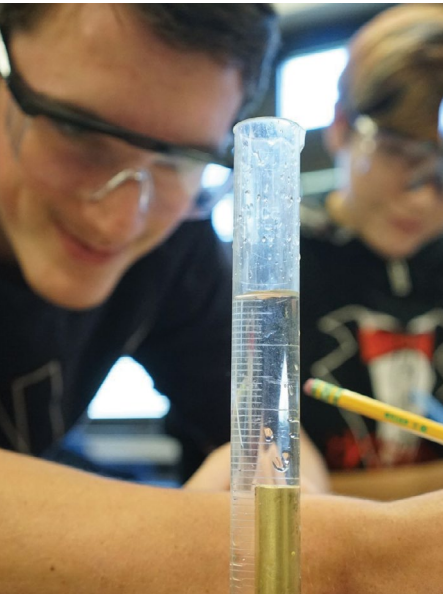
How does a school district in an unincorporated rural area build a culture and create a movement? Apparently, it starts by asking the right questions.

“One of the conversations we had at the very beginning was how are we going to be bold,” said Board Chair Randi Maynard. “How are we going to be bold leaders and bring something forward that’s going to actually transform education in our community?”

Director Maynard went on to explain that it was important for the board to summon the courage to have those conversations, commit to being transparent with one another, and be willing to take some risks.

“We challenged ourselves to come up with things that were a little outside our comfort zone, but doable in a way that could make a difference,” said Maynard. “Once you do that, then you’ve set the vision. The next step is going out, connecting with your stakeholders, and making sure that everybody’s ideas, opinions and





Opposite: Superintendent, Dr. Ken Russell, and Riverside Elementary students wearing their TEAM Riverside t-shirts. Below, Students gathering with their families for Grandparents Day. This page: Clockwise from top left, Superintendent, Dr. Ken Russell, reading to Chattaroy Elementary students, Powersports students at Riverside High School, one of the few high schools in the country with an accredited motorcycle repair program. Project Lead the Way engineering and wood shop students and biomedical sciences students.

thoughts are incorporated into your vision so that it becomes a grassroots approach. And so we had those conversations in our boardroom, and then Ken, our superintendent, took it out to the school leadership.”

The other critical ingredient, according to both the board chair and the superintendent, is culture. “You have to name the culture you want first,” said Superintendent Ken Russell. “And then I think the other part is getting to know your people. So it’s me working with principals and teachers and Brandi [the board chair] working with her superintendent and the community. So really, the work of the board, to me, is to

be with people, talk with people, be really communicative, be open-minded, value multiple perspectives and be in the mix.”

“Lead from the middle” was another way Dr. Russell described the approach. And what does that look like? “Be with people, go to events, ask for feedback when you’re out in the community, be a learner,” said Dr. Russell. “And once they start feeling you’re there with them and they’re with you, and you’re all part of the same team, you’re probably going to get the buy-in, engagement, and empowerment you need.”

CONTINUED on page 10

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—Board Chair Randi Maynard

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*—Superintendent
Dr. Ken Russell*

MOVEMENT continued from page 9

So how did Riverside name their culture? The answer was a big surprise for the board and superintendent. About two years ago, the board chose a word of the year: team. Then they took that word to an event the district created called Ramfest. Wildly successful, Ramfest was an evening event designed to connect community members with district staff and board members.

"We were hoping for a few hundred people," said Maynard. "But we got over a thousand! We thought 'team' was going to become a word of the year and next year we'd choose a different word. But it grabbed such momentum."

The board was pleasantly surprised that so many families, young and old community members, and even legislators all showed up.

"At the time, we didn't realize we were on the front end of a movement," said Maynard. "So 'TEAM Riverside' stuck, year after year, and we decided we didn't want to choose another word because this is who we are."

Establishing a district culture was just the first of three strategic decisions made by the Riverside board. The next was to establish a regular and consistent method of monitoring and supporting the superintendent, principals (and directors) to lead the implementation of the district's mission, vision, values and goals. That method took the form of "Forward Together" meetings.

Forward Together meetings happen three times a year. "It's a great opportunity for our school leaders to bring forward their data, their problems of practice and their theories of action; then just share that with us on a regular basis," said Maynard. "It's just been phenomenal because what happens is that the school district and the staff realize this is a priority to us. Student achievement is a priority. The whole child is a priority. And for them to be consistently thinking about it, presenting it in a way that we as laypeople understand."

So those meetings tie together the board, superintendent and principals. Beyond that, Superintendent Russell cited two more steps: weekly meetings with principals that

include a discussion of their professional learning goals and connecting the district's goals to the professional learning communities of the teachers.

Like Russian dolls that nest within each other, "we want the board goals to match with the superintendent goals, to match with the principal goals, to match with the school goals that then match with the professional learning community or team goals at the most granular level," explained Russell.

With only four schools and two additional programs, smaller districts like Riverside may enjoy an advantage when it comes to vertical alignment among staff. But out in the community, people are still numerous and diverse. Ram Fest was a first step into the community, but other steps were equally important.

Before their monthly work sessions, the Riverside board invites specific groups to share dinner with them. Invited groups include student leaders, new teachers, maintenance crews, boosters, and others—like faith leaders.

CONTINUED next page



Above: Riverside graduates walking the halls of Riverside Elementary—a new tradition which started last year is aimed at setting high expectations and building community. **Right:** TEAM Riverside's firepit, donated by the community, is used for tailgate parties and other community events. **Opposite:** Riverside School district's all staff photo.





"I thought it was a little unusual," said Pastor Robert Sheild of the Chattaroy Community Church. That was the pastor's reaction when he and seven or eight other faith leaders received an invitation to dine with the school board. "A lot of times, faith leaders just don't get asked for their opinion on school matters due to the idea of separating church and state. But with the challenges facing the district, challenges that the whole community faces, I thought to include everybody was a good idea."

Pastor Sheild explained that sometimes they talked about school finances and another time they performed a shared reading to explore the meaning of leadership with the board.

We asked Pastor Sheild if he noticed any unexpected benefits from the dinners. "Well yeah," he said with a chuckle, "I've come to respect people I disagree with more."

The pastor observed that by coming together in an environment created by the school board, they found common ground in their concern for the well-being of the school, the children, and the community. "I began to see them more as just human beings who have the same concerns I do."

Appreciating a shared sense of humanity relates well to the Riverside board's third strategic decision: emphasizing whole-child education, specifically social and emotional learning and character development.

Superintendent Russell explained that, at the elementary level, they use positive behavioral interventions and supports, or

"PBIS" in edu-speak. But at the secondary level, "we didn't have a framework upon which to have those conversations and set those types of goals." And that's the moment when it was revealed that Riverside engages with CharacterStrong to meet that need. "We decided to really, fully invest," said Russell.

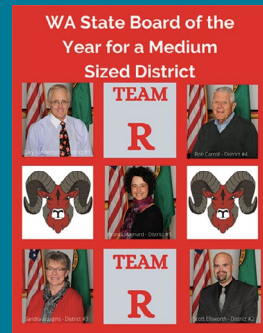
Riverside School District has adopted CharacterStrong's curriculum for middle and high school; sent every certificated staff and to an initial training facilitated by CharacterStrong; begun training their paraeducators; and they've sent out "character dares" to the community.

As district staff engage in their professional learning communities, they're looking at academics and social emotional development. "As with academics, they are using the whole idea of a problem of practice, theory of action, and evidence of progress in that work as well," said Russell.

And so, how does the district measure progress? For readers of their Board of Distinction application, which is available online, the list of ways is long. But we asked community member Ida Meza what she thought.

Ida is a mother of seven and one of the only women of color in the Aloha Pines mobile home community. The school board and administrators hosted a barbecue at Aloha Pines in an effort to meet families where they are.

When asked how that made her feel, Ida said "Counted. Like I matter."



"We thought 'team' was going to become a word of the year... But it grabbed such momentum. At the time, we didn't realize we were on the front end of a movement. So 'TEAM Riverside' stuck... and we decided we didn't want to choose another word because this is who we are."

—Board Chair Randi Maynard

School-based threat assessment

by Abigail Westbrook

What should happen when a district learns of a potential or alleged threat from a student? For example:

- A student posts an image on social media, wearing a black trench coat and aiming what appears to be an assault weapon;
- A teacher reports that one of her students wrote a story about hurting his classmates because they tease him;
- Several students report that another student warned them not to eat lunch in the cafeteria next Tuesday because something very bad was going to happen.

Currently, your district might not have a plan or a process for how to react, but by the start of the 2020-2021 school year, your district will have established a school-based threat assessment program to assess potential threats methodically and, when appropriate, intervene.

You might remember hearing about House Bill (HB) 1216 – *Relating to Non-Firearm Measures to Increase School Safety and Student Well-being*, which our Legislature passed during the 2019 session. HB 1216 has several important components, one of which is to mandate that by the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year, each district must establish a school-based threat assessment program. HB 1216 sets out the basic framework and creates a statewide network that provides districts with training and technical assistance to implement school-based threat assessment programs and other safety measures. The statewide network is comprised of the collaborative efforts of the state safety center established by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and the regional safety centers established by the Educational Service Districts (ESDs).

HB 1216 specifies that school-based threat assessment programs be consistent with a model policy developed by WSSDA and OSPI in consultation with the Student Safety and Student Well-being Advisory Committee and other organizations with pertinent expertise. Based on this collaboration, we are pleased to present new Model Policy/Procedure 3225–School-Based Threat Assessment to meet the requirements of the statute; this is an Essential policy. You'll also find corresponding policy revisions in Model Policy and Procedure 4314–Notification of Threats of Violence or Harm; this is also an Essential policy.



“HB 1216 sets out the basic framework and creates a statewide network that provides districts with training and technical assistance to implement school-based threat assessment programs and other safety measures.”

As we developed the model policy and procedure to implement the statutory framework, we looked to threat assessment programs already used in Washington. We also reviewed the practices of Virginia and Maryland. Pulling it all together, the model policy and procedure is based on/consistent with a synthesis of nationally established research, practice, and standards. Two publications in particular were instructive: “Enhancing School Safety Using a Threat Assessment Model: An Operational Guide for Preventing Targeted School Violence”¹ and “A Study of the Pre-Attack Behaviors of Active Shooters in the United States Between 2000 and 2013.”² That research was based on the *Safe School Initiative*, which began with a study of the thinking, planning, and other pre-attack behaviors engaged in by students who carried out school a shooting.³

Threat assessment based on the 10 key findings

The *Safe School Initiative* examined incidents of targeted school violence⁴ from the time of the incident backward to identify the attackers’ pre-incident behaviors and communications and explore whether such information might aid in preventing future attacks. The 10 key findings of the *Safe School Initiative* are:

- Incidents of targeted violence at school are rarely sudden, impulsive acts.
- Prior to most incidents, other people knew about the attacker’s idea and/or plan to attack.
- Most attackers did not threaten their targets directly prior to advancing the attack.
- There is no accurate or useful “profile” of students who engage in targeted school violence.
- Most attackers engaged in some behavior prior to the incident that caused concern or indicated a need for help.
- Most attackers were known to have difficulty coping with significant losses or personal failures. Many had considered or attempted suicide.
- Many attackers felt bullied, persecuted, or injured by others prior to the attack.
- Most attackers had access to and had used weapons prior to the attack.
- In many cases, other students were involved in some capacity.
- Despite prompt law enforcement responses, most shooting incidents were stopped by means other than law enforcement intervention.

These 10 findings indicate that there are productive actions districts can take to reduce targeted school violence. Specifically, districts can develop their capacity to recognize and evaluate information that might indicate a risk of a targeted school attack – this is threat assessment – and then use the assessment to develop and implement interventions that prevent potential school attacks from occurring.

School-based threat assessment is distinct from law enforcement investigation (if any). The goal of the school-based threat assessment process is to take appropriate preventive or corrective measures to maintain a safe and secure school environment, to protect and support potential victims, and to provide assistance, as needed, to the individual being assessed. In addition to being distinct from a

“...districts can develop their capacity to recognize and evaluate information that might indicate a risk of a targeted school attack...and then use the assessment to develop and implement interventions that prevent potential school attacks from occurring.”

possible law enforcement investigation, school-based threat assessment is also distinct from student discipline procedures. However, it is worth noting that the functions of school-based threat assessment might run parallel to student discipline procedures.

Based on the 10 key findings, effective threat assessment is based on facts, not on a student’s demographics or personal characteristics. Threat assessment is rooted in the proposition that each situation of concern should be viewed and assessed individually. The central question of a threat assessment is not whether a student got angry and made a threat, the question is whether a student poses a threat.

The school-based threat assessment team

It starts with putting together and training a school-based threat assessment team. HB 1216 specifies that the school-based threat assessment team must be multidisciplinary and multiagency. Team members might include a school counselor, a school psychologist and/or school social worker, a school resource officer or other law enforcement member, other individuals from the community, a school administrator, and a special education teacher. Not every team member needs to participate in every threat assessment. However, if faced with a potential threat made by, or directed toward, a student eligible for special education services, the threat assessment team must include a special education teacher.

In addition to having team members with a variety of areas of expertise, team members must have a questioning, analytical, and skeptical mindset. Team members need to be able and mindful to develop interventions that help rather than harm. Further, team members need discretion, and an appreciation for keeping information confidential, including having an appreciation for the possible harm that might result from the inappropriate release of information. Your district does not want to wait until a crisis occurs to establish its threat assessment team. Remember that HB 1216 requires districts to have a school-based threat assessment program in place before the start of the 2020-2021 school year and that developing the threat assessment team’s capacity involves training and time.

Information sharing to support threat assessment

The research shows that in most cases, there was information available prior to the incident that suggested the student was planning an attack at school. However, the research also indicates that the information was like puzzle pieces with different people having just a piece of the puzzle. This is why the threat assessment team might

¹https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/18_0711_USSS_NTAC-Enhancing-School-Safety-Guide.pdf ²<https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/pre-attack-behaviors-of-active-shooters-in-us-2000-2013.pdf/view> ³<https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/preventing-attacksreport.pdf> ⁴Targeted violence is defined as an incident of violence where a known or knowable attacker selects a particular target prior to their violent attack.

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need to gather information from multiple sources—teachers, parents, friends, guidance counselors, after-school program staff, part-time employers, and others.

But how does a multidisciplinary, multiagency team deal with educational records? The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) protects the privacy of “education records,” defined as any records that contain information directly related to a student and that are maintained by the district. Generally, the parent’s prior written consent is needed to disclose personally identifiable information from a student’s education records, unless certain exceptions apply. One exception is for a health and safety emergency. FERPA provides that schools may disclose personally identifiable information when there is an immediate need to protect the health or safety of the student or others. Under this exception, schools must define the term “health or safety emergency” narrowly and are permitted to disclose information from education records only to those individuals who need the information in order to protect the student and others. In sum, the health and safety exception applies *when* a health and safety emergency exists, not for the purposes of determining whether a health and safety emergency exists. This means that although the health and safety exception is relevant to threat assessment, it is not the starting place.

Threat assessment team members, including community members serving on the team, can constitute “school officials” under FERPA when the district and team members adhere to certain criteria.⁵ Qualifying as a school official means that team members may access student education records, including personally identifiable information, without parental consent. All threat assessment team members are “school officials” when they:

1. Perform an institutional service or function for which the school or district would otherwise use employees;
2. Are under the “direct control” of the school or district with respect to the use and maintenance of the education records;
3. Are subject to FERPA’s use and re-disclosure requirements, which limits the use and re-disclosure of the student’s personally identifiable information to the purposes of its disclosure; and
4. Qualify as “school officials” with “legitimate educational interests,” which means needing to review an education record in order to fulfill his or her professional responsibilities.

Importantly, each district must include the specific criteria it uses for determining who constitutes a “school official” and what constitutes a “legitimate educational interest” in its annual notification of FERPA rights.⁶

“...the health and safety exception applies when a health and safety emergency exists, NOT for the purposes of determining whether a health and safety emergency exists.”

⁵https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/sites/default/files/resource_document/file/SRO_FAQs_2-5-19_0.pdf (See pages 10 - 15)

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This means that all threat assessment team members, including team members who are not district employees, are prohibited from re-disclosing information obtained by being a member of the threat assessment team. For example, a threat assessment team member who is a city police officer is generally prohibited from giving the police department information obtained by being a member of the threat assessment team. To ensure that threat assessment team members are aware of the prohibition, you might want to consider requiring each member of your team (or teams) to sign an acknowledgment of his or her responsibilities for safeguarding student information.

As discussed above, an exception to the prohibition is disclosure for a health or safety emergency. The determination that information is sufficiently significant and articulable to warrant a health and safety emergency disclosure is ultimately a district decision. However, districts have the discretion to grant non-employees serving as school officials on the threat assessment team the ability to determine this on the district's behalf.⁷

Please know that this article is not and cannot be a complete review of FERPA requirements. Your district is encouraged to discuss its specific circumstances and any concerns regarding student records with your district's attorney.

Threat management

A school-based threat assessment program includes both threat assessment and threat management. Threat management may include both short-term and long-term interventions. As noted above, the goal of the threat assessment process is to take appropriate preventive or corrective measures to maintain a safe and secure school environment, to protect and support potential victims, and to provide assistance, as needed, to the individual being assessed. Depending on the level of concern, the threat assessment team develops and implements intervention strategies to manage the student's behavior in ways that promote a safe, supportive teaching and learning environment, without excluding the student from the school.

The research has found that an integrated approach to interventions enhances their effectiveness, and this is why the threat assessment program seeks integration with other avenues of intervention. For example, in cases where the student has a disability, the threat assessment team aligns intervention strategies with the student's individualized education program (IEP) or the student's plan developed under section 504 of the rehabilitation act of 1973 (section 504 plan). Similarly, a threat assessment intervention might purposefully run parallel to a response to a behavioral violation, as governed by your student discipline procedures. Nonetheless, all other teams and/or processes are governed by their own laws and rules and may have differing timelines and due process provisions. This is why it is important to recognize that although seeking alignment and cohesion with other interventions, the school-based threat assessment program remains distinct from all other teams and/or processes.

Culture and climate of safety, respect, and emotional support

Finally, for a school-based threat assessment program to be effective, it must be implemented within an overall culture and climate that promote safety, respect, and emotional support. Remember, one of the 10 key findings from the *Safe School Initiative* was that many attackers felt bullied, persecuted, or injured by others. Environments characterized by bullying and meanness can lead to student isolation and fear, which in turn might lead to psychological and physical

“A school-based threat assessment program includes both threat assessment and threat management. Threat management may include both short-term and long-term interventions.”



violence. Committing to a district culture where teasing and bullying are not accepted as a normal part of adolescence, and instead, where diversity and differences are respected protects everyone.

Key to a culture and climate of safety, respect, and emotional support is improving and supporting communication. *The Safe School Initiative* found that most school shooters shared their potentially lethal plans with other students, but that students who knew of planned attacks rarely told adults. More recent research found that not every student directly threatened their target prior to an attack, but in the majority of incidents (81%), another person was aware of what the student was thinking or planning.⁸ The solution to this lack of communication is purposefully developing trusting relationships between each student and at least one adult in the district. The goal is for the student to be able to share concerns openly and without fear of shame or reprisal. These connections between students and adults not only enable communication they also provide students with vital emotional support.

Developing and implementing a school-based threat assessment program is a complex but worthwhile task. Threat assessment was born from tragic roots. But it has identified a path to learn from tragic events, discern possible threats, and prevent targeted school violence.

³⁴ 34 CFR § 99.7(a)(3)(iii). The U.S. Department of Education has created a “Model Notification of Rights under FERPA for Elementary and Secondary Schools,” available at: <https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/resources/ferpa-model-notification-rights-elementarysecondary-schools>.
⁷ 34 CFR §§ 99.31(a)(10) and 99.36. ⁸ https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/18_0711_USSS_NTAC-Enhancing-School-Safety-Guide.pdf see page 10.



Maple Grove third graders test the waters of scientific data collection

Patricia Harmon's third grade students at Maple Grove Primary School take their roles as scientists very seriously.

Donning protective goggles, a group of students is seated around a picnic table testing water samples, carefully recording the data they collect along the way. Nearby, another group of four students is huddled over a small plastic tub filled with water and a few aquatic plants, using pipettes and plastic spoons to check for tiny critters. Suddenly there's a breakthrough, as an excited voice exclaims "Ms. Harmon, I found a stonefly!"

These young scientists are just some of the more than 3,000 Clark County students who make up the Student Watershed Monitoring Network (SWMN). Supported by Clark County's Clean Water Division and the City of Vancouver's Water Resources Education Center, the project trains teachers and students in grades kindergarten through high school to monitor water quality and habitat in a local stream, lake, river or wetlands.

"These students are learning standardized procedures used to collect and interpret data," said Rainy Rau, water educator from the Water Resources Education Center. "The work they're doing for this project aligns with level one science from the state of Washington's Next Generation Science Standards. If problems with a body of water

are discovered during the course of student data collection, qualified professionals are alerted for follow-up response to the issues. So the students have a real impact."

To collect their data, the Maple Grove students only need to walk a few hundred feet from their classroom to a pond just northeast of their campus where they're greeted by Maria Tunno, a part-time watershed educator assisting the City of Vancouver and Clark County with the SWMN, and Chad Schwatka, the stormwater program coordinator with the City of Battle Ground.

Tunno and Schwatka are there to help introduce the class to the local watershed and train them to take in-the-field water measurements. The tests include sampling the stream flow, water temperature, pH, phosphates, dissolved oxygen, and turbidity levels. Turbidity is a measure of the degree to which the water loses its transparency due to the presence of suspended particulates. The more total suspended solids in the water, the murkier it seems and the higher the turbidity.

Building on these skills, the students learn to collect and evaluate species of macroinvertebrates present in the waterway. Macroinvertebrates are organisms that lack a spine, but are large enough to be seen by the naked eye. Because different types of macroinvertebrates tolerate different stream conditions and levels of pollution, their presence or absence is used to indicate clean or polluted water.

For example, most larvae of caddisflies, mayflies, and stoneflies cannot survive in polluted water, so streams with these bugs are assumed to have good water quality. However, the absence of these organisms in a body of water does not necessarily indicate that the water quality is poor. Other natural factors, such as temperature and flow, also come into play.

"It has been a pleasure working with Maple Grove and River HomeLink students on this project for the last five years, and we hope that through multiple years of sampling, students can begin to think about how their everyday activities influence the quality of surface waters within their environments," Schwatka said. "It's a

“The work they’re doing for this project aligns with level one science from the state of Washington’s Next Generation Science Standards.”

joy to see students in the outdoors while they’re learning, and we are pleased that we have the opportunity to expose kids to their local watersheds. The program is also great for the City of Battle Ground, as it helps fulfill state requirements. But more importantly, it provides opportunities for us to directly educate and connect with the community we serve.”

In the past, students from Battle Ground Public Schools have collected water quality data from Woodin Creek and its tributary waters. Woodin Creek is one of the larger creeks that run through the City of Battle Ground, joining downstream with Salmon Creek just outside of city limits.

“It’s very rewarding watching young students discover things that excite them in a scientific setting,” Tunno said. “Getting outside provides an opportunity for kids to connect with nature and realize that they can have an impact on protecting and preserving the world around them. It can be quite empowering for kids to experience observational learning like this.”

Students and classes that obtain water quality data throughout the school year are invited to present their overall conclusions to other students and professionals from southwest Washington at a conference called Watershed Congress. Hosted in May of each year by the Vancouver Water Resources Education Center and Clark County Public Works, Watershed Congress has proven to be a great way to keep students engaged while exposing them to real-world communications and presentation experience.

“This is such exciting work for these young scientists,” said teacher Patricia Harmon. “My class is always eager to get outside to work on this project, and it’s amazing seeing them so engaged with the subject matter.”



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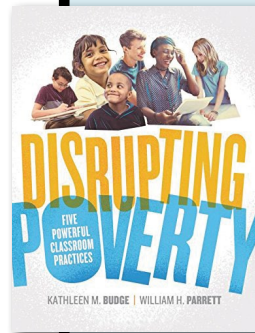


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Book Review

Cindy McMullen reviews *Disrupting Poverty* by Kathleen Budge and William Parrett



After attending the pre-conference workshops at the NSBA Conference last spring, I dove into Kathleen Budge and William Parrett’s book, *Disrupting Poverty: Five Powerful Classroom Practices*. The information provided comes from research with teachers and principals working hard to understand and address barriers to learning that arise from poverty.

The five practices described in the book are ones we have heard before: 1) Building Caring Relationships and Advocating for Students; 2) Holding High Expectations and Providing Needed Support; 3) Committing to Equity; 4) Accepting Professional Accountability for Learning; and 5) Having the Courage and Will to Take Action. Behind each practice is learning from real life experiences, with proven, effective strategies. The questions posed are insightful and challenging, going far deeper than the cursory “How do we level the playing field” or “How do we overcome the opportunity gap?”

The authors challenge us to see ourselves as “intervenor” who “create classroom cultures to mitigate the adverse effects of poverty on students’ learning.” This is much more than providing “learning opportunities” like field trips and cultural events. It includes teaching skills such as study habits and routines that form the basis of learning. It means meeting each student where they are and providing the knowledge and skills they each need. Everyone in the education system must “see through poverty to the person” and focus not on the student’s deficits, but rather on their strengths and assets.

The most impactful aspects of this book are the “Voices from Poverty” statements from students, shared life experiences providing the necessary “reality” for the work to be done. Another strong device is a recurring set of questions for each practice that call for reflection and commitment to putting the practice into action.

While understanding the first four practices will help board members as they govern their district, the fifth, “Having the Courage and Will to Take Action” is a direct call to all of us. As the authors challenge us in the close of the book, “Think about the kind of schools we could build if we were all willing to do what we can for the children we serve.”

ABOUT THE REVIEWER

In 2007, Cindy served as president of WSSDA. She is currently a practicing attorney in Spokane Valley and has been a member of the Central Valley School Board since 2014. She is also Director Area 9’s legislative representative.



direct

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

WSSDA Direct is evolving. Our hope is that it will grow into a platform that helps school directors share their knowledge, experience and perspective with each other. In this way, it will become a resource informing and reflecting the work of Washington's school boards. *Direct* will be published quarterly. The views expressed by individual authors do not necessarily represent WSSDA policies or positions. If you have a disability and need this publication in an alternative format, please contact our Communications department.

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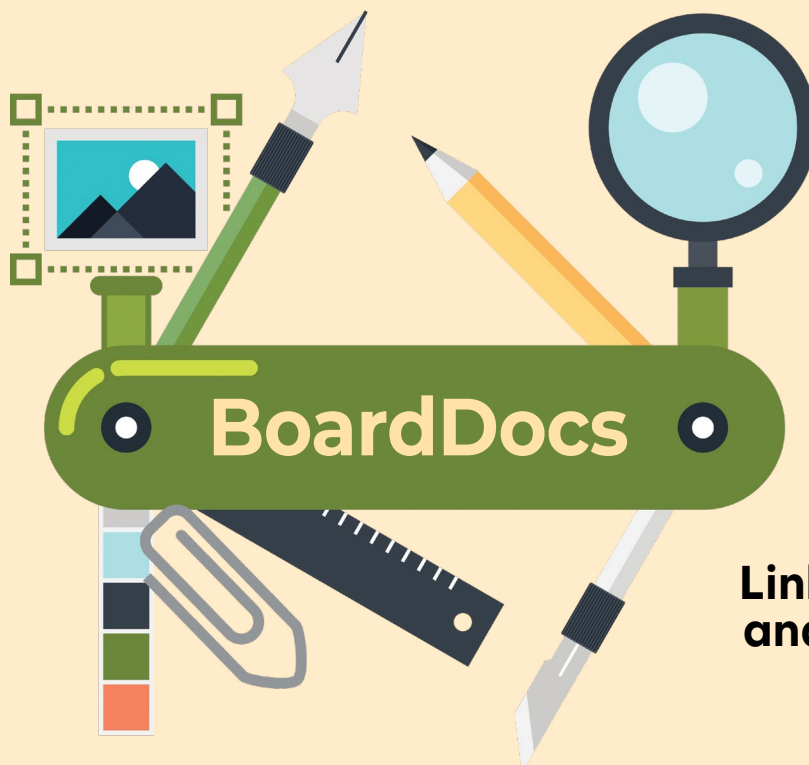
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