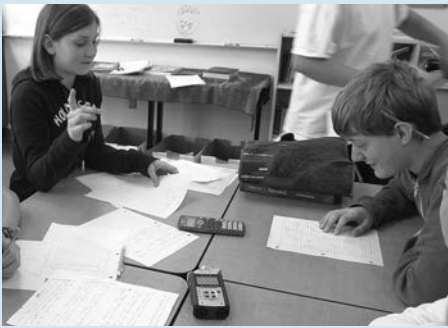




# Direct

Washington State School Directors' Association

MARCH 2014



The Real Time Math Project has Vashon Island students working with STEM professionals to solve real-world math challenges.

## OUR KIDS OUR FUTURE

### A real-world lesson in math for Vashon

The Vashon Island School District faced two seemingly unrelated challenges shared by many school systems across Washington: it needed to replace its aging and dilapidated high school building, and too many of its students were struggling in math. So the district decided to tackle the problems in tandem.

Building a new school would require dozens of technical professionals and skilled tradespeople: architects, designers, engineers, contractors, landscape architects, surveyors, plumbers, electricians, carpenters, masons, heavy equipment operators, and landscapers. In short, for two years, the building site would be swarming with people who use science, technology, engineering, and math in their daily work.

District officials recognized this was

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

## Members hit the hill in D.C.

BY MARTHA RICE

In February, 25 WSSDA members joined more than 750 of our colleagues from across the country in Washington, D.C. at the 41st Annual NSBA Advocacy Institute, formerly the Federal Relations Network (FRN) Conference.

Attendees were asked to discuss four NSBA priority issues with their respective senators and representatives:

- **Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).** This legislation has not been reauthorized since 2002 and since 2008 has been extended through Congressional

appropriations processes. In the vacuum created by the failure to reauthorize, the Department of Education has stepped in with ever increasing layers of regulations.

- **Federal Funding of Education.** Although most of the funding cuts that occurred because of sequestration have been restored—they have only been restored to the 2013 level. Significant areas continue to experience drastic underfunding, particularly in Title I and Special Education (IDEA).
- **Early Learning and Child Nutrition.** Specific talking points

CONTINUED ON PAGE 5



WSSDA Board member Patty Wood (left) and Past-President Mary Fertakis showed their Seahawk pride during the Advocacy Institute held in Washington, D.C.

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

TAYLOR: Public education has a lot to celebrate lately

Our Kids Our Future to keep up to date with what's right in our schools

2014 Magna Awards go to Kent and Vancouver

# High school graduation rates at an all-time high

BY JIM HULL

Secretary Duncan proudly wore number 80 on his jersey at the recent NBA celebrity all-star game — as well he should've. It just so happens the number 80 represents one of the best kept secrets in education: our national on-time graduation rate.

This may come as a shock to many as popular perception tends to be the myth that our public schools are flatlining. But the facts show otherwise, as recent data released by the National Center for Education Statistics show our national on-time graduation rate for our public high schools now stands at 80 percent— an all-time high. It's quite an accomplishment considering the rate hovered around 71 percent for much of the 1990s.

And keep in mind, the 80 percent graduation rate represents only those students who earned a standard high school diploma within four years of entering high school so it doesn't include students who earned a high school equivalency or certificates of completion. Nor

does it include those students who took more than four years to earn a standard high school diploma.

As the Center for Public Education report on late high school graduates *Better Late Than Never* found, including late high school graduates would likely add more than five percentage points to the national graduation rate. So the actual national graduation rate is quite likely closer to 90 than 80 percent.

What is even more impressive about these gains is that our high schools are serving an ever more diverse student population. Yet the overall graduation rate increased due to the substantial gains made by minority students. The on-time graduation rate for Hispanic students increased from 64 percent in 2008 to 75 percent in 2011. During this same time period the on-time graduation rate for black students improved from 61 percent to 67 percent. These are tremendous gains made in a relatively short amount of time. Let's not overlook the fact that the graduation rate

also continued to climb for white students during this same time period (81 to 84 percent).

While these are numbers worth celebrating they also show there is much more work to be done. The attainment gap between minority and white students needs to be closed. While they have narrowed in recent years, the narrowing needs to accelerate so minority students who are just entering school now will have the same chance to graduate as their white classmates.

Of course, simply giving students a diploma will not help them get a job or get into college. So, the diplomas they do receive must represent that fact that these students have completed courses they need to get into and succeed in college or get a quality job after high school. While there is more work to be done to ensure all students leave college and career ready, the data clearly shows our public schools are up the challenge.

JIM HULL is the Senior Policy Analyst at the Center for Public Education. This article is reprinted with permission.

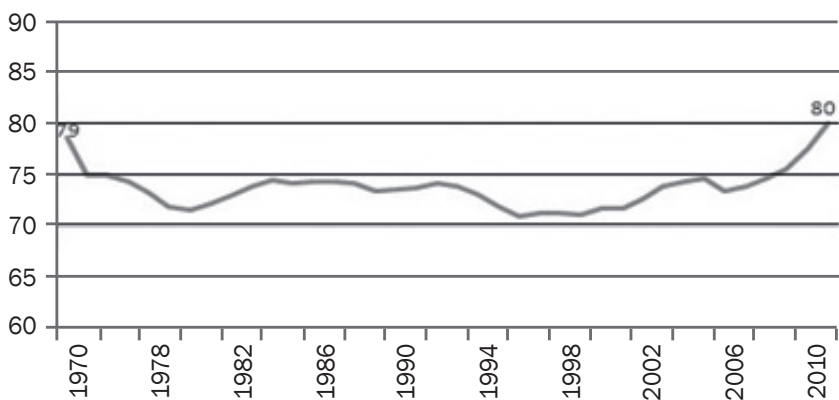
## Washington state demonstrates similar graduation gains as U.S.

Washington state's graduation rate has been calculated somewhat differently over the years, but also shows long-term improvement.

The rate of on-time graduation improved from about 66 percent in the 2002-3 school year to 75 percent in 2010-11. During the last seven years of that eight-year period, the extended graduation rate rose from 74 to 81 percent.

The calculation method changed for the past several years, giving it a slightly lower base, but continued to improve. Under the new method, the on-time rate in 2012-13 was 76 percent and the extended rate was 79 percent.

### On-time U.S. high school graduation rates



Source: NCES Common Core of Data Average Freshman Graduation Rate

# Exemplary arts education to be celebrated with annual award

**A**pplications are now being accepted for the fourth annual Schools of Excellence in Arts Education Awards.

Presented by ArtsEd Washington, in partnership with the Association of Washington School Principals, this prestigious distinction honors schools that include the arts as an essential part of their students' education, providing a creative learning environment for outstanding student achievement through the development of exemplary arts education.

Inspired by a program of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, the awards are open to all K-12 schools throughout Washington state. Deadline for completed applications is April 15, 2014.

Full details on eligibility, program requirements, and the nomination process are posted online. To learn more and to apply, visit [www.artsed-washington.org/excellence](http://www.artsed-washington.org/excellence). For questions, send an email to [programs@artsedwashington.org](mailto:programs@artsedwashington.org), or call 206.441.4501.



PRESIDENT  
**Mari Taylor**

## Public education has a lot to celebrate lately

**U**.S. high school on-time graduation rates have hit an all time high of 80%. Students of color are achieving substantial increases and extended graduation rates are approaching 90%. Our own state has also seen improvements.

The improvements are not limited to graduation rates. U.S. students have made extraordinary gains in international tests, with more evidence of success in reducing achievement gaps.

There is no magical explanation. No single curriculum, program, test, or corporation is behind these improvements. These gains have come from a great many smart, dedicated and hard-working people committing their time and energy to quality public education for all children.

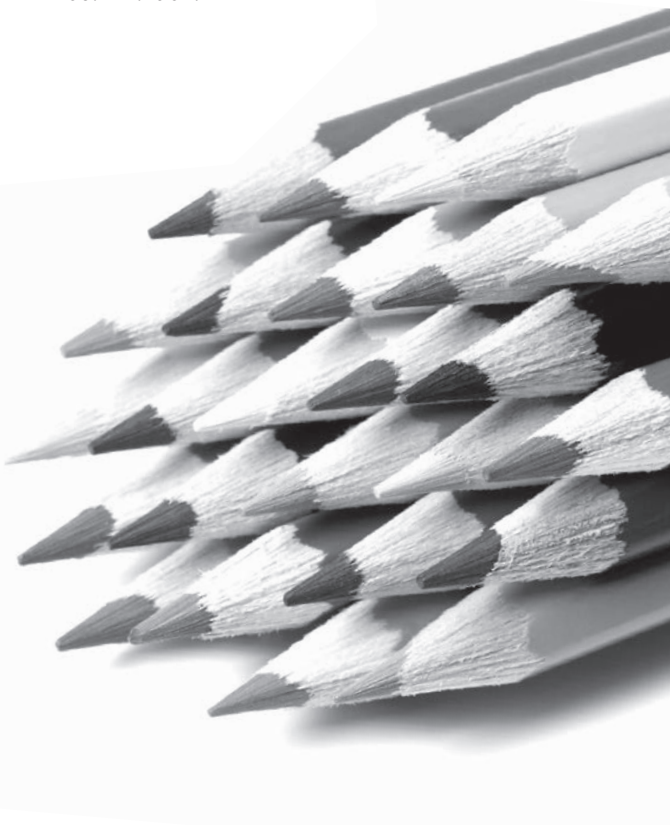
Two such efforts in our state were recognized recently when the Kent School District and Vancouver Public Schools received nationally prestigious Magna Awards for their efforts (See story on page 6). This dedication, innovation and hard work is on display in schools throughout Washington. If you have any doubt, just visit the new Our Kids, Our Future website at [www.ourkidswa.org](http://www.ourkidswa.org).

Professional learning communities of teachers, administrators, superintendents, board members and many others are working together to fuel this success. With a mindset of continuous improvement, we are equipping ourselves to courageously address some of the deeper challenges facing our communities, including rapidly increasing student homelessness, poverty and inequality.

Key components to improving opportunities for all kids include:

- Leadership at all levels motivated solely by the unwavering goal of quality public education for every child.
- Intensive, ongoing, embedded professional development for teachers.
- Access to all available resources, including human and financial capital.
- A perspective that values building relationships and embracing diversity.
- Constant adaptation in a cycle of continuous improvement.

I encourage you to bring this spirit to WSSDA's spring regional meetings. They are a great opportunity for board members and superintendents to further their professional learning, share valuable insight, and build relationships to support this vital work.



a once-in-a-generation opportunity to show the districts' students the real-world value of math. Along with the high school's students, 10 classes of kids at the nearby elementary and middle schools would watch with interest as their future high school took shape.

They could learn why geometry matters from architects intent on building a school that would last a century, the importance of adding, subtracting and multiplying fractions from carpenters building the cabinetry in the science lab, applied principles of physics and geology from the crews working to build the geothermal heat exchange infrastructure that lies beneath the building.

Working with a grant from Washington STEM, the district conceived the Real Time Math Project. The project is designed to help middle school students learn from real-world math challenges derived from the construction of the new high school, alongside STEM professionals from architects to engineers to land surveyors to plumbing contractors.

The idea was baked into the district's working agreements with its contractors including Integrus Architecture. Indeed, partnering with the Vashon educators was a central element of the interview process with enthusiastic firms receiving a competitive advantage in evaluation criteria.

Architects and engineers brought the design problems of the project into middle-school classrooms this spring. How should the stairwells be built to both comply with code and promote learning? What problems of math and physics apply to the seemingly simple but daunting plumbing problem created when an entire high school goes to the bathroom during a 10-minute break between classes?

Students eagerly tackled these problems and compared their solutions to the "real" solutions worked out by the professionals.

As Loretta Sachs with Integrus Architecture remarked, "When we heard there was an opportunity to work with students to do actual math problem-solving and have them think about how the building comes together, we were really excited because it was a whole new way to engage them."

The project was so successful that Washington STEM made another grant to expand the program to the high school and elementary school, and document promising practices to help spread this idea elsewhere.

Even now, teachers and the STEM professionals on the project are working on new ways to make math real for the students by using the construction of the new school. The idea has even bled into other subjects. Freshman English students make weekly observations of the project's progress and write about it to strengthen their non-fiction writing skills.

Among the goals of Washington STEM is finding replicable and scalable ways to improve STEM teaching and learning across our state. This idea may have hatched in the small community of Vashon Island, but it can be used anywhere. Schools build new buildings and renovate old buildings every year, and students across our state are struggling in math and science. Let's solve both problems in tandem.

## OUR KIDS OUR FUTURE

# Find out what's right with our schools

**T**here is a new tool to stay on top of what is going on in schools in your district and across the state.

The *Our Kids, Our Future* website, [www.ourkidswa.org](http://www.ourkidswa.org), launched in early February and has already attracted a throng of readers from across Washington. The site highlights excellence in public education. Examples range from efforts to dramatically increase graduation rates and reduce bullying to new approaches to teaching the arts, math and science.

"We need to get past the clatter of politics and bleeding headlines," said Michael Wilson, WSSDA's communications director. "Every poll highlights the disconnect between how people feel about their local schools, which they usually like a lot, and the education system, which they often believe is broken. It's time to acknowledge the great models that are out there and learn from them."

The site is intended to be much more than a public relations effort, Wilson said. It should serve as a storehouse of ideas for teachers, administrators and other educators. It may even become a resource for people moving into a district to learn more about their schools. The site also has a companion Facebook page to feature selected pieces.

"There are plenty of ideas and best practices" said Marcie Maxwell, Governor Inslee's Senior Policy Advisor on Education and former school board director. "As we all work on challenges and opportunities, it's important and helpful to share these wonderful stories about the kids and our public schools."

The content on the website comes for the most part from the districts. Every week, districts produce newsletter stories, videos and other products to explain what is occurring in the state's schools.

In just a month, the site has captured more than 150 success stories from districts across the state. More than 1,650 people have already gone to the site to examine what is working in Washington's schools.

The website was spearheaded by the state Learning First Alliance and is a joint effort of several state education organizations, including The Washington State School Directors' Association, Association of Washington School Principals, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Washington Association of School Administrators, Washington Education Association, Washington State PTA and Washington Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

The site has a search engine to make it easy to find examples by subject or school district. More than 40 districts have already contributed and the founders expect many more to be added over the next few months.

"As the website itself says," said WSSDA President, Mari Taylor, "The stories remind us that universal public education is something to believe in and one of our nation's greatest inventions. How we approach education and the improvement of education will define our future."

revolved around the importance of local decision-making authority for both of these areas and opposition to placing more unfunded mandates on local school districts.

- NSBA bill on restoring local school board authority and flexibility, HR 1386. The House passed this bill last fall. Senators were asked to co-sponsor this bill or pass a Senate bill which would then move both bills to conference.

The Institute offered workshops in these and other subject areas, as well as motivational speakers and opportunities to network with school directors from across the country. Copies of the Powerpoint presentations given during the Institute can be found on the NSBA website along with more information on its priority issues.

Once armed with all this information, it was time to “hit the hill.” We had very beneficial conversations with our Congressional representatives and in some cases their legislative aides. We were able to meet with Senator Marie Cantwell and her staff. Senator Patty Murray’s staff has been with her for quite some time and is very knowledgeable about our issues. Many of our FRN Coordinating Members are also scheduling meetings with their representatives back here in their congressional district.

A small group of the WSSDA delegation met with staff from the Department of Education (ED) and discussed areas of interest to Washington’s school directors. This is an activity we have pursued for quite a number of years and to our knowledge we are the only state that meets with them. Both the ED staff and our members appreciated the opportunity to share perspectives.

We welcome any questions about the FRN work and encourage all school directors to become engaged in advocacy on behalf of education in your community.



Nancy Truitt Pierce, Monroe School District board member spoke during the 41st Annual NSBA Advocacy Institute in February. Twenty five WSSDA members attended the conference in Washington, D.C.



DIRECTOR OF POLICY AND LEGAL SERVICES  
**Heidi Maynard**

## In today's schools, vapor gets in your eyes

**P**ublic health officials and school officials alike are concerned about the recent surge in popularity of vapor devices—otherwise known as vapor pens or e-cigarettes—among middle and high school students.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), during 2011-2012, use among high school students increased from 4.7% to 10%. Among middle school students, it increased from 1.4% to 2.7%. Perhaps most disturbing, e-cigarette experimentation and recent use among U.S. middle and high school students doubled, resulting in an estimated 1.78 million students having used the devices as of 2012.

Vapor pens were originally intended to help people quit smoking. The battery-operated devices allow users to control the amount of liquid nicotine (contained in a cartridge) they put in the device. This allows the user to taper off on the amount of nicotine they use.

The problem is that the device appears to be attracting new smokers. According to the CDC, in 2012, 20.3% of middle school students surveyed reported smoking vapor devices but never smoking conventional cigarettes. Vapor pens, it appears, have a number of marketing advantages over cigarettes. They are cheap, accessible to minors in most states at any mall, and advertised all over social media and the web. Another attraction for youth is that and they come in a variety of different styles and colors, making them easy to coordinate with makeup and clothes. The techy-cool vibe of vapor devices has, in short, made smoking cool again.

Experts dispute vapor pen advocates’ claims that the devices are a much healthier way to smoke. The Food and Drug Administration has warned that its analysis of two leading brands of cartridges revealed a toxic chemical used in antifreeze as well as multiple carcinogens.

And that’s not the only concern for school officials. As it turns out, vapor devices allow students to smoke a tincture of marijuana virtually undetected. It’s as simple as putting the tincture in a cartridge, inserting the cartridge into the mouthpiece of the vapor pen, and pressing a button.

The device emits an odorless (unless the cartridge is flavored) water vapor and the only way to detect marijuana is to get close enough to smell it on the student’s exhalations. The devices are about the size of a pen or electric toothbrush, and are easily concealed in a shirt sleeve or pocket. NBC Bay Area reported in January on a new “game” teens are playing—using vapor pens for both nicotine and marijuana in the same room as their parents.

WSSDA has revised its Policy/Procedure 4215, now titled Use of Tobacco and Nicotine Products and Delivery Devices, to prohibit the use of vapor pens and vapor devices by staff, students, visitors and community members on school district property.

# 2014 Magna Awards celebrates Kent and Vancouver

**K**ent School District and Vancouver Public Schools took three of the top awards at the nationally prestigious Magna Awards. The highly selective awards recognize local school boards and their districts that take bold steps to advance public education.

The 2014 winners are highlighted in a special section in the April issue of American School Board Journal, a publication of the National School Boards Association. NSBA cosponsored the awards with Sodexo. Kent's nomination was one of 300 submissions to this year's competition.

Kent took two awards, including the grand prize award for districts with more than 20,000 students. The award recognized the district's iGrad effort, an individual graduation and degree program Kent runs in partnership with Green River Community College. The program helps 16-21 year-olds earn high school diplomas, GEDs, college credits, or professional certification.

"The demand for our program shows how eager people are to succeed," Debbie Straus, president of the Kent School Board told the Seattle Times. "iGrad is another way we provide equal access to education for all."

Since iGrad's opening in 2012, 156 students have received their credentials with 25 diplomas, 130 GEDs, and 1 professional certificate. Enrollment this school year more than doubled from last year to 564 students from Kent and nearby districts. As a result of its success, iGrad expanded its facility to accommodate more students.

Located in a shopping center, iGrad offers students a flexible schedule—students can attend in three-hour blocks in the morning, afternoon, or evening—and individualized learning plans. This program is the result of the school board's goal of high achievement for all students.

This year's three grand prize, 15 first place, and 15 honorable mention winners were selected from three enrollment categories: under 5,000 students, 5,000 to 20,000 students, and over 20,000 students. Each of the grand prize-winning school districts will receive a \$5,000 contribution from

Sodexo during a special presentation at NSBA Annual Conference, to be held April 5-7 in New Orleans.

Vancouver Public Schools was one of five first place winners in the category for districts with more than 20,000 students. The district won the award for its Jump Start kindergarten program. Jump Start is a free summer program that provides academic and developmental activities to help incoming kindergartners develop the skills they need to begin learning on the first day of school.

Six hundred students attended Jump Start programs in 14 district schools during 2013. The Foundation for Vancouver Public Schools helped pay for the program.

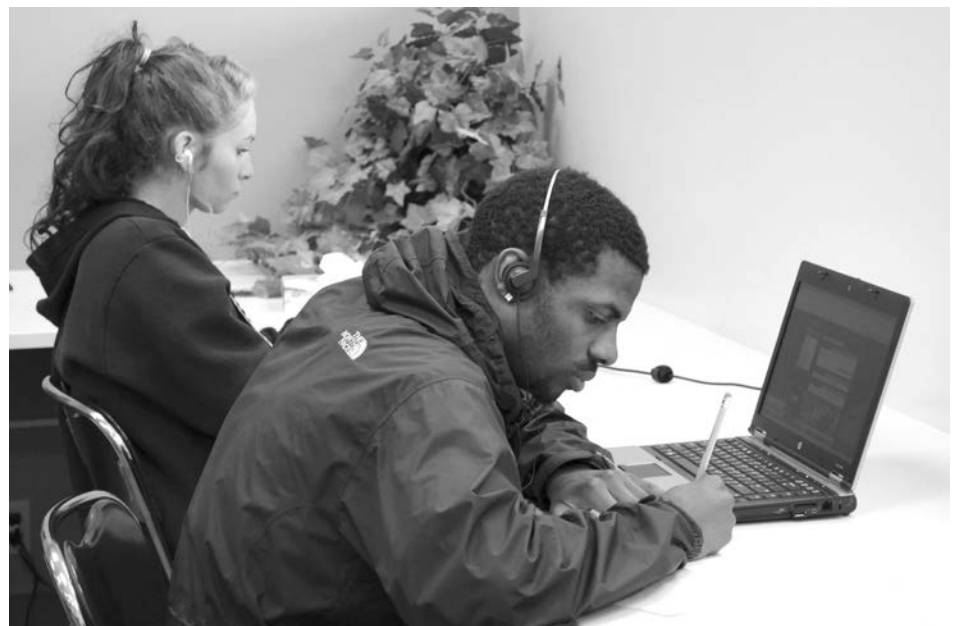
In 2013, nearly half of the students who attended Jump Start at least 13 days were ready for benchmark-level instruction. Jump Start students are more likely to be at benchmark than their non-Jump Start peers.

The Kent School District also received honorable mention in this year's Magna Awards for another of its programs, Kinder to College.

This program invites kindergartners and parents to visit local college campuses to experience college and gain a vision of

what is possible for their future. Students engage in a Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM) learning activity facilitated by the college. This shows them academic areas of the highest projected job growth of the future, while parents observe and are able to continue the engagement at home.

Kent and Vancouver were among 15 school boards that received WSSDA board of distinction awards in 2013.



Kent School District's iGrad program has helped 156 students receive high school diplomas, GEDs, college credits and professional certifications since launching in 2012. Students are offered a flexible schedule and individualized learning plans.

## SPRING REGIONAL MEETINGS

# NSBA launches national campaign

The National School Boards Association (NSBA) has launched an all-new national campaign to highlight the success of public education. The campaign features advertisements with celebrity advocates and public school graduates to tell their stories of public education.

“Great public schools reflect the will of local communities and the strong governance of local school boards dedicated to advancing student achievement,” said NSBA Executive Director Thomas J. Gentzel. “This is an excellent vehicle for NSBA and our state associations to connect to share the great things happening in America’s public schools.”

Sal Khan, founder of the not-for-profit Khan Academy, is the campaign’s first celebrity advocate. Two other household names have joined upcoming phases of the campaign: basketball legend and business mogul Earvin “Magic” Johnson and former talk show host and celebrity spokesperson Montel Williams. State school boards associations will be highlighting local celebrities in their campaigns as well, and more celebrities will be joining the national campaign over the next year.

“NSBA’s campaign intends to counter the aggressive, well-funded attacks on public education with national and local outreach that supports local school board governance and honors the achievements of America’s public schools,” Gentzel said.

The campaign operates against a simple premise: “Who I am today began with public education,” paired with the rejoinder, “Today’s public schools are better than ever.”

In one of the advertisements featuring Khan, he notes that “People talk about college and career readiness, but both are just a means to an end. What we really need to talk about is life readiness.”

The campaign website, [www.standup4publicschools.org](http://www.standup4publicschools.org), includes more details on the campaign and how individuals can get involved and take action to support public schools.

### March 19 DIRECTOR AREA 6

**Camas**  
6:00 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.

Hayes Freedom High School Commons  
1919 NE Lone St.  
Camas, WA 98607

### March 20 DIRECTOR AREA 3

**Eatonville**  
6:00 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.

Eatonville High School South Hall  
302 Marshall Ave. N.  
Eatonville, WA

### April 29 DIRECTOR AREA 2

**Kent**  
6:00 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.

Administration Building Boardroom  
12033 SE 256th St.  
Kent, WA 98030

### April 30 DIRECTOR AREA 1

**Lake Stevens**  
6:00 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.

Administration Building Boardroom  
12309 22nd St. NE  
Lake Stevens, WA 98258

### May 1 DIRECTOR AREA 5

**Elma**  
6:00 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.

Elma High School Library  
1011 W. Main Street  
Elma, WA 98541

### May 5 DIRECTOR AREA 8

**Naches Valley**  
6:00 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.

Naches Valley High School Cafeteria  
101 W. 5th St.  
Naches, WA 98937

### May 6 DIRECTOR AREA 7

**Omak**  
6:00 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.

Omak High School Commons  
20 South Cedar St.  
Omak, WA 98841

### May 7 DIRECTOR AREA 10

**Cheney**  
6:00 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.

Betz Elementary School Viking Room  
317 N Seventh  
Cheney, WA 99004

## 2014 Road Map Project Awards honors three districts

Congratulations to the winners of the 2014 Road Map Project Awards.

A ceremony was held in early March to celebrate the great work happening in South King County and South Seattle

to advance equity and eliminate opportunity gaps for students.

The event, held at the Museum of Flight, put a spotlight on the awards program’s 21 finalists, which were selected from a pool of

more than 60 nominations.

School districts honored at the ceremony included Auburn, Kent, and Federal Way.

Visit [www.roadmapproject.org](http://www.roadmapproject.org) to learn more about the program and to get involved.





WSSDA Direct is published monthly by the Washington State School Directors' Association to provide information of interest to school directors and the education community. The views expressed in opinion articles appearing in WSSDA Direct are those of the writers and do not necessarily represent WSSDA policies or positions. If you have a disability and need this publication in an alternate format, please contact the WSSDA Communications Department.

221 College Street N.E.  
Olympia, WA 98516-5313

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Mari Taylor, President . . . . . 425.314.1131  
Chris Nieuwenhuis, President-Elect. . . . . 509.290.1824  
Chris Nation, Vice President. . . . . 425.322.6630  
Debbie Long, Immediate Past President . . . . . 509.993.1019  
Dr. Jim Koval, Acting Executive Director . . . . . 360.252.3001  
Michael Wilson, Communications Director . . . . . 360.252.3013

#### WSSDA DIRECTORY

General Information . . . . . 360.493.9231  
Association Services . . . . . 360.252.3002  
Leadership Development Services . . . . . 360.252.3009  
Governmental Relations . . . . . 360.252.3010  
Communications . . . . . 360.252.3013  
Policy and Legal Services . . . . . 360.252.3018  
Toll Free (In-State) . . . . . 800.562.8927  
E-Mail . . . . . mail@wssda.org

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### March

- 15** Regional Meeting: DA 4
- 19** Regional Meeting: DA 6
- 20** Regional Meeting: DA 3
- 21** Webinar
- 27** Webinar for New Directors
- 31** Regional Meeting: DA 1

### May

- 5** Regional Meeting: DA 8
- 6** Regional Meeting: DA 7
- 7** Regional Meeting: DA 10
- 14** Regional Meeting: DA 5
- 17** Average to Excellent Workshop: Arlington

### August

- 22-24** Board of Directors' Meeting
- 29** Regional Meeting: DA 2

### April

- 25, 26** Board of Directors' Meeting
- 29** Regional Meeting: DA 2
- 30** Regional Meeting: DA 1

### June

- 20, 21** Board of Directors Meeting
- 20, 21** Legislative Committee Meeting

### September

- 18** Board of Directors' Meeting
- 19** Legislative Committee Meeting
- 19-20** Legislative Assembly

### July

- 17** Average to Excellent Workshop, Rochester
- 18, 19** Legislative Committee Meeting

### October

- 25** Legislative Committee Meeting

### November

- 19-22** Annual Conference