

Our quarterly profile of educational leadership in Washington state.

Sen. Lisa Wellman

State Senator 41st Legislative District

Senator Lisa Wellman is the recipient of AWSP's 2018 Torch of Leadership Award. She represents the 41st Legislative District (Mercer Island, Bellevue, Newcastle and parts of Issaquah, Sammamish, and Renton) in the Washington State Senate. She was elected in 2016 after a 25-year career in technology and marketing including executive level positions in Fortune 100 companies.



How did education become an area of focus for you in the Legislature?

My campaign for the state senate in 2016 was all about education. McCleary of course was top of mind and my opponent was chair of the Senate Education Committee. Although I have a background in education, I knew I needed to learn more about a number of specific needs. That year I took a deep dive into our state's education challenges – that was nearly three years ago and I'm still learning something new every day. Nothing is more important to our state than providing a high-

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quality education for our kids – it's why we spend more than half of our state budget on education. That's why I was so pleased that my caucus entrusted me with the chairmanship of the committee.

What is the biggest challenge the Legislature faces in addressing student needs at the state level in the 2019 session?

McCleary funding and how school districts have been impacted will continue to need careful examination. I'm also focused on school safety – and helping empower educators to install and maintain a school culture that is sensitive to the mental health needs of students. Obviously, mental health support is top of mind for all legislators and will require sufficient funding to address our children's growing needs in this area.

Have you seen any changes in the way the Legislature functions since you were elected? If so, what's changed?

Really? It has been a sea change. The first year, Democrats were in the minority in the Senate and the number of seats on the education committee was reduced so I couldn't even sit on the committee. Now, I am chair! With Democrats in the majority, the vast majority of bills passed this year were bipartisan legislation that put people first, not special interests. I make sure all committee members, regardless of



party, get bills heard. We're focused on putting people first and I feel honored to be in a position to make positive change.

What has had the most influence on your thinking about education reform?

First, I believe public education is the bedrock of democracy. I know, having grown up around schools like Bronx Science and the High School of Music and Art in New York, public schools can be as varied as the community wants or needs. And they must prepare children for work in a 21st Century. This is going to require public education to be flexible and responsive to our rapidly changing country.

With all that you do, what do you do to relax and maintain balance in your life?

I love to be with family and friends, enjoy travel, love reading and exercise my creative muscle with photography.

What book is on your nightstand?

Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind by Yuval Noah Harari.

What is one lesson that you have learned that you would like to share with principals?

A school's culture is one of the most important factors in student success. Creating an inclusive environment where staff and students feel supported and encouraged to be their best is critical. Leadership matters, and as a former executive, I know some days it is really hard. It starts at the top and principals, as leaders of the enterprise, drive school success. Hats off to them and the critical role they play. ■

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