

Our quarterly profile of educational leadership in Washington state.

Tami Skillingstad

Assistant Principal, Westwood Middle School, Cheney SD



In this edition of Honor Roll, we are proud to feature Tami Skillingstad, AWSP's 2018 Assistant Principal of the Year. Tami's peers on the Association of Washington Middle Level Principals (AWMLP) chose to honor her exemplary leadership with Cheney School District students and adults through this award.

What made you decide to go into education?

Great and impactful teachers I had as a student: Mr. Gunderson and Mrs. Byrd. These two educators changed the trajectory of my life in such a positive way that I wanted to do the same for others.

What led you to pursue school leadership?

This decision was a quick one. Our district planned to downsize the district office staff and use this money for staffing in buildings. I was the math and science coordinator at the district office and then assigned, after approval from the building principal, to be an assistant middle school principal and athletic director. I was so excited and fortunate to work with a principal that I have the highest respect for and in a building with teachers that are professional, have high expectations and love kids.

What's the best part about being an assistant principal? The most challenging?

I love being with the students and having fun in my job every day. The most challenging part of being an assistant principal is the time commitment needed to get all of the work done well.

“The most challenging part of being an assistant principal is the time commitment needed to get all of the work done well.”

What are the biggest challenges facing principals today?

A school today must provide numerous wrap-around services outside of reading, writing and math to all students. Our school provides nutrition, clothing, social and emotional support, health services, mental health services, counseling, restorative practices, discipline, extracurricular opportunities, and academics with intentional student centered interventions and enrichments. Today's principals are managing and running a highly complex system.

What do you view as some of the strengths and opportunities of education reform?

One of the opportunities of education reform is for our state to fully fund public education. I hope we continue to make progress toward fully funding our public schools, which will have a

positive effect on all of our students. Our society will benefit when these students are adults. Another strength of education reform is the Common Core State Standards (Washington State Learning Standards) which outline the knowledge and skills all students should have and be able to do at each grade level.

What advice would you give to a new assistant principal?

Work for an extraordinary principal. Don't be afraid of hard work. Try your best every day. Listen — really listen to others — and learn. See and understand the positive in others.

What do you do to unwind and step away?

I love family vacations and continue to beg my adult children to join my husband and me on our excursions. Attending and rocking out at live concerts is another way I unwind by just getting lost in the music and the moments. As I get older, my dance moves have slowed to avoid injury. ■