



BOOKENDS OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

PRINT NEWSLETTER OF THE ASSOCIATION OF WASHINGTON SCHOOL PRINCIPALS | FALL 2025



FIND YOUR NETWORK: Over 40 Leaders of Color from all walks of education met during the 2025 AWSP/WASA Summer Conference in June to find camaraderie, share experiences, and celebrate the joy of the end of the school year! Pictured from left to right: AWSP Middle-Level Committee Past Chair Thomasina Rogers, AWSP Middle-Level Committee Regional Rep. Dr. Wilnic Gideon, AWSP Board President Jason Smith, AWSP Associate Director Kamrica Ary-Turner Beaver, and AWSP Elementary Committee Chair Enrique Romero. Learn more about the AWSP Leaders of Color Network (LOCNET) and each of our new Leadership Networks on page 6.





Bringing Literacy Within Reach for All Students.

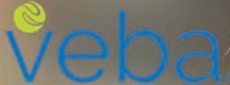
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-  Get **Free** AI tools through sponsored opportunities
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The AWSP iGrow Summit for Leaders of Color

We Hear You. We See You. We Need You!

February 7, 2026 | Tacoma
www.awsp.org/igrow



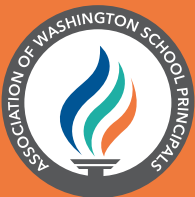
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Get in Touch!

Caroline Brumfield

AWSP Marketing and Design Director
caroline@awsp.org



NSPRA Award of Excellence

AWSP is honored to receive an award of excellence for Bookends from the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA)! Thank you to all contributors for making this publication a valuable resource to AWSP members.



Strengthening Your Personal Brand

School Leaders,

Having a marketing and design background, I spend a lot of time thinking about our organization's logos, fonts, colors, and—most importantly—**branding**.

When you think of branding, many well-known logos and marketing campaigns likely come to mind: Apple, Nike, Coca-Cola, Google, Starbucks, and more. These brands are successful because they are consistent, strategic, relatable, unique, and reflective of their audience's needs and values.

Similarly, we at AWSP are proud of our brand. We work together as a team to maintain strong and consistent branding. In a practical sense, branding lets people know who we are. But on a deeper level, branding is a statement of our mission, our priorities, and the “why” behind the work.

Did you know that as a school leader, you, too, have your own personal brand?

Your brand is the foundation of you who are. It's a combination of your strengths, your vision, your beliefs, and your experience. And while you probably don't have your own personal logo, the people in your school community see your brand on everything you do.

You have the power to influence this brand and adjust it to reflect your goals and values as a school leader. And just like the branding of the most successful companies, your brand will resonate best when it recognizes and supports the needs of your students and staff.

This issue of *Bookends* focuses on the theme of “Building a Strong Foundation.” From getting involved with AWSP's new Leadership Networks to strengthening your student connections and empowering your whole district to lead with excellence, we have information to help tune your personal brand as you are *becoming while doing*.

Of special note are guest articles from Chimacum superintendent Dr. Scott Mauk, Clover Park superintendent Ron Banner, R.A. Long High School Assistant Principal Lacey Griffiths, and River Homelink Principal Matthew Kesler.

As always, we'd love to hear from you. Reach out to us anytime!

Caroline Brumfield
AWSP Marketing and Design Director



AWSP & Foundation

Congrats to the 2025 Schools on the Rise!



The AWSL/AWSP “Washington Schools on the Rise” award celebrates schools where students and adults collaborate to improve culture and amplify student voice. AWSP and its Foundation support these schools with resources and opportunities. These schools foster inclusive and equitable environments. There were 42 Schools on the Rise for 2025. View the full list at www.awsp.org/OnTheRise.

AWSL Celebrates 70 Years of Leadership



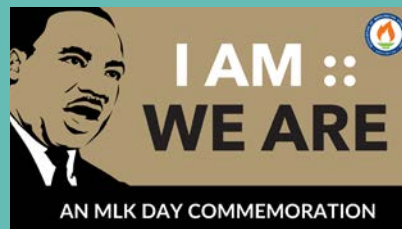
The Association of Washington Student Leaders (AWSL) invites you to become an AWSL member school during their 70th year! Since 1956, AWSL has partnered with principals and schools across our state to develop students as leaders. Membership gives you access to savings, resources, and discounts all designed to support your work and strengthen your student leadership programs. Learn more at www.AWSLeaders.org/benefits.

AWSP Winter Forum: Join Us Feb. 19



Join us for our 2026 Winter Forum on Feb. 19 from 3:30-5:00 p.m. Each of our quarterly school leader forums is a member benefit and are a time to hear from your association leadership and leaders from our partners across the state. Clock hours are available! Register on the AWSP Learning Lab at www.awsp.org/forums. Special thanks to our Forum sponsor, Renaissance Learning!

I AM | WE ARE: An MLK Day Commemoration

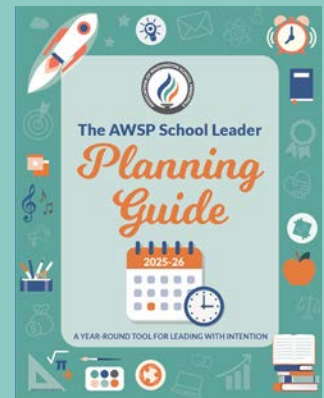


Recognize MLK Day with the Association of Washington Student Leaders! AWSL is proud to announce the 2026 Martin Luther King program, I AM | WE ARE, is coming soon for elementary, middle and high school students!

Updated each year, I AM | WE ARE is a ready-to-roll program designed for school assemblies and MLK Day events. It includes a keynote address, implementation guide, engagement questions and access to

AWSL Director, James Layman all in a format that lets you customize a 20-30 minute assembly event that fits your school day. Engage your students across all grade levels with the ideas of belonging and humanity. Learn more at www.AWSLeaders.org/mlk.

New! The AWSP School Leader Planning Guide



To support you in managing your time with greater purpose, AWSP in collaboration with the National School Leader Collaborative has created the School Leader Planning Guide — a planning and reflection tool designed specifically for the demands of today’s school leaders. This isn’t your average calendar. It’s a monthly guide packed with:

- Key responsibilities aligned to seasonal leadership priorities
- Important deadlines and events
- Timely professional development opportunities
- Leadership tips and reflective prompts to help you grow

AWSP members receive 50% off! Purchase your copy (digital or print) at www.awsp.org/PlanningGuide.

Highlights

Torch of Leadership Winner: Rep. Steve Bergquist



Each year, AWSP's Advocacy Advisory Council has the opportunity to select a state-level public servant who has demonstrated support of principals and the principalship in the education of all students. We're thrilled to announce that our 2025 Torch of Leadership Award is presented to Representative Steve Bergquist (D-Renton), who currently serves on the Appropriations, Education, and Early Learning & Human Services committees. Learn more at www.awsp.org/torchofleadership.

Culture Kickoff Award Winners



The AWSP/AWSP Culture Kickoff Award celebrates schools that start the year with energy, intentionality, and a focus on positive school culture. These schools intentionally set the tone for belonging, community, and success. We're excited to announce our 2025 winners! View the full list at www.awsp.org/culturekickoff.

Welcome from the 2025-26 AWSP President, Jason Smith!



AWSP is excited to welcome Jason Smith, Principal at Gov. John R. Rogers High School in Puyallup, as this year's AWSP President. Below is a message from Jason to AWSP members.

Not long ago, I stood at commencement, reflecting on how quickly time passes. And now, I have the privilege of welcoming you—leaders who shape our schools and communities—as we head full swing into another year of meaningful work.

As we step into the next season, I invite you to carry with you three essentials: courage, wisdom, and an awareness of time.

Courage will guide you through difficult decisions and help you stay true to your values, even when it's challenging. When adversity comes, let your courage anchor you in your purpose.

Wisdom is not just what we know—it's how we apply it. It helps us choose ethics over convenience, people over politics, and long-term impact over short-term gains. And when you feel unsure, lean on your AWSP family. We're in this together.

Time is our greatest gift. Each year is a window to make a difference—to inspire, lead, and grow. Don't let the pace of leadership keep you from its beauty. Pause, reflect, and give yourself grace along the way.

These three—courage, wisdom, and time—work best together. One without the others can lead us off course. But in tandem, they create a path to leadership that is bold, thoughtful, and impactful.

As Aristotle said, "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit." Let's make excellence our habit, every day.

Wishing you a year filled with purpose and possibility.

A handwritten signature of Jason Smith in black ink.

Jason Smith, Principal
Gov. John R. Rogers High School |
Puyallup School District ■

FIND YOUR NETWORK



Scan this code or visit
www.awsp.org/networks.

Surround Yourself with Leaders Like You!

At AWSP, we know leadership can be lonely—but it doesn't have to be. That's why we've created AWSP Leadership Networks, designed to bring school leaders together in collaborative, supportive, and action-focused communities.

Our new leadership networks are an AWSP member benefit, and there is no cost to participate. Clock hours may be available. (Check with your network chair and staff liaison.)

Please sign up in the AWSP Learning Lab so our network chairs can plan for the right meeting size.

Why Join a Network?

- **Connect & Collaborate:** Share experiences, swap solutions, and learn from leaders like you across the state.
- **Lead the Change:** Your input fuels AWSP's Government Relations & Advocacy work, helping us push for policies that truly meet the needs of schools and students.

- **Access Anytime:** Coming soon, our members-only online platform will allow you to ask questions, poll your peers, and strengthen your leadership—24/7.

Get Started Today

We're starting with five Leadership Networks this year. (But there is room to grow!) Register for any of the following networks that are right for you at www.awsp.org/networks. Learn more about each network and find meeting dates and times below. ■



CO-CHAIR

Brenda White-Thompson
Assistant Principal,
Thompson Elementary,
Bethel SD

ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS

Jan. 14: 7:30 - 8:30 a.m.
April 15: 1-2 p.m.



CO-CHAIR

Michael Kantman
Assistant Principal,
Wahluke Junior High,
Wahluke SD



AWSP STAFF

Gina Yonts
Associate Director



CHAIR

Dr. Jessica Gideon
Principal, Madison
Elementary,
Everett PS

LEADERS OF COLOR

Nov. 20, Jan. 22, Feb. 26
(More dates listed online!)
5 - 6:30 p.m.

AWSP STAFF

Kamrica Ary-Turner Beaver
Associate Director



RURAL SCHOOLS

Dec. 10, April 4
4 - 5 p.m.

CO-CHAIR

Billina Dolezal
Principal, Kalama Elementary,
Kalama SD



AWSP STAFF

Scott Friedman
Associate Director



CO-CHAIR

Cindy Sholtys-Cromwell
Principal, Kelso Virtual
Academy, Kelso SD



CO-CHAIR

Cathi Davis
Principal,
Ruby Bridges
Elementary,
Northshore SD



AWSP STAFF

Jack Arend
Deputy Director



WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

Dec. 9, April 21
4 - 5 p.m.

CO-CHAIR

Patrick Vincent
Principal, Union Gap School,
Union Gap SD



CO-CHAIR

Kim Doecker
Principal,
Garrison Middle,
Walla Walla SD



AWSP STAFF

Roz Thompson
Government
Relations &
Advocacy Director



CO-CHAIR

Brett Wille
Principal,
Monroe High,
Monroe SD



INCLUSIONARY PRACTICES

*(View next date and time in
the AWSP Learning Lab!)*

Connect with Us!

Questions? Want to suggest a new Leadership Network, or help lead one? Reach out to us at webmaster@awsp.org.



Finding Your Mid-Year *Rhythm*

Jack Arend, Deputy Director, AWSP



AWSP LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL: For extra mid-year support with the AWSP Leadership Framework, check out our self-assessment tool. We designed the self-assessment to help you evaluate your leadership practices and identify areas for growth within the framework. By reflecting on your leadership and assessing your systems, you can identify areas of strength and uncover barriers to your growth and impact. *(This document is not part of your required evaluation and sharing the results of your self-assessment with your supervisor is optional.)* Scan this QR code or visit www.awsp.org/Framework.

As the school year moves into November, the tempo shifts. The bright, energetic *allegro* of September gives way to something more complex, a score filled with dense measures, unexpected key changes, and the occasional dissonant chord. Before becoming a principal, I spent 16 years as a high school music teacher, and I learned that in every performance there are moments of high energy and moments that test your focus. **Great music, like great leadership, takes time, patience, and the willingness to keep showing up measure after measure.** In these darker, busier winter months, it's easy to forget how much beautiful music you've already made in your school. I want to remind you that you are doing good work, that your efforts matter deeply, and that AWSP is here to support you through every movement of this leadership journey.

The AWSP Leadership Framework as a Musical Score

The AWSP Leadership Framework works much like a musical score. The eight criteria — Creating a Culture, Ensuring School Safety, Planning with Data, Aligning Curriculum, Improving Instruction, Managing Resources, Engaging Families, and Closing the Gap, are like the movements of a musical piece. Each criterion provides structure and direction, but the artistry comes from how you interpret and lead them in your school. When the days grow darker, the AWSP Leadership Framework helps you keep your place in the music, reminding you of the incredible passages you've already played and pointing you toward the next phrase.

This is the time of year when it can be helpful to pause, listen, and notice where the music is already beautiful. Identify one part of your leadership “score” where your school is truly in harmony right now, and take a moment to celebrate that with your staff. Let them hear the music they are making together. Then, choose one new note to play—a small, intentional action in another part of the Framework that might bring fresh en-

ergy to your leadership ensemble. You might think of it as introducing a new motif into a familiar piece, something that keeps the performance alive and moving forward.

Check Your Tempo

I sometimes imagine this mid-year reflection as listening back to a rehearsal recording. You hear the strong passages where everyone is in sync, the moments that shine. You also catch a few places where the tempo drags or the balance is off, and you know exactly where to make an adjustment. Maybe you consider using our Self-Assessment and Reflection Tool as a quick check to ensure you're in tempo, in balance, and ready for the next movement.

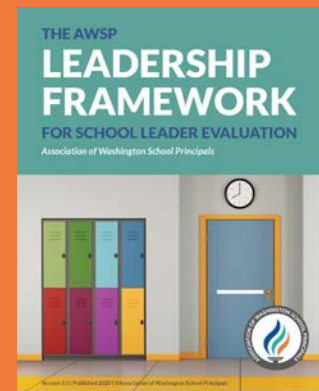
A Beautiful Blend

Many school leaders across our state are engaging with *The School Leader Paradigm*. The Paradigm calls this deep leadership work “becoming while doing.” You are developing your own leadership voice while guiding the complex interplay of culture, systems, and learning. Some passages will require *fortissimo*—bold, visible leadership. Others will call for *pianissimo*—listening, reflecting, and letting others take the melody. The AWSP Leadership Framework blends beautifully with the School Leader Paradigm to help you know when to lean in and when to hold back so the whole composition stays balanced.

You're the Conductor

Soon enough, the season will change and the light will return. But even now, your leadership is creating something worth hearing. Students feel it in your encouragement, staff hear it in your clarity, and families sense it in your steady presence. The AWSP Leadership Framework isn't just an evaluation tool—it's your score, your structure, and your reminder that you're conducting something extraordinary. Keep turning the pages. The performance isn't over, and the best movements may still be ahead. ■

AWSP Deputy Director Jack Arend joined the AWSP team in 2019. He has served in education since 1989 as an elementary, middle and high school music teacher. He began his building leadership career in the fall of 2006 as the principal of Peter G. Schmidt Elementary in the Tumwater School District. After eleven years in the principalship, he served two years at the Central Office level overseeing multiple content areas and mentoring first year teachers.



Looking for AWSP Leadership Framework Support? Let Us Help!

AWSP offers a variety of tools to help with your evaluation journey. Check out the Framework page on the AWSP website (www.awsp.org/framework) for an evidence of impact tool, self-assessment and reflection tools, resources for each criterion, and more.

We have evaluation and observation resources for both principals and assistant principals.

If you're looking for more personalized support, reach out to Jack Arend any time at jack@awsp.org or 800.562.6100.



Small but Mighty

Chimacum Principals Rebuild a District's Foundation and Transform Its Reputation

Dr. Scott Mauk, Superintendent, Chimacum School District

Nestled in a valley where the mountains meet the sea, Chimacum School District serves a proud, deeply connected community on Washington's Olympic Peninsula. Like many rural districts, we have faced the challenge of declining enrollment and a history of reputational struggles.

But today, Chimacum schools are experiencing a remarkable transformation. At the center of this story are three dynamic and dedicated principals—Ryan Stevens (Chimacum Junior/Senior High), Sarah Walker (Chimacum Creek Primary), and Katie Bensch (Chimacum Elementary)—whose collective leadership is shifting the district's trajectory.

A Foundation Rebuilt

Chimacum, like much of Jefferson County, has seen birthrates decline for decades. Since 1998, our student population has dropped by nearly half, and in the past, families often looked

elsewhere for schools, citing concerns about bullying, rigor, and uneven instruction. These challenges were real, but they are not the end of the story. Instead of retreating, our principals and staff embraced change together. Through progress aligning instructional practices across schools, calibrating teacher evaluation and supervision, investing in targeted professional learning, cultivating community with our staff, and having fun, we are writing a new chapter—one characterized by academic improvement, a sense of belonging, and impact partnerships.

Academic Gains and Student Voice

The results of this renewed focus are tangible. Student achievement is rising in core areas. Discipline incidents, including bullying and violence, are way down. Attendance is improving, and students are speaking up through surveys, leadership groups, and classroom dialogue. Participation in extracurricular activities like athletics, clubs, and robotics is climbing. These gains have not come by chance—they

are the direct result of collaborative leadership and a culture that blends rigor with care.

Engaging Every Learner

For our youngest learners, Sarah Walker has led the expansion of early learning programs—adding part-time preschool for three- and four-year-olds as well as Transitional Kindergarten. With fiscal support from community partners like AAUW and Rotary, kindergarten readiness leapt from 13% in 2023-24 to 77% in 2024-25. Under Walker's leadership, play-based, individualized learning now provides a stronger foundation for long-term success. In addition to her role as principal of Chimacum Creek Primary, she also serves as the district's Director of Inclusionary Practices. She is ensuring that all learners experience classrooms where every child is welcomed, supported, and challenged. Her work integrates tiered supports, coaching our staff, building family engagement, and implementing early intervention strategies so that students of all backgrounds and

abilities can thrive. Walker also works to align inclusionary strategies across grade levels so that engagement, equity, and rigor are cornerstones for all Chimacum kids.

At Chimacum Elementary, Katie Bensch continues to infuse classrooms with Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and inclusion. Restorative approaches to discipline ensure students feel safe and valued while being challenged to meet high expectations. She has also worked closely with staff to strengthen Tier 1 literacy and math instruction, ensuring that core academics are rigorous and accessible for all learners. By fostering strong partnerships with families and creating opportunities for outdoor and experiential learning, Bensch extends the classroom beyond its walls and connects learning to the unique environment of the Chimacum Valley. Her collaborative leadership exemplifies the belief that belonging and rigor go hand in hand.

Meanwhile, at the secondary level, Ryan Stevens has collaboratively developed innovative academic pathways that go toe-to-toe with big districts. Dual credit opportunities through programs like “College in the High School” allow students to graduate with up to two years of college credit. Career and Technical Education programs led by CTE Director, Kelley Watson, like

Chimacum Valley Tech, the FEED Truck, and Project Lead the Way open doors to relevant skills and high demand career pathways. Our secondary equity work has also focused on opportunity gaps for boys, bringing their achievement and engagement up substantially. Stevens even coached varsity Baseball to have more time to mentor and challenge boys.

Principals as a Unified Team

What makes steady improvement sustainable is not just the individual talents of our principals, but their commitment to lead as a team and to prioritize collaboration with our outstanding school staff teams. Stevens, Walker, and Bensch meet regularly to align practices, share strategies, and support one another in navigating the complexities of rural school leadership. They calibrate teacher supervision and evaluation to ensure fairness and growth. They coordinate Professional Learning Communities across schools so data-based practices for improvement become a districtwide effort rather than a building-by-building initiative. They are integral members of the Superintendent’s Cabinet, shaping districtwide decisions and ensuring that fiscal management, communication, and human resources remain tightly



Principals Ryan Stevens, Sarah Walker, and Katie Bensch sport vintage Cowboy football gear at their back to school inclusionary practices training for all teachers.

aligned with our strategic priorities. Together, they balance the essential ingredients of school culture: high expectations for learning, inclusive practices that work for all students, and a strong emphasis on collaboration. Their unity has built up our district’s capacity, transforming a once-fractured system into a more cohesive, joyful, and resilient one.

Partnerships that Multiply Impact

Chimacum principals understand that schools thrive when they are woven tightly into the fabric of our community. They communicate regularly with the school board to maintain transparency and shared vision, and advance school improvement. They work with community partners to fund tuition-free preschool, and with volunteers to enrich music, athletics, core academics, and outdoor education. These relationships extend Chimacum’s reach and resources well beyond what our size might predict.

Small but Mighty

There isn’t enough column space to capture our amazing progress in Chimacum. But one thing is certain: Our principals are leading to help us rewrite our story. In a district where



Chimacum Creek Primary Principal Sarah Walker greets students on the first day of Kindergarten.

every student is known by name, strength, and need, the leadership of Stevens, Walker, and Bensch ensures that students are not just engaged, but truly seen and supported.

Chimacum is proof that small districts can be mighty when guided by collaborative, courageous leadership. Like districts across our state, we continue to face challenges, but with our unified principal team leading the way, we are charting a steady and sustainable path of improvement, becoming the heart center of a proud and vibrant community where all our children and families thrive.

OUR PURPOSE

To be a caring community for courageous learners.

OUR PROMISE

Every student is known by name, strength, and need, to inspire them to learn, dream, and become.

OUR PEOPLE

Our people are at the heart of Chimacum Schools, keeping our commitment to know and inspire every student. ■

Dr. Scott Mauk is Superintendent of Chimacum School District.



RURAL SCHOOLS

LEADERSHIP NETWORK



**In a Rural District?
Join AWSP's Rural Schools
Leadership Network!**

Leading in a rural community comes with both unique challenges and incredible rewards. The work can feel isolating at times. AWSP's no-cost Rural Leadership Network is here to change that. Connect with other small-town and remote school leaders across the state. Learn more at www.awsp.org/networks.

Chimacum's AWSP Connection

JACK AREND,
AWSP DEPUTY
DIRECTOR:



"When Dr. Scott Mauk reached out to AWSP four years ago, he wasn't just looking for leadership development—he was seeking transformation. Together, we co-designed a customized leadership experience rooted in the AWSP Leadership Framework and School Leader Paradigm. Our work focused on cultivating strong school culture, deepening trust and relationships with staff and community, and strengthening contextual leadership—where each principal developed a keen understanding of their individual, social, political, and community landscape. These sessions weren't theoretical; they were grounded in the daily leadership realities of small, rural schools. Through reflection, dialogue, and practice, the leaders of Chimacum developed a unified approach that married vision with action and systems with empathy.

This kind of superintendent-principal development doesn't happen by accident—it happens through intentional partnership. Scott's decision to collaborate with AWSP serves as a model for districts across the state. When superintendents invest in the leadership growth of their principals and engage deeply with AWSP as a thought partner, real transformation becomes possible.

Chimacum's story isn't just about improvement—it's about what happens when leaders lead together. It has been a joy working with Dr. Mauk and I look forward to many more years of this collaborative partnership."

SCOTT FRIEDMAN,
AWSP
ASSOCIATE
DIRECTOR:



"Chimacum schools recognize that a high school diploma is just the beginning. Students should be guaranteed they will graduate from Chimacum with the knowledge, support, and preparation one needs to be successful in their lives after high school.

To that end, Principal Ryan Stevens is serving on a statewide team of high school principals working with the Association of Washington School Principals in partnership with the Gates Foundation to tackle one of the most pressing challenges for Washington schools: increasing student matriculation into post-secondary education and training. Chimacum is working to strengthen their dual-credit and CTE program pathways and they are engaging in work to identify and eliminate barriers that often prevent rural students from accessing college and career training.

For Chimacum students, this commitment means more than just course offerings; it is a pledge to expand horizons. By linking local innovation with statewide partnerships, Stevens and his colleagues are ensuring that rural students are not left behind in the race toward college and career readiness. From building stronger advising systems to fostering relationships with higher education and industry partners, Chimacum is actively working to create supports that encourage every student to see post-secondary education as both possible and attainable."

The Power of Alignment

Matthew Kesler, Principal, River HomeLink, Battleground PS

In the movie *Monsters, Inc.*, every scare powers Monstropolis by filling those big yellow containers with energy. Sully and Randall might compete for the top spot, but the real magic happens when all that energy flows into the same system. In schools, our “energy” is the work we put into TPEP, PLCs, and SIP goals—but too often, it’s stored in separate containers that don’t connect.

That’s why TPEP can feel daunting, or even disconnected. We meet one-on-one with a teacher, they present quality lesson plans steeped in student-centered pedagogy, we observe the lesson, and it often all goes off without a hitch. But afterward, it can leave everyone wondering, *Why did we just do this?* Without alignment, the work can feel like a container sitting on the shelf—full of potential, but not hooked up to power anything else.

A few years ago, we set out to change that. It seemed like everyone was making goals: teachers set TPEP goals, PLCs created their own, administrators wrote SIP and TPEP goals... container after container, each filled separately, with no shared pipeline. Frankly, we’d had enough of the disjointed approach—and we weren’t seeing the measurable results we wanted.

So we asked, *What if the same goal powered everything? What if teachers worked with their PLC team to set one strong goal, used that same goal for TPEP, and then fed it directly into the*

SIP? That way, every ounce of energy we generated went into the same grid. Then things got even more interesting when we asked our PLCs if they’d be open to a formal evaluation cycle of their PLC work itself.

This did a few things. In management, you know the work we pay attention to is the work that gets done. Setting up a formal observation of a PLC elevated the team’s work. All of a sudden, Dufour’s four questions became much more pertinent, and we discovered that earnestly asking and answering those questions touched on criterion after criterion. Our PLC goals became richer, more student-focused, and more instructional. Teams began talking about what they could do to move students toward mastering priority standards. We could almost hear the clanging of those yellow containers as the energy flowed in.

Remember Sully and the slumber party? We sat in PLCs, took verbatim notes, and pasted those notes directly into several teachers’ TPEP evaluations. It felt like cheating—but it was actually just good energy management.

Then came the moment that proved it was working. One random Tuesday morning, I walked through classrooms and saw it everywhere: PLC goals in action. On whiteboards. In small group work. In direct instruction. On posters. The same goals we’d set together, powering everything I saw. It was like

breaking through the Matrix—and all the containers were connected and humming.

I’d encourage you to find a PLC open to the idea. Join them when they’re working on goals. Remind them that every time you’re with them, it’s one less meeting to schedule, one less isolated goal to write, and one less lesson to “dial in” for a one-time observation. Then, get in for a formal observation of the PLC and listen closely to what they’re doing and why. Record it slumber-party style in your evaluation system—and later, go find it on a random Tuesday. Look for the authentic work that’s rooted in standards, powered by shared pedagogy, and fueling deep engagement and rich student learning.

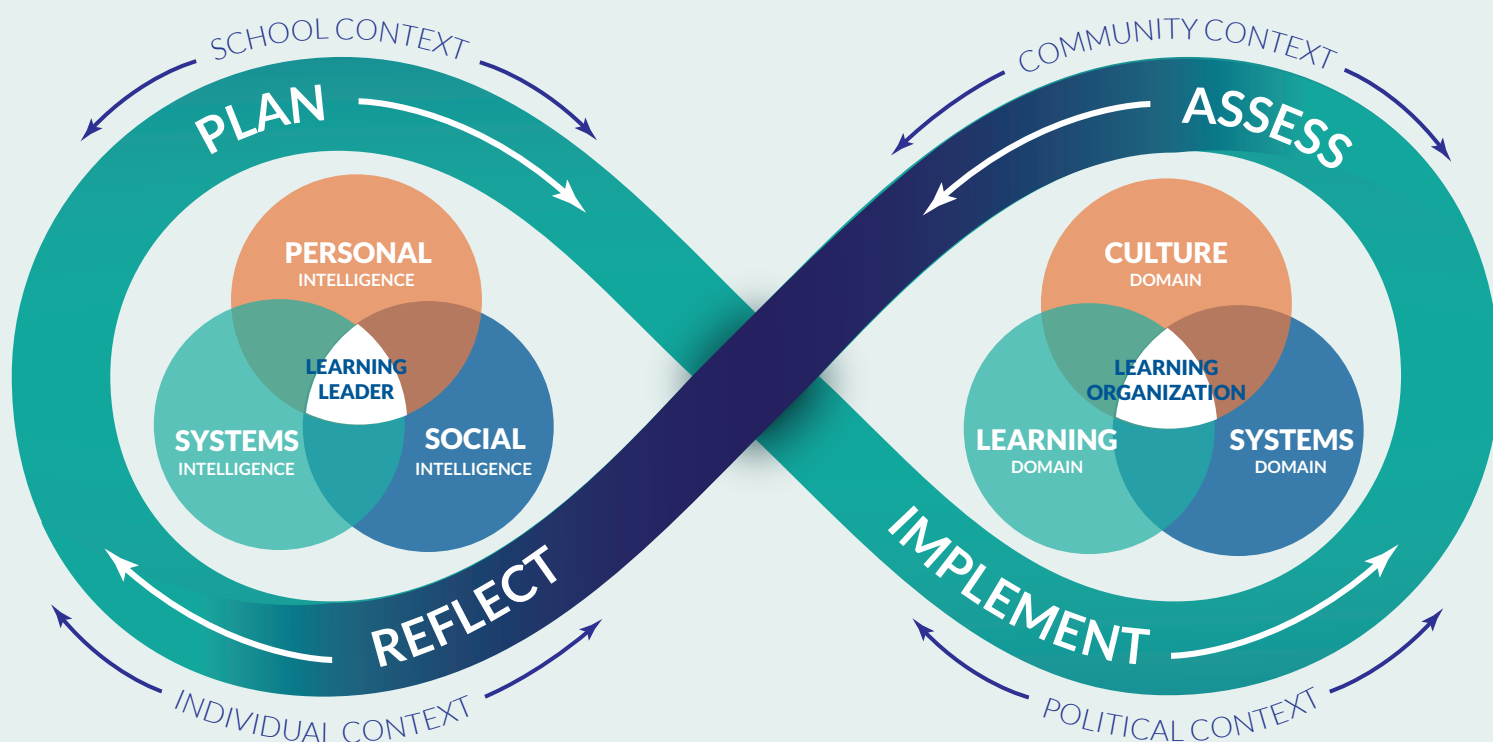
During my last round of final evaluations, I reflected with teachers about how PLC time never seemed fake or forced. “That’s because it’s real,” they told me. And I couldn’t agree more—because when all your containers are connected, the energy never gets lost. ■

Matthew Kesler is Principal of River HomeLink in Battleground Public Schools.



BECOMING *while* DOING:

Strengthening
Leadership
through
Intentional
Support



Covering a range of topics from setting foundations for the school year to assessing and connecting your leadership impact, **AWSP's Empowering Excellence Series** breaks down the complexity of leadership into customizable sessions that bring to life all aspects of the School Leader Paradigm in a collaborative environment.

Clover Park School District **Superintendent Ron Banner** is partnering with AWSP to bring the eight-part Empowering Excellence Series to his Administrative Leadership Team this year. Ron describes their district's experience in the article that follows. Scan the QR code or visit www.awsp.org/excellence to learn more about the series.



Ron Banner, Superintendent, Clover Park SD

While attending the AWSP/WASA Summer Conference in June 2024, I found myself drawn to one of the final breakout sessions on the very last day. What caught my attention was its focus on principal and leadership professional development, and more specifically, the concept of “Becoming while Doing.”

As a superintendent, I see firsthand the increasing complexity of a building administrator’s role. In Clover Park, our principals are balancing the demands of instructional leadership, staff support, navigating extreme student behaviors, engaging with families and communities, and confronting the politicization of public education, all of which have been compounded by the long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

I hold a simple belief about the chain of support in our district: the district supports building administrators, who support educators, who in turn support students. Yet I recognized a growing gap. It was becoming harder to clearly articulate how the district was intentionally supporting our administrators in a way that met their evolving needs.

That realization came into sharp focus during a recent principal candidate interview. A finalist asked, “What do you do to support the professional growth of your administrators?” I knew our answer, association dues, principal academies, and an annual professional development stipend, didn’t capture the deeper, more sustained support I envisioned.

Then came that breakout session. As I listened to the elements of AWSP’s Empowering Excellence series and the School Leader Paradigm, I felt like I had found it—the missing piece. This framework addressed the full spectrum of leadership: culture, systems,



AWSP Executive Director Dr. Scott Seaman leads Clover Park School District’s Administrative Leader Team (ALT) through the first session of the Empowering Excellence Series this August.

and learning. It blended personal growth (becoming) with the practical demands of the role (doing) in a way that simply made sense.

I brought the idea back to my Superintendent Council and our principals’ association leadership. The response was unanimous, this was the through-line we needed for our 2025–26 Administrative Leadership Team (ALT) professional development.

We launched the first session during our August ALT retreat, and the feedback was immediate and positive. Leaders valued the way the Paradigm grounded our discussions in both self-reflection and actionable leadership practices. We now have a shared framework for monthly ALT meetings that will carry us through the school year and likely into a “Round 2” in 2026–27, with goals to differentiate for veteran leaders and on-board new administrators.

Now, when candidates ask how we support our leaders, our answer will be richer and more complete. Yes, we continue to provide stipends, association dues, and principal academies to learn district systems. But we also

proudly share that at the core of our high expectations lies high support: a solid leadership framework, rooted in Becoming while Doing, delivered through the AWSP Empowering Excellence series.

For us in Clover Park, this is more than professional development, it’s an investment in the people who carry the responsibility of shaping culture, refining systems, and fostering learning. And it’s a commitment to ensure that as they lead, they are also growing into the leaders their schools and our students, need them to be. ■

Ron Banner is
Superintendent of
Clover Park School
District in Lakewood, WA,
and is 2025 Washington
State Superintendent
of the Year.



Learn more at www.awsp.org/excellence.

Together for *Safety*



LOWER COLUMBIA SCHOOL SAFETY SUMMIT

Lacey Griffith, *Assistant Principal, R.A. Long High, Longview SD*

School safety is not the responsibility of a single person, department, or profession—it is a shared mission that thrives when schools and communities come together. That belief is at the heart of the Lower Columbia School Safety Summit, an annual event dedicated to fostering a united, proactive, and resilient approach to school safety by bringing together key partners. These partners include school and district leaders, law enforcement, emergency management, fire services, mental health professionals, and community advocates.

The summit's mission is clear: "To build strong partnerships, share best practices, and create comprehensive strategies that ensure safe, supportive, and prepared learning environments for everyone. Together, participants commit to a culture of prevention, readiness, and rapid response, working side by side to protect and empower schools and the communities they serve."

How It Began

Four years ago, the idea for the summit was sparked by a chance meeting on a flight home from Arizona. I found myself sitting next to Mary Beth Tack, Superintendent of Kelso School District. While we knew each other's names, it was our first conversation, and we spent the entire flight planning what would become the Cowlitz County School Safety Summit.

At the time, Clark County hosted its own safety summit, but northern counties were not participating. By the time we landed, we had already pulled in our mutual friend Larry Hembree, Emergency Management Outreach

Coordinator and my colleague on the SAFE Committee. Within a week, the three of us were meeting to map out our vision.

Without a budget, only four months to prepare, and an ambitious goal of launching the summit that August, it was GO TIME! Thanks to personal connections in the safety field, the response was overwhelming.

Lower Columbia College generously donated the space, a tradition that continues to this day, and Longview Public Schools, Kelso School District, ESD 112, PacTech, and Fiesta Bonita donated funding for food and supplies. Port of Longview and Kelso Foundation have since added to our donor list.

Over time, the event grew beyond county lines. With the addition of Pacific and Wahkiakum counties, the name officially changed to the Lower Columbia School Safety Summit.

How It's Going

From the beginning, our focus has been on more than just school administration. We wanted a community approach—a place where first responders, mental health professionals, and educators come together to problem-solve and plan.

Earlier this year, we hosted our Fourth Annual Lower Columbia School Safety Summit, and it was our best yet! Over 200 participants attended, hearing from expert presenters and engaging in district safety planning.

Our planning team has grown to four: Mary Beth Tack, Superintendent of Kelso School District; Gunnar Guttormsen, Director of Student Services and Assessments; Larry Hembree, Emergency Management Outreach Coordinator; and myself, Lacey Griffiths, Assistant

Principal at R.A. Long High School. We've also expanded our list of sponsors to help cover the growing costs of hosting such a large event.

Lessons Learned:

Building something from the ground up takes both risk and ownership. With a small planning team, there's little opportunity for delegation—so embracing every task, from logistics to outreach, is essential.

Feedback from participants has been key to shaping the summit's evolution. Over the years, we've implemented changes such as:

- Bringing back highly requested presenters;
- Adding dedicated district planning time at the end of the day;
- Featuring ESD 112's vision for all schools;
- Selecting presenters whose expertise aligns with participant-requested topics.
- These adjustments ensure the summit remains relevant, practical, and impactful for those on the front lines of school safety.

The Lower Columbia School Safety Summit began with a conversation between two people on a plane and has grown into a cornerstone event for our region's school safety efforts. By uniting educators, first responders, and community leaders, we're not just planning for emergencies—we're building a stronger, more connected, and more prepared community. ■

Lacey Griffiths is an assistant principal at R.A. Long High School in Longview SD and was AWSP's 2019 Secondary Assistant Principal of the Year.



BELIEVE IN...

BELIEVE



Building a Foundation for Student Leadership

James Layman, *Director, Association of Washington Student Leaders*



Communities and connections are built at AWSL Summer Camps (AWSL summer camps 2025, Cispus Learning Center)



Summer Camps allow students to believe in each other. (AWSL summer camps 2025, Cispus Learning Center)

When the buses pull into camp for the first day of an AWSL summer program, most students are still just names on a spreadsheet. Rows and columns. Data. Numbers. But at AWSL, we see them differently. We see them as brilliant, complex, and extraordinary human beings, each carrying a lifetime of experiences, gifts, and potential within them. The moment they step off those buses, something powerful begins: belief is ignited.

At the heart of everything we do, whether in our programs, summer camps, or leadership training, lies a simple yet transformative idea: it all begins with believing in students. Belief is not passive. It is an action, a commitment, and the very mechanism for building strong foundations for students to lead and thrive. Belief is at the center of the magic we create, and when done intentionally, it changes lives for both students and educators.

Believe in Students

Before students can lead, before they can collaborate, before they can dream big for their schools and communities, they must first believe in themselves. Our job as educators and leaders is to remind them again and again that what they bring to the world is more than enough.

The sum of their experiences, talents, and skills is brilliant and extraordinary. It does not matter whether they are the class president, the quiet artist, the athlete, or the student still trying to figure out who they are. Each carries a torch of brilliance that deserves to stay lit. When students begin to believe that they have something to offer, the atmosphere changes. Their posture shifts. Their voices grow stronger. They begin to carry what they learn at camp far beyond that week, bringing it into their schools, homes, and communities.

Believing in students is not just about recognizing their potential; it is about declaring it out loud. It is our collective responsibility to make it clear that they belong, that they matter, and that they are capable of extraordinary things.

Believe in Others

Belief cannot remain a solo endeavor. In fact, belief grows when it is shared. Like an Olympic torch, belief must be passed from one person to the next. When we encourage students to believe in others, we invite them to look beyond surface-level differences and notice the beautiful variety of brilliance in the people around them. They begin to see not just classmates, but collaborators. Not just peers, but partners. This act of believing in others normal-

izes compassion and connection in a school community. It turns competitive environments into collaborative ones. It reminds us that greatness is rarely built alone. It is built together. When students learn to say, "I see the good in you. I believe in what you bring," they create a ripple effect that reaches every corner of the school.

Believe in Growth

Believing in growth is an act of empathy. It is an acknowledgment that no one is finished growing, not us, not our students, not our schools. Growth is not a straight line. It zigs and zags. It surges forward, then pauses, then leaps ahead again.

When we teach students to believe in growth, we teach them to celebrate progress and not just perfection. We remind them that failure is not final and that mistakes are simply remixes of their learning journey. This belief enables them to view their own evolution and that of others as something to be welcomed and not feared.

When growth is celebrated, students learn to pause and honor how far they have come. They learn to cheer for the small wins and the big leaps, and they become the kind of leaders who inspire perseverance in others.



Students believing in the power of believe! (AWSL summer camps 2025, Eastern Washington University)



Belief sparks joy! (AWSL summer camps 2025, Eastern Washington University)

Believe in Community

No student thrives in isolation. Believing in community means recognizing that every person has a place and that belonging is a fundamental aspect of life, not an optional choice.

AWSL programs encourage students to see their school not as a collection of separate groups but as a mosaic of communities, each piece adding beauty to the whole. When students believe in community, they begin to act as bridge builders, inviting others into the circle and expanding the table so everyone has a seat.

The result is that schools become places where students feel seen, heard, and valued. The hallways hum with connection. The cafeteria becomes a place of inclusion. The culture shifts from “me” to “we.”

Believe in Belief

In one of the most memorable moments from the television series *Ted Lasso*, Coach Lasso tapes a single word above the locker room door: BELIEVE. He tells his team, “I believe in believe.” It sounds simple. It might even sound naive. However, belief is not a trivial matter. Belief is the engine that drives courage, resilience, and hope. When we believe in belief itself, we commit to making belief the soundtrack of our schools.

This means we do not just believe when it is easy. We believe when the

student is struggling, when the school climate feels fractured, when the year feels long. We believe on the first day and the last. We believe when students doubt themselves. And we remind them to believe again.

A Call to Principals

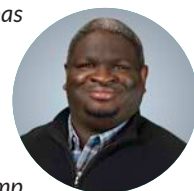
Principals hold the keys to shaping school culture. You are the conductors of the soundtrack your students hear every day. When belief is the dominant track, students thrive.

Through AWSL programs and summer camps, we have seen students’ beliefs transform. We have seen them arrive shy and uncertain, and leave standing taller, ready to lead. We have seen them move from names on a spreadsheet to agents of change who will return to their schools with a renewed sense of purpose.

So here is the challenge: make belief visible. Name it. Celebrate it. Build structures in your school where belief is expected, encouraged, and modeled by every adult. Let students know that you see them, you believe in them, and that their contributions are essential. When belief becomes the foundation, everything else: learning, leadership, belonging can grow strong, and that is the kind of magic that lasts far beyond the school year.

Let’s make belief the epicenter of a strong foundation for this year! ■

James joined the AWSL staff in the summer of 2017. James has been a part of the AWSL organization since 2001 since attending camp as a delegate and has served as a Junior Counselor, Senior Counselor, and Camp Director.



How Can AWSL Help YOU?

The Association of Washington Student Leaders (AWSL) empowers students to lead and make positive change within their schools, communities, and themselves.

AWSL designs and provides fun, hands-on programs for all ages that builds school community, promotes students as leaders, and teaches social responsibility.

Learn how AWSL can support you at www.AWSLeaders.org.

WHO LEADS YOU?



THE AWSP/WSPEF BOARD AND GRADE LEVEL LEADERSHIP COMMITTEES

BOARD & COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

The AWSP/Foundation **Board of Directors** serves as the policy-making body of our Association, guiding its direction and ensuring the success of its mission. With a range of responsibilities including reviewing and adopting the annual budget, establishing governing policies, and making decisions requiring membership ratification, the Board plays a pivotal role in our operations.

Members of each **Grade Level Leadership Committee (GLLC)** are practicing principals and assistant principals. They represent colleagues like you across Washington state. The leadership of each committee serves on the AWSP Board.

Our boards and committees reflect the diversity of our membership, working together to strengthen the relationship between the Association and its component boards to achieve our collective goals.

EQUAL & EQUITABLE REPRESENTATION

It's important to us that all of our state's areas and demographics be represented on our governing boards. Our three Grade Level Leadership Committees are constructed around our nine Educational Service District (ESD) regions.

Each GLLC is equally sized at 29 representatives per committee (three from each ESD, except for ESD 121) and fairly and equitably represent the demographics of the entire state, with the exception of ESD 121 which has more representatives because of the student population it represents.

Our goal is to increase the ability for interested principals and assistant principals to get involved and increase the transparency of the process.

MEET THIS YEAR'S LEADERSHIP

Check out the list of 2025-26 board and committee leaders on the page at right. They are excited to lead each grade level and support you this year!

To get in contact with a GLLC representative, find out what they're up to, or suggest topics for the committee to address, reach out to our staff lead for your GLLC below.



ELEMENTARY

Jack Arend,
Deputy Director, AWSP
jack@awsp.org



MIDDLE LEVEL

Gina Yonts, Associate
Director, AWSP
gina@awsp.org



HIGH SCHOOL

Scott Friedman,
Associate Director, AWSP
scottf@awsp.org



GET INVOLVED!

We're looking for AWSP members like you from across the state who are passionate about helping shape the future of the principalship and AWSP as an organization. Join us in representing principal and assistant principal voices!

Each spring, we accept applications for our GLLCs. We need diverse representation on these committees in order to ensure we are meeting the unique needs of our schools and communities. Watch for our GLLC application at www.awsp.org/GLLC.

MEET YOUR 2025-26

AWSP/WSPEF Board and Grade Level Leadership Committee (GLLC) Leaders

AWSP/WSPEF BOARD

President



Jason Smith
Principal, Gov. John R. Rogers High, Puyallup SD

President-Elect



Erin McKee
Principal, Cougar Mountain Middle, Issaquah SD

Past President



Woody Howard
Principal, Ben Franklin Elementary, Vancouver PS

ELEMENTARY COMMITTEE

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Enrique Romero
Principal, Kirkwood Elementary, Toppenish SD

Chair-Elect



Tamera Marcoe
Assistant Principal, Hunt Elementary, Puyallup SD

Past Chair



Kim Doughty
Principal, Peter G Schmidt Elementary, Tumwater SD

MIDDLE LEVEL COMMITTEE

Chair



Cameron Grow
Principal, Lincoln Middle, Pullman SD

Chair-Elect



Heidi Fagerness
Principal, Chehalis Middle, Chehalis SD

Past Chair



Thomasina Rogers
Principal, Central Kitsap Middle, Central Kitsap SD

HIGH SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Chair



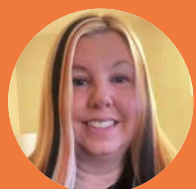
Tom Adams
Principal, Curtis Senior High, University Place SD

Chair-Elect



Lacey Griffiths
Assistant Principal, RA Long High School, Longview SD

Past Chair



Heather Hastie-Ulery
Principal, Davis High School, Yakima SD



Building Your Foundation with Your Students

Dr. Scott Seaman, *Executive Director, AWSP*

For over 15 years now we've been TPEPing across our state. Meaning, teachers and school leaders have been held accountable to state established "Frameworks" for both teaching and leading. Washington is one of the only states with a state adopted leadership framework, the AWSP Leadership Framework, that was created by and for school leaders.

Currently in its third iteration, the AWSP Leadership Framework has stood the test of time as a valuable resource to capture the impact of school leaders in the final evaluation. Over the years we've developed a wide array of resources to nurture the ongoing professional growth of leaders throughout the year, not just at the end.

The architects of the AWSP Leadership Framework laid out eight clearly defined criteria capturing the breadth and depth of the work of school leaders. Starting with creating a culture where each and every student and adult can improve, to building the systems to support that culture, to working tirelessly to close the gaps of achievement, relationships, expectations, access, opportunities, and hope.

The Framework truly serves as a great foundation for measuring leadership impact effectiveness. But, have you ever considered it a resource to help you lead WITH your students?

As principals and assistant principals, we inherit certain systems in the

schools in which we were hired. Our job as leaders is to keep improving the already existing good-for-kids systems, while simultaneously and carefully dismantling the bad ones. This is the art of leadership. But it's not an art you should do alone, and especially not without your students.

One system that exists in most schools is some form of a student leadership class, club, or advisory council. These groups can range in size and scope of responsibility depending on the longstanding systems and traditions of the school. Their influence and impact also tends to depend on how much or little the school principal leans into their voices as integral co-leaders of the school. Again, this varies greatly, but also correlates often to the culture in the school.

As you head into this year, you've got a choice on how you engage WITH your students in building the desired school culture. No matter what or how you've done this in the past, I've got a challenge for you to consider. Have you ever thought about using your own AWSP Leadership Framework as an ongoing resource with your students? Engage your students in the language of your own evaluation and have them help you measure your impact.

Whether you have a handful of students serving in a leadership capacity or whether you have classes of "Student Leadership," you can leverage the Framework the same. The concept is

"Have you thought about using your own **AWSP Leadership Framework** as an ongoing resource with your students? Engage students in the language of your own evaluation and have them help you measure your impact."

simple in design, but masterful in practice and product. And, your students will help you move the needle in your school. Wondering what this looks like? Here we go...

You don't need to create new student leadership structures necessarily, you just need to redirect some of their work. Quite often student leadership classes are focused on planning assemblies, welcoming new students, leading fundraisers, organizing clubs, etc. Obviously those are all important contributions to school climate, but don't get to the heart of school culture. You need students to help you create your desired culture.

COMMITTEE	PURPOSE	OUTCOME
CULTURE (Criterion 1)	Help YOU measure and monitor the “pulse” of culture in the school.	This group will run with the information provided by the Data Committee to help tackle any and all climate and culture related issues.
SAFETY (Criterion 2)	Help YOU monitor and assess all issues related to school safety.	This group will work to not only assess the physical safety of a school, but also work to help reduce student behavior issues and everything in between.
DATA (Criterion 3)	Help YOU collect and share data from multiple sources and perspectives.	This group serves as the lifeblood for other committees as they will collect, monitor and share a massive dashboard of data points.
CURRICULUM (Criterion 4)	Help YOU calibrate what is being taught across the school.	This group serves as your eyes and ears of what is being taught and graded in classrooms and the gaps that exist in adult expectations for learning.
TEACHING & LEARNING (Criterion 5)	Help YOU assess the impact of effective and ineffective instruction.	This group will help highlight the disparities in relationships, expectations, teaching, and learning. They can say what often times you cannot.
RESOURCES (Criterion 6)	Help YOU ensure the equitable distribution of resources.	This group will constantly monitor and address gaps in access, opportunities, and resources.
COMMUNITY (Criterion 7)	Help YOU engage your local school community.	Because you can't be everywhere for everyone, this group will be your connection to the community. Watch them lead with relationships!
THE GAP (Criterion 8)	Help YOU identify and close the gaps throughout the school.	Gaps go well beyond achievement. Watch this group run with the information from the Data Committee to help monitor, push, and celebrate the work being done to reduce gaps.

Regardless of the student leadership structure, your goal is to create eight new student leadership committees, one for each criterion in the AWSP Leadership Framework. For each of these new committees, you next want to identify a committee chair or lead. These are your new eight best friends. Each committee chair will carry the responsibility of leading and reporting back to you about their respective initiatives. What do each of these committees do and why?

By taking your students who genuinely want to lead and be involved, and then giving them clear lines of roles, responsibilities, and purpose, you will unleash a support like you've never had before. Everything they collect and lead with you serves as evidence for not only your overall impact, but great information for ongoing “check-in” conversations with your evaluator.

Want to authentically engage student voice? Give them the AWSP

Leadership Framework, and then watch the magic happen as you build your desired culture WITH your students! Give it a try! Call us if you want help or need ideas. ■

Dr. Scott Seaman joined AWSP in the fall of 2013 after serving as the principal at Tumwater High School. Scott became Executive Director in 2018.





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Thank you to our business partners!

Business partners and sponsors help AWSP grow, support, and sustain principals and assistant principals in Washington state. Strong leaders create strong schools which create strong students. To learn more about each of our business partners, visit www.awsp.org/partners.

