



BOOKENDS OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

PRINT NEWSLETTER OF THE ASSOCIATION OF WASHINGTON SCHOOL PRINCIPALS | WINTER 2026




CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE: Meet our 2026 Washington State Principals and Assistant Principals of the Year! Pictured above is 2026 Elementary Principal of the Year Kim Doughty of Peter G. Schmidt Elementary in Tumwater School District. Learn more about each of our four outstanding winners—Kim Doughty, Melyssa Stone, Traci Schultz, and Dr. Brent Osborn—on page 12.

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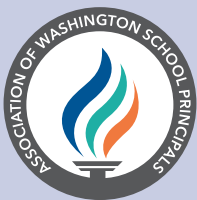
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Get in Touch!

Caroline Brumfield

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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.



“Wabi-Sabi” - The Art of Imperfection

School Leaders,

I recently read something that reshaped the way I think about perfectionism. It was an article about the concept of “*wabi-sabi*,” a Japanese philosophy centered on the idea of finding beauty in imperfection. Instead of dismissing what’s worn or faulty, *wabi-sabi* encourages us to recognize the authenticity and quiet charm held by those flaws.



Wabi-sabi is particularly apparent in “*Kintsugi*,” the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery with gold. Rather than disguising the cracks, *Kintsugi* illuminates them—embracing the breakage as part of the object’s story. It becomes a powerful metaphor for personal healing and resilience.

How often do we extend that same grace to ourselves? What if, instead of hiding our imperfections, we allowed them to shine in ways that add beauty and depth to the communities we lead?

As a school leader, your impact comes not from perfection, but from authenticity. When you honor the full spectrum of who you are—the strengths and the struggles—you model for your staff and students that they, too, can lead with honesty and courage.

This issue of *Bookends* centers on celebration, spotlighting some of our state’s most remarkable leaders—our 2026 Principals and Assistant Principals of the Year. The work happening in their schools is nothing short of inspiring and absolutely worth celebrating.

And yet, in these long winter months that pull us from the start of the school year toward its distant finish line, we hope you’ll also pause to celebrate the small wins, the simple joys, and even the imperfect moments. This renewed perspective can offer healing and build resilience against the storms—literal and metaphorical—that come our way.

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

Caroline Brumfield

Caroline Brumfield
AWSP Marketing and Design Director



Welcome, New Members

AWSP is excited to welcome the following new members for the 2025-26 school year!

A

Chloe Abbott, Stanwood High,
Stanwood-Camano SD

Jason Acevedo, Gray Middle,
Tacoma PS

Peggy Aguilar, Mountlake
Terrace High, Edmonds SD

Heidi Alexander,
Syre Elementary, Shoreline SD

Allina Alexis, Naches Trail
Elementary, Bethel SD

Mike Allen, Freeman SD

Bethany Anderson, Mt.
Pilchuck Elementary, Lake
Stevens SD

Kris Anderson, Seton Catholic
High, Vancouver, WA

Barbie Anderson-Gonzalez,
Hillside Elementary,
Clover Park SD

Daniel Aragon, Grand Mound
Elementary, Rochester SD

Amairani Arteaga, Wilson
Middle, Yakima PS

Chequita Austin, Auburn High,
Auburn SD

Brian Avery, Cle Elum-Roslyn SD

Tahisha Ayala-Dean, Franklin
Middle, Yakima PS

B

Devin Bauer, Lakeside High,
Nine Mile Falls SD

Eugenia Bluebird, Heritage
High, Marysville SD

Christopher Bolt, Blaine High,
Blaine SD

Andrea Borell, Edgerton
Elementary, Puyallup SD

Cindy Breeze, Grapeview
School, Grapeview SD

Lori Brillhart, Desert Hills
Middle, Kennewick SD

Elizabeth Brobbey, Graham-
Kapowsin High, Bethel SD

Trevor Buckley, Medical Lake
Middle, Medical Lake SD

Valerie Budinich, Katherine G.
Johnson Elementary, Bethel
SD

Ariana Burton, Henry M.
Jackson High, Everett PS

C

Gerardo Camargo, Highlands
Middle, Kennewick SD

Jill Cameron, Evergreen
Middle, Central Valley SD

Sean Carrick, Spanaway Lake
High, Bethel SD

Taylor Carrier, Cascadia
Elementary, Seattle PS

Claire Carter, Lummi Nation
School (K-12), Lummi Indian
Business Council

Bronson Castellano, Perry
Keithley Middle, Franklin
Pierce SD

Rebecca Cays, Coupeville
Middle/High, Coupeville SD

Mira Chauhan, Rose Hill Mid-
dle, Lake Washington SD

William Christianson, Washtuc-
na School, Washtucna SD

Hazel Clapp, Kulshan Middle,
Bellingham PS

Teri Clark, Frontier Middle,
Moses Lake SD

Kristin Coddia, South Whidbey
Elementary, South Whidbey SD

Conor Collins, John R. Rogers
High, Puyallup SD

Stacey Conley, Kamiakin
Middle, Lake Washington SD

Shannon Coty, Raymond
Elementary, Raymond SD

Elizabeth Cronin, Pacific Beach
Elementary, North Beach SD

Danielle Cronin, Orting
Middle, Orting SD

Andrew Crook, Evergreen
High, Highline PS

Sara Crowston, Selah SD

Jennifer Crowther, Orchard
Heights Elementary, South
Kitsap SD

Breanna Cull, Indian Trail
Elementary, Spokane PS

Joshua Cunningham, Hiawatha
Elementary, Othello SD

D

Courtney Dallas, Park Middle,
Kennewick SD

Travis Davio, First Creek
Middle, Tacoma PS

Scott Davis, Hawkins Middle,
North Mason SD

Danielle Denney-Cox, Neah
Bay Jr/Sr High, Cape Flattery
SD

Ashwinta Deo, Cordata
Elementary, Bellingham PS

Meriba Diaz, Martin Luther
King Elementary, Vancouver PS

James Dixon, Lowell
Elementary, Seattle PS

Madeline Dorris, Wellpinit
Elementary, Wellpinit SD

Glenn Duggan, Mead High,
Mead SD

E

Joey Easley, James W. Lintott
Elementary, Chehalis SD

Swan Eaton, Lewis & Clark
Middle, Yakima PS

Bill Edwardson, Entiat Middle/
High, Entiat SD

Kimberly Elms, Acme
Elementary, Mount Baker SD

April Emerson, Poulsbo
Middle, North Kitsap SD

Alia Eraky, Sarah Anderson
Elementary, Vancouver PS

Lance Espejo, Juanita High,
Lake Washington SD

F

Ashlee Finneran, Joel E. Ferris
High, Spokane PS

Christine Fledderjohann,
Union Ridge Elementary,
Ridgefield SD

Kayla Frank, Ridgetop Middle,
Central Kitsap SD

G

Stephanie Gallardo Lara,
Evergreen High, Highline PS

Cyndi Garber, Green Mountain
Elementary, Central Kitsap SD

Paul Gaskins, Elma Middle
Elma SD

Natalie Goodale, Glacier Park
Elementary, Tahoma SD

Ronnie Gordon, Lincoln High,
Tacoma PS



Jacqueline Gosch, Mark Twain Elementary, Pasco SD

Kelly Gouveia, Happy Valley Elementary, Bellingham PS

Megan Graham, West Valley Innovation Center, West Valley SD #208

Sophie Gray, Green Lake Elementary, Seattle PS

Julaine Groeneveld, Whitstran Elementary, Prosser SD

Azure Grossi, Emily Dickinson Elementary, Lake Washington SD

H

Corina Hansen, Quil Ceda Tulalip Elementary, Marysville SD

Oluwabunmi Hart, Robert Eagle Staff Middle, Seattle PS

Christopher Harvey-Foltz, Inglewood Middle, Lake Washington SD

Melissa Hattaway, Saddle Mountain Elementary, Wahluke SD

Sarah Hattenburg, Riverside Elementary, Riverside SD

Jennifer Henderson, Concrete Elementary, Concrete SD

Maria Herrera-Lofton, Puget Sound Skills Center, Highline PS

David Hinojosa, Sierra Vista Middle, Sunnyside SD

Paige Hockersmith, Rochester Middle, Rochester SD

Karlee Hodges, Grandview Middle, Grandview SD

Jackie Hofer, Ilwaco High, Ocean Beach SD

Jennifer Holm, Mount Tahoma High, Tacoma PS

Janet Hubbard, Reeves Middle, Olympia SD

Chris Hunke, Orting High, Orting SD

Kyle Hutchinson, Tolt Middle Riverview SD

I

Francie Ishler, Orin C. Smith Elementary, Chehalis SD

J

Emily Jinnah, Discovery Middle, Vancouver PS

Mabel Joel, South Ridge Elementary, Ridgefield SD

Crissi Johnson, Skyline Elementary, Lake Stevens SD

Emily Jordan, Castle Rock High, Castle Rock SD

Mitchell Judie, Bremerton High, Bremerton SD

K

Julie Kapaska, Spanaway Lake High, Bethel SD

Jennifer Kekuna, Aki Kurose Middle, Seattle PS

Colin Kelly, Curtis Junior High, University Place SD

Cat Kelly, Evergreen Elementary, Shelton SD

Stephanie Kesterson, Shadow Lake Elementary, Tahoma SD

Jessica King, Evergreen Elementary, Clover Park SD

Todd King, Michael T. Simmons Elementary, Tumwater SD

Kristen Knoll-Marx, Fawcett Elementary, Tacoma PS

Rebecca Kratzig, Irene Reither Elementary, Meridian SD

Angela Kyle, Eagle Creek Elementary, Arlington PS

L

Skyler Lamberd, Everett High, Everett PS

Tashi Langton, Manitou Park Elementary, Tacoma PS

Sandy Ledbetter, Kendall Elementary, Mount Baker SD

Joel Ledesma Jr., Park Middle, Kennewick SD

Shawn Leggett, Toledo High, Toledo SD

Jayne Lenker, Goodman Middle, Peninsula SD

Bonnie Levin, Genesee Hill Elementary, Seattle PS

Kristina Lewin, Truman Middle, Tacoma PS

Faith Lindley, Franklin Middle, Yakima PS

Aaron Lippy, Colfax Jr/Sr High, Colfax SD

Shelby Lockhart, Star Lake Elementary, Federal Way PS

Katie Loker, Everett High, Everett PS

Christie Long, Fisher Elementary, Lynden SD

M

Lynette Madsen, Graham-Kapowsin High, Bethel SD

Ella Maeda, Juanita High, Lake Washington SD

Javier Mancilla, River Ridge Elementary, Kent SD

Christopher Maniece, Silas High, Tacoma PS

Laura Marshall, Madrona School, Edmonds SD

Brandon Marskell, Chehalis Middle, Chehalis SD

Rushing Mayes, Woodland Middle, Woodland PS

Karen McCormick, Clear Creek Elementary, Central Kitsap SD

Heather McDonough, Willow Crest Elementary, Auburn SD

Allison Meines, Eatonville Middle, Eatonville SD

Daisy Mendoza, John Campbell Primary, Selah SD

Melisa Milholland, East Farms STEAM Magnet School, East Valley SD #361

Regina Millard, Allen Creek Elementary, Marysville SD

Nedra, Miller, Marrion Elementary, Evergreen PS

Joseph Mingo, Interagency Programs, Seattle PS

Alison Mitchell, Salem Woods Elementary, Monroe SD

Brandon Moeller, Crossroads Alternative, Granite Falls SD

Michelle Moon, Briarwood Elementary, Issaquah SD

Oscar Moreno Gilson, Mount Vernon High, Mount Vernon SD

Megan Morris, Saddle Mountain Elementary, Wahluke SD

Pretrina Mullins, White Pass Elementary, White Pass SD

Diana Musial, Washington Elementary, Auburn SD

N

Michelle Navarro, Harrah Elementary, Mount Adams SD

Tina Neil, Northshore Middle, Northshore SD

Sheila Nelsen, Mountain View Elementary, Shelton SD

Christie Nepean, Holmes Elementary, Spokane PS

Stephanie Norman, Beacon Hill International Elementary, Seattle PS

Suhaill Nuñez, Washington Middle, Yakima PS

O

Ryan Orphan, Foothills Elementary, White River SD

Tawnya Ostrer, Leona Libby Middle, Richland SD

P

Jarom Packer, Port Angeles High, Port Angeles SD

Anne Park, Wilson Elementary, Spokane PS

Morgan Parker, Columbia River High, Vancouver PS

Bryan Parker, Kimball Elementary, Seattle PS

Elizabeth Pavlik, Franklin Elementary, Pullman SD

Paige Pereira, Sultan Middle, Sultan SD

Amber Perry, North Pines Middle, Central Valley SD

Bradford Peter, Summit Trail Middle, Tahoma SD

Jami Phelps, La Center SD

Lenzi Pierce, Dessie F. Evans Elementary, Puyallup SD

Rachel Pitts, Hawthorne Elementary, Seattle PS

Jordon Poynor, Mount Spokane High, Mead SD

Adriana Prince, Poulsbo Elementary, North Kitsap SD

Q

Steven Quesinberry, Cedarcrest High, Riverview SD

R

Mike Randles, Lake Stevens Middle, Lake Stevens SD

Marit Rasmussen, Sharpstein Elementary, Walla Walla PS

Jomanda Richards, Kamiakin Middle, Lake Washington SD

Suzanne Rieger, Showalter Middle, Tukwila SD

Leah Ringer, Maltby Elementary, Monroe SD

Joshua Rockey, Rainier Elementary, Clover Park SD

Lindsay Rodriguez, Toppenish Early Learning Center, Toppenish SD

Shanell Rogers, Otis Orchards Elementary, East Valley SD #361

Jennifer Rogers, Port Angeles SD

Brandy Ross, Edison Elementary, Walla Walla PS

S

Katie Sabol, Redmond Elementary, Lake Washington SD

Dawn Sandhop, Larson Heights Elementary, Moses Lake SD

Vidhya Sankaranarayanan, Hamilton International Middle, Seattle PS

Yumiko Savage, Wenatchee High, Wenatchee SD

Dina Sawyer, Gause Elementary, Washougal SD

Joseph Seaborn, Washington High, Franklin Pierce SD

Kristen Sebesta, Soap Lake Elementary, Soap Lake SD

Rebecca Selby, Stevens Creek Elementary, Lake Stevens SD

Jennifer Simonson, Brownsville Elementary, Central Kitsap SD

Brian Smith, Covington Middle, Evergreen PS

Daniel Smith, Klickitat Elementary & High, Klickitat SD

Peter Smyth, Issaquah High, Issaquah SD

Kristy Sorce, Anacortes Middle, Anacortes SD

Hanaphi Sos, Alderwood Middle, Edmonds SD

Matthew Steen, Mercer Island High, Mercer Island SD

Jessica Stella, Gates High, Franklin Pierce SD

Felecia Stenbakken, Yelm High, Yelm CS

Kyle Strand, Presidents Elementary, Arlington PS

Michelle Strickler, Everett PS

Tina Strong, St John-Endicott Cooperative Schools

Carolina Suarez-Purdum, Wellpinit Middle/High, Wellpinit SD

T

Erica Tait, Toppenish High, Toppenish SD

Inez Tapia, John Muir Elementary, Seattle PS

Maurice Thomas, Westwood Middle, Cheney PS

Angela Thomas, Jane Addams Middle, Seattle PS

Danielle Thorn, Frederickson Elementary, Bethel SD

Laura Treece, Sacajawea Middle, Spokane PS

Nicole Tronvig, Tahoma Elementary, Tahoma SD

Michelle Turner, Roy Elementary, Bethel SD

U

Vaughn Uber, Montesano Jr/Sr High, Montesano SD

V

Steven Vradenburg, Meridian Elementary, Kent SD

W

Kenyea Wade, Cascade Middle, Auburn SD

Kelley Watson, Pi Program (Chimacum Alternative School), Chimacum SD

Rachel Wenzel, Aberdeen High, Aberdeen SD

Allyson West, Armin Jahr Elementary, Bremerton SD

Bethany Whisler, Victor Falls Elementary, Sumner-Bonney Lake SD

Jamie Whobrey, Marshall Elementary, Marysville SD

Amy Wilson, Fairview Middle, Central Kitsap SD

Dusty Wirtzberger, Warden Middle, Warden SD

Kala Wofford, Orin C. Smith Elementary, Chehalis SD

Annette Woolley, Port Susan Middle, Stanwood-Camano SD

Y

Jordan Young, Meadowdale High, Edmonds SD

Z

Robert Zabel, Meridian High, Meridian SD

Juan Zavaleta Berdeja, Everett High, Everett PS



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The Mid-Year **Melt**

No Parka Required: A Winter Reset for Resilient School Leaders

By Gina Yonts, Associate Director, AWSP

By mid-February, most school leaders are knee-deep in what I like to call the mid-year melt—not the cheerful spring thaw, but that slow, subtle softening of routines, expectations, and energy levels that creeps in right after winter break. Systems that felt crisp in September start slumping a bit, like snow that’s been stepped on one too many times. It’s normal. It’s predictable. And it’s exactly why this season is the perfect time for a strategic reboot.

Even if winter break feels like it happened somewhere back in a different geological era, February still offers a

natural pause if we’re willing to take it. The shorter days and colder mornings give us permission to slow down long enough to see our leadership work with fresh eyes. This isn’t indulgence—it’s a resilience strategy. Leaders make better decisions, build better systems, and show up more humanely when they’ve taken a breath, recalibrated, and reclaimed a bit of perspective.

And let’s be honest: by now, even your most loyal routines may be showing signs of slush. That’s not a crisis. That’s information.

Why Systems Matter When Everything Feels... Melty

When systems are strong—predictable, controllable, and designed with moderation—schools stay steady even when the season, the workload, and the collective energy levels get a little slushy. Strong systems reduce anxiety. They build trust. They lighten the leadership load (imagine emptying a backpack full of outdated Chromebooks—that kind of lightening).

So in this late-winter stretch, pick one system or initiative that matters. Tier 1 expectations. PLC routines. Arrival. Dismissal. Student support processes. Whatever needs a little refreezing. Then run it through three simple questions that cut through the melt:

1. Is the system predictable?

When predictability melts, people improvise—creatively, inconsistently, and not always in the same direction. Predictability is a gift: it steadies staff, students, and families and frees up cognitive space for actual learning.

- If yes, what does “staying the course” look like in February, when enthusiasm is at a... let’s call it “seasonal low”?
- If not, what needs reteaching or clarifying?

Quick example:

Take arrival routines. A predictable system means nobody is surprised—not the new substitute, not the kindergarten, and especially not the leader holding a lukewarm coffee while supervising student drop-off. Predictable doesn’t mean rigid; it means clear.

2. Is the system controllable?

Not perfect. Not flawless. Just steerable. During the mid-year melt, feedback becomes your best thermometer. It shows you where things are warming up faster than you intended. Whose feedback have you collected?

- Teachers?
- Classified teams?
- Students? (They will absolutely tell you how the system is really going.)
- Families?

And don’t forget the folks who see more than anyone: office staff, custodians, paraeducators, and bus drivers. They often know where the system is slipping long before it shows up in data. A controllable system is one you can actually adjust because you’re listening to the people living inside it.

3. Is the system moderate?

This is the Goldilocks check—during the mid-year melt, especially:

- Not too intense.
- Not too loose.
- Just right.

A moderate system keeps its shape, even when morale and stamina are... temperature-sensitive. Expectations are consistent and humane—high enough for excellence, low enough that nobody cries alone in the supply closet, especially the leader!

Is the system sustainable? Manageable? Balanced? If not, what tiny shift might restore the right level of warmth without letting everything puddle?

A Leader’s Pause Creates Organizational Resiliency

Even though winter break is far behind us, the leadership benefits of stepping away still apply: rest improves clarity, creativity, patience, and perspective—all of which are priceless in February. When leaders reset, systems reset. And when systems reset, people trust the work again.

Resiliency isn’t about white-knuckling your way through the mid-year melt. It’s about noticing what’s softening, tightening what matters, and letting go of what doesn’t.

Reflection Prompts for Your Late-Winter Reset

As you scan your systems through your February lens, ask:

- Where has the mid-year melt softened clarity or consistency?
- Which system is draining the most energy—and why does it have so much power over my Tuesday mood?
- Who could give me honest system feedback... and am I ready for it?
- What’s one thing I could tighten — and one thing I could simplify?

You don’t need a redesign. You just need one intentional next move.

Your Mid-Year Melt Call to Action

This February, choose one system. Run it through the three questions: predictable, controllable, moderate. Gather a little real-world feedback. Make one simple, strategic adjustment. Then step confidently into March with steadier systems, clearer expectations, and more resilient leadership — even if the snow outside refuses to cooperate. Because resiliency isn’t something leaders magically possess. It’s something we strengthen — in ourselves, in our systems, and in our communities — every time we pause, recalibrate, and choose to lead with intention... even in the mid-year melt. And if you’re looking for fresh ideas, prompts, or simple ways to steady your systems, check out the AWSP Principal Planning Guide—it’s full of practical tools to help you reflect, reset, and plan with purpose. Remember, you’re not navigating this season alone. AWSP is here with resources, support, and partnership to help you keep leading well through every stretch of the year, slush and all. ■

Gina Yonts joined AWSP the summer of 2018 as an Associate Director from Southeastern WA. She served for 27 years in the Walla Walla School District as a classroom teacher, middle school assistant, and lead principal, as well as an elementary principal.



AWSP’s School Leader Planning Guide

Learn more about this resource designed to help school leaders like you in every season and in every month of the school year!





2026 Legislative Priorities

Roz Thompson, Government Relations and Advocacy Director, AWSP

“Storytelling is the oldest form of education.”

– Terry Tempest Williams

The 2026 Legislative Session began January 12 and runs just 60 days, ending March 12. As a short session, it will move quickly—and it will be shaped by hard fiscal realities. The state operating budget will dominate the conversation, as Washington faces an estimated \$4 billion shortfall over the next four years. Simply put, projected revenue is not sufficient to cover all of the priorities before the Democrat-controlled Legislature. Lawmakers will be forced to make difficult decisions involving spending cuts, new revenue, or a combination of both.

In this environment, the role of AWSP is clear and essential: we tell the story of what policy and budget decisions mean in real schools, for real students, every single day. Your experiences—what’s working, what’s not, and what’s at risk—fuel our advocacy. As educators and school leaders, this is our wheelhouse. We know how to educate, and during session, that includes educating legislators about the realities of leading public school buildings.

AWSP Legislative Priorities: The Bookends of Leadership

The AWSP Legislative Priorities document (accessible at www.awsp.org/platform) was developed over the past several months through conversations with members, partners, and stakeholders, as well as participation

in multiple workgroups. This year, for the first time, we intentionally named the “bookends” of leadership by placing both AWSP and the Washington School Principals’ Education Foundation (WSPEF) at the top of the document—anchored by students at the center of everything we do. Our call to action is bold and unapologetic:

Public education isn’t optional; it’s the state’s paramount duty. Every student and staff member must learn and lead in safe, equitable environments where goals turn into achievements. We want every student to graduate inspired, skilled, and ready—with a credential that opens doors to stability, mobility, and purpose. Fully fund basic education. Invest in and sustain strong school leaders. Meet the needs of students. Our kids can’t wait. The future of Washington walks into our schools every morning. The future is now.

From there, our priorities fall into three clear buckets.

Fully Fund Basic Education

Alongside our partners—WASA, WSSDA, WASBO, and other education organizations—we are calling on the Legislature to fully fund basic education, with a particular focus on Materials, Supplies, and Operating Costs (MSOC). Districts across the state are not receiving adequate state funding for expenses such as insurance, utilities, curriculum, and technology. As a result, local dollars are being diverted to cover what should be basic education costs, placing increasing strain on district budgets and widening inequities.

Strengthen Leadership Development

Our second priority is building and sustaining a robust, statewide system

of leadership development. We know what effective preparation looks like: high-quality preparation programs, meaningful internship experiences, and strong, ongoing mentorship. Yet for the approximately 250 new principals and assistant principals who enter the profession each year, this level of support is not guaranteed.

AWSP will continue working with the Legislature and partners such as PESB, OSPI, and higher education institutions to strengthen the leadership pipeline. This work extends beyond the 2026 session and will remain a priority heading into the 2027–2029 biennium.

Support Students

The final bucket focuses squarely on student needs. This includes investments in mental and behavioral health supports, efforts to restore funding for outdoor education (not likely this session), and implementing a tax on tobacco products to fund prevention, cessation, and education efforts that protect student health.

Elevating Student Voice

We are working with students from the Association of Washington Student Leaders’ Student Voice Network to host an Educational Advocacy Summit on February 20–21, 2026. This event will include both in-person and virtual participation, with approximately 40–50 students attending in Olympia. Students will learn more about state government, tour the Capitol, meet with legislators, and participate in a mock bill competition—bringing authentic student voice directly into the legislative process. More information is available at awsladvocacysummit.org.

Ways to Advocate

During the legislative session, you can expect a brief email update from me every Friday with highlights from the week, a preview of what’s ahead, my current bill tracking list, and clear ways to engage. Advocacy opportunities range from quick and simple—such as signing in to support or oppose a bill or emailing a legislator—to more involved options like serving on the

AWSP Advocacy Advisory Council, testifying, or participating in our Day on the Hill. If you’d like to get involved in any way, please email me at roz@awsp.org.

Closing

It is truly an honor to represent you in Olympia. Your perspectives, your challenges, and your successes matter—and they deserve to be heard. If you have

questions, ideas, or stories to share, I want to hear from you. Together, we can ensure that the voices of school leaders—and the needs of students—remain at the center of every decision. ■

Roz Thompson is AWSP’s Government Relations and Advocacy Director. Prior, Roz worked in the Tumwater School District.



WASHINGTON’S 1.1 MILLION
STUDENTS
NEED US.

Public education isn’t optional; it’s the state’s paramount duty. Every student and staff member must learn and lead in safe, equitable environments where goals turn into achievements. We want every student to graduate inspired, skilled, and ready—with a credential that opens doors to stability, mobility, and purpose.

Fully fund basic education. Invest in and sustain strong school leaders. Meet the needs of students.

Our kids can’t wait. The future of Washington walks into our schools every morning. The future is now.

Fully Fund Basic Education	Grow, Support, Sustain, and Protect Highly Effective Leaders	Increase Supports for Students
<p>Support the OSPI request for an increase to Materials, Supplies, and Operating Costs (MSOC) to ensure equitable support for both small and large districts</p> <p>Complete the job of fully funding the cost of special education services so that our schools can better serve our most vulnerable students</p> <p>Pause on new policies that are unfunded so that schools can focus on core academic needs</p>	<p>Adequately fund the Principal Internship Grant</p> <p>Fund the Beginning Educator Support Team Program to include Principal Mentoring</p> <p>Increase the ratio of school principals in the Prototypical School Funding Model to promote school cultures of learning and growth, support students by regularly meeting social-emotional and mental health needs, and address increased responsibilities in supervisory duties of their staff members</p>	<p>Maintain state investments in school behavioral health, including the Behavioral Health Navigator Program, the Student Assistance Program, and School-based Health Centers</p> <p>Leverage Medicaid funding to sustain and expand school-based behavioral health supports</p> <p>Restore funding to outdoor education</p> <p>Increase the tobacco tax in order to discourage youth from using these products and to raise revenue for cessation and education efforts</p> <p>Support the Student Civic Education Summit</p>

TRACI
SCHULTZ



KIM
DOUGHTY



MELYSSA
STONE



DR. BRENT
OSBORN





Celebrating **EXCELLENCE**

AWSP's 2026 Principals and Assistant Principals of the Year

Each year, AWSP's Washington State Principal and Assistant Principal of the Year awards shine a light on school leaders whose daily work strengthens communities and changes lives. Announced this past October but celebrated year long, the 2026 honorees reflect the very best of educational leadership across Washington.

From both the elementary and secondary levels, these principals and assistant principals lead with purpose, empathy, and an unwavering belief in students and staff. Together, their stories illustrate the powerful impact of relationship-centered, inclusive leadership in our schools. Read on to find out more about each of our four winners!

AWSP's 2026 Principals and APs of the Year

TRACI SCHULTZ

2026 ELEMENTARY ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL OF THE YEAR



Yelm Administrator Rebuilds Trust and Culture Through Hope, Connection, and Data-Driven Leadership

Teresa “Traci” Schultz, assistant principal at Southworth Elementary School in Yelm Community Schools, leads with empathy and clarity—anchoring every decision in her belief that every interaction can change a life.

“Traci consistently brings a positive outlook to every situation. She is grounded and realistic, yet always finds a way to focus on the positives. Her steady and optimistic approach makes her a reliable and uplifting presence in our school,” writes Office Professional Dorine Hunt.

Known for her steady leadership and ability to restore hope in times of challenge, Schultz has helped rebuild trust and community at Southworth following district-wide levy losses and staff turnover. Schultz implemented

an open-door policy, ensuring every staff member felt heard and valued.

“By engaging in honest, individualized conversations and prioritizing transparency in decision-making, I affirmed each person’s dignity. This approach, grounded in the principles of openness, empathy, and fairness, was crucial in repairing harm and rebuilding a foundation of trust within our school community,” says Schultz.

Through a series of intentional initiatives—including empathy interviews with staff, the implementation of instructional rounds for teacher collaboration, and district-wide Advanced Academic coordination—Schultz has elevated both culture and student achievement. Her work reconnected educators across grade levels and strengthened the school’s Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), resulting in more responsive interventions and higher academic growth.

Beyond Southworth, Schultz serves as district coordinator for Advanced Academics. Her work bridges academic excellence with social-emotional growth for students from diverse backgrounds — including those from military families and tribal communities — through Southworth’s Native language and heritage partnerships.

Schultz writes, “We maintain a strong connection with our neighbors, the Nisqually Indian Tribe, with our weekly native language classes serving as a cornerstone of this relationship. Taught by community members, these classes preserve linguistic heritage and empower students by deepening their cultural identity. Additionally, we organize student field trips to the local tribal youth center and host professional development sessions where Native community members share their traditions and stories with our educators.”

Through her work at Southworth Elementary, Traci Schultz has shown what hope-centered leadership looks like in action: listening deeply, leading steadily, and reminding every student and staff member that they belong.



Assistant Principal Traci Schultz checks in with a student working on a project.



Traci Schultz teaches a first-grade class about the penguins she saw on her trip to Antarctica.

AWSP's 2026 Principals and APs of the Year

MELYSSA STONE

2026 SECONDARY ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL OF THE YEAR



Student Voice Rises at Shorewood High through Melyssa Stone's Leadership

Melyssa Stone, Assistant Principal at Shorewood High School in Shoreline, is one of those heroes who doesn't want recognition, which makes her all the more deserving of it. By listening closely to students and rolling up her sleeves to take practical action, Stone has transformed Shorewood High School into a place of belonging, support, and self-advocacy.

One of the most pivotal actions Stone took through student voice centers on safety. She honed in on survey feedback from students about feelings of safety at school. Students expressed a need for both physical safety and systems to ensure social-emotional safety. In response, Stone worked with teachers to establish clear protocols for students on expectations for entering and exiting class to help keep hallways peaceful. Additionally, the team began their staff meetings with

scenarios that warranted an appropriate level of response, which, in turn, helped strengthen their intervention muscles. These efforts sparked conversations about confronting their own blind spots as a team and about building collective awareness within the school community.

At the core of Stone's work is a belief that all students are capable. She writes, "I believe that all students want to succeed, and helping them identify barriers and working with my amazing team are at the crux of brainstorming."

When asked how she challenges high-performing students while maintaining high expectations for all learners, Stone answered: "There are massive amounts of differentiation happening in classrooms on a daily basis, and my own research in highly capable learners makes clear that students are capable of rising to meet the challenges of learning, and it's our job as educators to recognize when other behaviors may be masking a need for more rigor."

A true partner to teachers and staff, Stone takes every opportunity to uplift her team and celebrate her students' accomplishments.

"She is a trusted figure in the community, among her peers and families.

Melyssa is a cheerleader for things that uplift anyone and everyone. She is also an amazing Black leader in a district where students want to see themselves reflected in all spaces. Her joy, brilliance, and commitment to supporting all students make her an amazing leader," says Kelsey Linares, who nominated Melyssa Stone for the award.

Stone's passion and experience extend beyond her school in many ways. She served on OSPI's Washington State African American History Advisory Board, working with Congress to develop a comprehensive education plan for secondary education. She served on the University of Washington's PESB board for more than five years as the AWSP rep., working across the College of Education to help maintain accreditation. She is also currently a member of the University of Washington's conference planning team for the Leading Towards Justice annual symposium, a conference for school leaders and communities to think creatively and across networks to work towards equitable outcomes for students and families.

Living by the idea that "a rising tide lifts all boats," Stone's work continues to elevate those around her—proving that when leaders lead with heart, entire communities flourish.



Assistant Principal Melyssa Stone chats with students between classes.

AWSP's 2026 Principals and APs of the Year

KIM DOUGHTY 2026 ELEMENTARY PRINCIPAL OF THE YEAR



Tumwater Principal Builds Culture of Belonging, Visibility, and Collective Leadership

Kim Doughty, principal at Peter G. Schmidt Elementary School in the Tumwater School District, has been named the 2026 Washington State Elementary Principal of the Year.

At the heart of Doughty's leadership is a simple yet powerful belief: every student, staff member, and family deserves to feel seen, known, and valued. Under her guidance, Peter G. Schmidt Elementary has become a place of hope and high expectations for all learners.

Doughty and her team launched the Human Lighthouse initiative, anchoring the school's culture around visibility, connection, and hope. Through student leadership programs, cross-grade buddy systems, and staff visibility tools, she has strengthened trust and relationships across the entire school community. Panorama

student data shows a 16% increase in students' sense of belonging since implementation. Ninety-two percent of staff reported in mid-year feedback that they felt more connected to leadership, and 89% reported feeling like they were part of a strong team.

"I'm driven by the idea that schools should be places of hope. That means doing the hard work to make sure every child is learning, growing, and surrounded by adults who believe in them—even on their hardest days," says Doughty.

Doughty's leadership is equally grounded in systems thinking and collaboration. She has refined her school's MTSS framework, implementing a "Mobile MTSS" rapid-response system for students needing timely academic or behavioral support. Her team also created a live skill-tracking dashboard to monitor real-time progress, resulting in a 14% increase in literacy benchmarks and a 22% reduction in Tier 2 behavior referrals.

"Kim prioritizes both academic excellence and social-emotional well-being, fostering an environment where students are supported in every aspect of their growth. Her inclusive and student-centered approach ensures that

each learner is recognized for their unique strengths and provided with the resources and encouragement they need to succeed," writes Assistant Principal Brittany LaPalm.

Beyond her own building, Doughty helps design statewide professional learning for principals and has grown her own leadership through the Next Level Leaders program. She represents Washington state principals and assistant principals at the state, regional, and national levels through advocacy work. She is known for mentoring aspiring school leaders and cultivating leadership across the Tumwater School District.



An Eagles student waves a sign of support for Mrs. Doughty during the award presentation.



Kim Doughty engages with families during their annual turkey feast. Firefighters, police officers, and other community members show up to serve and support families during the feast.

AWSP's 2026 Principals and APs of the Year

DR. BRENT OSBORN

2026 SECONDARY PRINCIPAL OF THE YEAR



Innovation and Inclusion are Key at the Future- Oriented Lakeside High School

Dr. Brent Osborn, principal at Lakeside High School in Nine Mile Falls School District, is our 2026 Washington State Secondary Principal of the Year.

Osborn's focus on strong systems and his belief in his students and staff drive powerful change in his rural school community. At a time when principal turnover is a concern for long-term student and staff wellbeing, Osborn's 14 years (and counting!) at Lakeside High School shows the impact of consistent, meaningful years in the same building.

"When I arrived at Lakeside, only pockets of inclusive instruction existed. Today, we are one of the state's exemplar sites for Inclusionary Practices, a living demonstration site that other districts visit to learn what 'all means all' looks like in action," says Osborn.

Lakeside High School now stands as a model for inclusion and inclusive practices. The school has played a leading role in launching Unified Sports programs that unite students with and without disabilities, building a culture of empathy, respect, and understanding. As the first small school in Eastern Washington to field Unified teams, Lakeside now proudly hosts a Unified Bowling tournament for small schools across the region.

Expanded access to dual credit programs at Lakeside High has reduced financial and geographic barriers for many families while increasing college readiness. Students from all backgrounds and communities can earn college credit thanks to the prioritization of these programs. By helping students understand their postsecondary options, Lakeside High School staff see students no longer choosing courses based on familiarity or ease, but based on where they see themselves in the future.

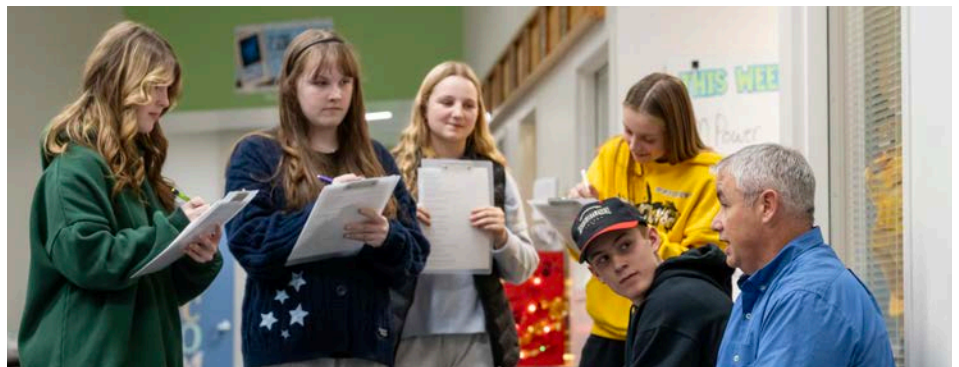
Staff at Lakeside High are encouraged to take risks, try new strategies, and push boundaries to support student success. They do all this while keeping trust from students and families at the forefront. All IEP meetings begin with the learner's strengths and aspirations. The counseling team and front office staff know students' strengths and stories deeply, and recognize when to step in with care and compassion. And student voice is paramount,

with ASB officers engaging weekly with administration.

"Dr. Osborn doesn't just lead a school, he transforms student lives through intentional, compassionate, and equity-focused leadership," writes Troy Hughes, Osborn's former assistant principal at Lakeside and the current principal at nearby Mead High School.

Osborn's passion for education doesn't stop at the doors of his school; he also leads at the state level, championing public education and principal support in Olympia. As a trusted voice in educational policy, he represents not only the Nine Mile Falls School District but also students and school leaders throughout Washington. His commitment to legislative advocacy helps ensure that rural communities have a seat at the table in statewide education decisions. In his role as the AWSP President for the 2022-23 school year, he advocated on behalf of Washington state principals across the state, region, and country.

Osborn says the true core of his school's success lies in its people. "What we've accomplished here is not about the work of one individual, and certainly not just the principal. It is the result of collective dedication, trust, and belief in students. I've had the incredible privilege to hire and work alongside what I genuinely believe is the greatest team of educators ever assembled."



Lakeside students take turns interviewing Principal Brent Osborn for a journalism assignment.

DUAL CREDIT



Zillah High School's Approach to Expanding Opportunities

**Jeff Charbonneau, Principal,
Zillah High School, Zillah SD**

Dual credit isn't a single program—Zillah High School (ZHS) believes it's a strategy that blends **College in the High School (CiHS)**, **CTE Dual Credit**, and **Running Start** to open doors for every student.

Done intentionally, these pathways reduce college costs, boost post-secondary enrollment, and strengthen our own high school community. Here's one approach that Zillah High School has used to build their programs.

**Start with a philosophy,
not a product.**

Commit that every student will have the chance to earn college credit in high school, be exposed to degree possibilities, and experience high-quality CTE courses. Even a single college credit can change a student's trajectory—and your school culture. That mindset drives equitable outreach, scheduling, and counseling practices.

**Understand the three
programs—and why you
need all three.**

- **CiHS** brings university-approved courses onto your campus, taught by your teachers. In Washington, CiHS credits are guaranteed to transfer to public 2- and 4-year in-

stitutions under WAC and Council of Presidents agreements, making CiHS a fiscally responsible, high rigor option *on your campus*.

- **CTE Dual Credit** aligns hands-on, career-focused courses with community college articulations. These credits are granted directly by the college and can count toward the "home" college's residency requirement for an AA, which makes them a pivotal part of an associate degree plan.
- **Running Start** expands access to advanced coursework and different learning environments. With Washington's 1.4 "super FTE" and summer eligibility, you can design schedules that keep students connected to your school while earning meaningful college credit. The key is to *partner* with Running Start, not work against it. Running Start is a vital part of how ZHS has increased the number of students staying on our campus while also increasing the number of students accessing Running Start. The key is in the alignment.

**Demystify FTE—protect
your programs and your
campus.**

Run the math. In many cases, "losing" one period for a group of students to take a single Running Start class results in less FTE loss than sending one student full time to the college. For example, at ZHS, losing one period equates to ~0.08 FTE loss; twelve students stepping out one period is ~0.96 FTE, which compares favorably to a fully enrolled RS student. But FTE math gets more interesting. If a student takes two periods off, the FTE loss increases from 0.08 to 0.31. The moral of the story is that losing one period a day is very different from losing two periods.

**Build the AA pathway on
purpose.**

If your local goal is a DTA AA (transfer associate degree), remember: not all AA degrees are the same (DTA vs.

“Even a single college credit can change a student’s trajectory—and your school culture. That mindset drives equitable outreach, scheduling, and counseling practices.”

AAS), and most colleges require a specific number of credits to be earned from them—often 30 credits. That’s why aligning **CTE Dual Credit** and **Running Start** with the same community college that will confer the AA is crucial. It ensures residency credits and simplifies advising.

Consider alternatives to “AA or bust.”

A DTA AA waives general education requirements at many universities, but some institutions’ gen-ed packages can be met in approximately 55–65 credits—meaning an AA isn’t the only way to accelerate. We can create pipelines to specific universities’ gen-ed and leverage statewide transfer sets like the **Washington 45** to lock in the first year of college credits that we know will count towards a student’s degree. If you have not yet looked into the Washington 45, do it today!

Communicate with students and parents to keep them coming back for more!

Students don’t “check out” when credits stack up; they lean in. When families see that each dual credit class is effectively a guaranteed scholarship (saving them more than \$1,000 in tuition per 5-credit class), participation rises across grades—and schools can capture a high ratio of FTE to headcount even as college credits soar. Earning more high school credits and saving money leads students to STAY in high school rather than look for early exits.

Action plan: What principals should do first.

- 1. Calculate your FTE by period** and map balanced schedules that keep students anchored while accessing college courses; in short, learn the math of FTE for your specific school. You might be surprised what you find.
- 2. Choose one community college “home.”** Align CTE Dual Credit articulations and Running Start with the AA granting college to meet residency requirements cleanly. Request the full CTE articulation list from the college—there are often more course options than you expect.
- 3. Expand CiHS deliberately.** Audit teacher credentials against partner universities’ criteria, noting that a master’s degree is not always required. Apply in spring windows and explore pathways (e.g., CWU has a STEM master’s program that allows teachers to teach CiHS while still earning their degree).
- 4. Publish a local transfer map.** Use statewide CiHS equivalency tools to show how courses meet gen ed or the Washington 45. Eliminate offerings with limited transferability and prioritize those with clear degree impact.
- 5. Market dual credit as equity.** Make “earn college credit in high school” a message for all students. Track participation by grade and subgroup; celebrate milestones (Washington 45, guaranteed admissions programs, AA completions) to normalize success.

The bottom line.

Dual credit is the most scalable, budget-savvy lever we have to change life trajectories. If schools (and their principals) lead with an inclusive philosophy, align the three programs to a single AA granting institution, and protect FTE through smart scheduling, students can graduate with a diploma and a powerful head start—sometimes even an associate degree—without stepping away from the high school experience that helps them thrive. ■

Jeff Charbonneau has been principal at Zillah High School since 2022, but has been with the district since 2001 in various teaching and leadership roles. Jeff was named the 2013 National Teacher of the Year.

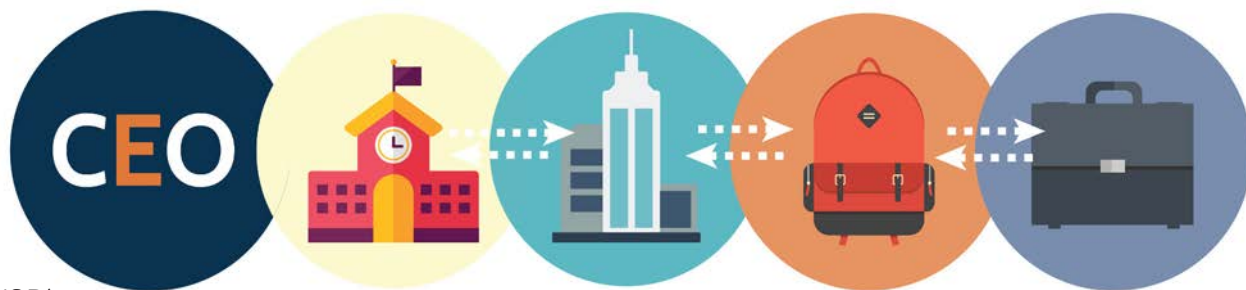


Want More?

You can download Zillah High School’s student and parent Guide to Dual Credit from their website at: <http://zhs.zillahschools.org>.

AWSP hosted a Dual Credit webinar in early 2025 where ZHS principal Jeff Charbonneau went into more detail on their programs. Access the recording at <https://tinyurl.com/mvhf559k>.

Jeff volunteers his time to work with high schools across the state to either start, improve, or expand their programs. Please reach out to him with questions at: jeff.charbonneau@zillahschools.org.



AWSP's CHIEF EDUCATION OFFICER NETWORK

Scott Friedman
Associate Director, AWSP

What happens if you put nearly fifty high school principals from every corner of Washington State in the same room and ask them to wrestle with one singular, urgent question:

How can we increase students' access to—and success in—postsecondary opportunities?

This work began not with answers, but with wonder.

AWSP's "CEO" Network

Over the course of three convenings, school leaders came together as part



High school leaders from across the state gather to discuss how they can best impact their local contexts.

of the Chief Education Officer Network, supported by the Association of Washington School Principals and made possible through the generous investment of the Gates Foundation. These were not conferences built around presentations and passive listening. They were intentionally designed spaces for collective inquiry, discomfort, truth-telling, and shared responsibility. Leaders arrived curious how they could impact their local contexts—rural, urban, large, small. They left carrying something else: a shared commitment to reimagine what postsecondary access and opportunity can look like for all students.

Examining Systems to Make Positive Change

From the beginning, the group grounded itself in a clear belief: without highly effective and sustainable leadership, it is nearly impossible to change the traditional high school system. Rather than trading stories or venting frustrations, principals engaged in identifying common problems of practice, examined antiquated inequitable systems, and developing collective theories of action aimed at measurable improvement for all students.

Principals examined national, state, and local contexts to understand the complexities of the world our graduates are entering. They explored labor market realities, FAFSA completion data, dual credit access, and postsecondary persistence rates. Just as important, they reflected on whose stories are often centered in post-



Dr. Brent Osborn shares his expertise on College in the High School.

secondary conversations and whose voices are missing. Principals were challenged to interrogate how school schedules, transcripts, advising systems, and long-standing policies can unintentionally limit opportunity, even when intentions are good.

Defining Postsecondary Success: What Does It Mean?

Across sessions, leaders asked hard questions of themselves and their systems. What does postsecondary success truly mean? How early are students exposed to meaningful pathways? Which students see themselves reflected in those pathways, and which do not? What would it look like if every student graduated not just with a diploma, but with a plan, a sense of belonging, and a tangible next step? They shared with each other it wasn't enough to graduate and began asking the question of, "What are students graduating to?"

“School leaders examined the role of dual credit, College in the High School, Running Start, career-connected learning, and financial aid systems—not as isolated programs, but as interconnected levers that require intentional leadership and alignment.”

The answers were not uniform, and that was the point. Through structured dialogue, data analysis, and shared problem-solving, principals surfaced both innovative practices and persistent barriers. They examined the role of dual credit, College in the High School, Running Start, career-connected learning, and financial aid systems—not as isolated programs, but as interconnected levers that require intentional leadership and alignment.

Over time, principals shared their thinking about their role in redesigning systems with a focus on removing barriers and increasing access to post secondary opportunities. They began to see themselves as the conduit and understood if they didn't focus on this work nobody would. Many shared that the experience strengthened their resolve to lead postsecondary work as a systems issue rather than a compliance task, to elevate student voice, and to bring counselors, teach-

ers, families, and community partners into a more coherent vision. Leaders left with clearer next steps, renewed urgency, and a deeper sense that they are not alone in this work.

Essential Support from the Gates Foundation

None of this would have been possible without the support of the Gates Foundation. Their investment created the conditions for leaders to step out of isolation, engage in meaningful inquiry, and imagine new possibilities for students across Washington State. The result is not a finished product or a single solution, but something more powerful: a growing network of leaders equipped, connected, and committed to ensuring that postsecondary access and opportunity are not reserved for some, but realized for all. The momentum now lives in schools across Washington, embedded in schedule redesign conversations,

strengthened advising systems, expanded dual credit access, earlier exposure to pathways, and more intentional storytelling with students and families. It shows up in principals asking better questions, aligning teams around a common vision, and refusing to accept that opportunity should depend on zip code or circumstance. It can't stop there though. This work needs to spread. This work needs to be shared. This work needs to cover our state.

It must continue, as all meaningful improvement does, through action, reflection, and sustained collaboration. The wonder that sparked the question remains, now paired with responsibility: if we know what is possible when leaders come together with purpose, the task before us is to carry that learning back into our schools, districts, and communities, and to keep asking what more we can do. When school leaders are given the time, space, and support to focus on what truly matters, amazing things happen and students' dreams become reality. ■

Scott Friedman joined AWSP in July of 2018 as an Associate Director after 25 years as a teacher, coach, school, and district administrator. Scott specializes in supporting school leaders on the east side of the state.



Members of the CEO Network gather outside the Gates Foundation in Seattle.

“ASK A PRINCIPAL”

In October, we asked school leaders, “What’s the best idea a student ever brought to your attention?” Here are a few of the great responses we received:



“Everybody Club. We read the book *All are Welcome* as a school. A first grader noticed that school clubs happen before or after school and that not all kids can participate and be included because not everyone can be there. She came up with an idea where everyone could participate in a club. Everybody Club has been an inclusive hit!”

- Nicolas Anderson, Principal, Sunnyside Elementary, Marysville SD

“A student asked me to begin including jokes in our weekly announcements! It has been such a hit and students give me jokes all week long.”

- Rachel Collins, Assistant Principal, Lakeland Hills Elementary, Auburn SD

“We should be allowed to wear ball caps at the middle school. Several students did a full-on Powerpoint presentation on why we should change our school policy—and they were successful. We have changed it. And it has been a great change in our school.”

- Paul Gaskins, Principal, Elma Middle School, Elma SD

“A Native student told me a few years ago in a principal/student listening session, ‘I do not share the fact that I am Native with other students, because when I look around our school I see no representation of myself or my culture. So, I assume no one cares one way or the other.’ We now have several Native displays and recognitions, and pieces of Native artwork in our offices and in the main area of the school. We now honor Native culture and histories at every opportunity and in our curricula.”

- Tom Adams, Principal, Curtis High School, University Place SD



Membership FAQs

Did you know your membership with AWSP includes professional advice from our executive staff on employment-related issues? Our seasoned staff can help you navigate a thorny issue or offer a helpful second opinion. Our services are always confidential and respectful of all parties involved. Below are a few questions frequently asked by school leaders.

Q: Am I able to receive some extra support around mentoring?

A: Yes! At AWSP we believe strong leadership support is essential for both success and sustainability in the principalship. One of the many benefits of your AWSP membership is access to a trained mentor—a fellow school leader who will walk alongside you, offering guidance, encouragement, and real-world perspectives as you grow your leadership. Our mentoring program will provide you with 10 hours of virtual support during the 25-26 school year. Learn more and apply for a mentor at www.awsp.org/mentor.

Q: When should I call AWSP?

A: Anytime you need us! Remember, your active membership comes with ongoing AWSP staff support. Whether you have a question about clock hours, evaluations, or contract negotiations, or there has been an incident where you feel like you may need representation and legal support, please call us. We are here to support you! Our number is 800.562.6100.

Q: What membership type is right for me?

A: AWSP offers five annual membership types that run from September 1 - August 31.

If you are a principal, assistant principal, or employed in professional work related to the elementary, middle or high school administrative team, **ACTIVE** membership is right for you. It's very important to be an active member in any of these roles as your membership includes national association membership and legal/liability benefits.

If you are currently working towards your administrative credentials and participating in an internship, you want to be an **ASPIRING** member.

If you have recently retired from school leadership, stay connected with us as a **LIFETIME** member.

For central office personnel, college/university program director or instructors, and anyone else employed in the education field outside of school leadership, you can join as an **ASSOCIATE** member.

For those who have been active members and are now changing roles, but still need to maintain their national legal benefits, we welcome you as an **ADVOCATE** member. ■

It's not about YOU

(And That's a Good Thing!)

The Surprising Secret to Winning Over Any Audience—Students, Parents, or Staff

By Alyssa Gallagher,
Head of Education (Programs),
BTS Spark North America

When I first became a principal, it felt like I was on a speaking tour without the entourage, fans, or music. One day I was addressing students at an assembly, the next I was making the case for funding at a PTA event. I took pride in being prepared. My talking points were always neat and organized. I knew exactly what I wanted to say and I said it clearly.

But over time, I realized that being prepared wasn't the same as being effective. The turning point came when a colleague, Scott, who coached executives on communication, shared a simple strategy that forever changed how I prepare for public speaking. He said, **"Stop starting with your agenda. Start with the audience's agenda."** That single idea changed everything. Up to that point, I had always begun by asking, "What do I need to say?" I'd list my main messages, add supporting details, and make sure I didn't forget anything important. Scott encouraged me to flip that completely and start with the audience.

Who is in the audience? What are they thinking? What are the most skeptical members wondering? What do they already know about the topic? What are their concerns? Why should they care?

When you shift from your agenda, to planning for your audience's agenda your message starts to connect in a whole new way.

The Power of the Audience Agenda

As principals, we speak constantly. We brief, motivate, and persuade every single day. But too often, our focus stays on what we want to communicate rather than on what the audience needs to hear. Starting with the audience's agenda doesn't mean abandoning your own goals. It means framing them through your listeners' perspective. You still deliver your message, but now it's grounded in empathy and purpose. Here's what that looks like in action.

Example: The Cell Phone Policy Talk

Imagine you're preparing to speak with parents about new cell phone procedures at your high school.

My Agenda (Speaker-Centered):

- Communicate the new rules
- Explain the rationale
- Outline consequences for violations
- Ask for parent support

That looks fine on paper, but it's focused entirely on what you need to accomplish. Now, let's rewrite it with the audience in mind.

Audience Agenda (Listener-Centered):

- Parents want their teens to be safe, reachable, and responsible
- They're wondering if this policy will make communication harder
- Some worry their child will be unfairly disciplined
- Others believe phones are a distraction and hope for clear limits
- They want to understand how this change helps learning, not just what it bans
- They need to trust the school's consistency and fairness

Do you feel the difference? When you start with their perspective, your message immediately shifts in tone. Instead of opening with, "Here's our new cell phone policy," you might say, "We all know phones can be both a lifeline and a distraction for our teens. Our goal is to help them stay focused on learning while still ensuring parents can reach them when it matters."

Now you're not just announcing rules. You're showing that you understand their concerns. Once you understand your audience's mindset, you can shape

your message to meet them where they are. Here's a quick checklist I now use before any speaking engagement:

1. Audience Snapshot: Who's in the room? What's their role or stake in this topic?
2. Skeptic's Corner: What's the toughest question or worry they might have?
3. Emotional Temperature: Are they anxious, curious, tired, frustrated, or hopeful?
4. Desired Outcome: What do I want them to think, feel, or do by the end—and what do they want to walk away with?
5. Message Bridge: How can I connect my goals to their goals using language that feels natural and respectful?

When you use this approach, your tone changes. You move from telling to relating, and your listeners notice.

Landing the Message Every Time

When I began planning from the audience's point of view, everything about

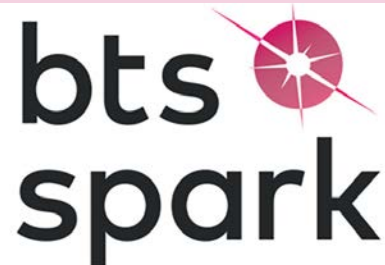
my communication changed. People leaned in more. Questions became thoughtful instead of defensive.

Feedback shifted from "I don't agree" to "That makes sense—how can we help?"

Public speaking isn't about perfect delivery or polished slides. It's about connection. When you take the time to see the world through your audience's eyes, you show respect for their perspective and care for their experience. That empathy is what earns trust and makes your words matter.

So, before your next talk—whether it's with parents, staff, or students—start by standing where they stand. Step into their concerns, their hopes, their point of view. Because when you do, your message won't just be heard. It will be felt. ■

Alyssa Gallagher is a former school principal and assistant superintendent of schools who now leads BTS Spark, America, a not-for-profit focused on supporting school and district leaders. If you are interested in learning public speaking tips and tricks, check out Speak Like a Leader.



AWSP Members Receive a Discount on Coaching through BTS Spark!

AWSP is thrilled to partner with BTS Spark to provide proactive support for individual school leaders like you! Through this partnership, AWSP members can access confidential, personalized and affordable leadership coaching at a discounted rate (\$120 off a full coaching package).

Learn more and sign up at <https://us.btsspark.org/awsp> or email Alyssa Gallagher at alyssa.gallagher@btsspark.org.

Free for AWSP Members! Register today.

YOUR LEADERSHIP RESOLUTION

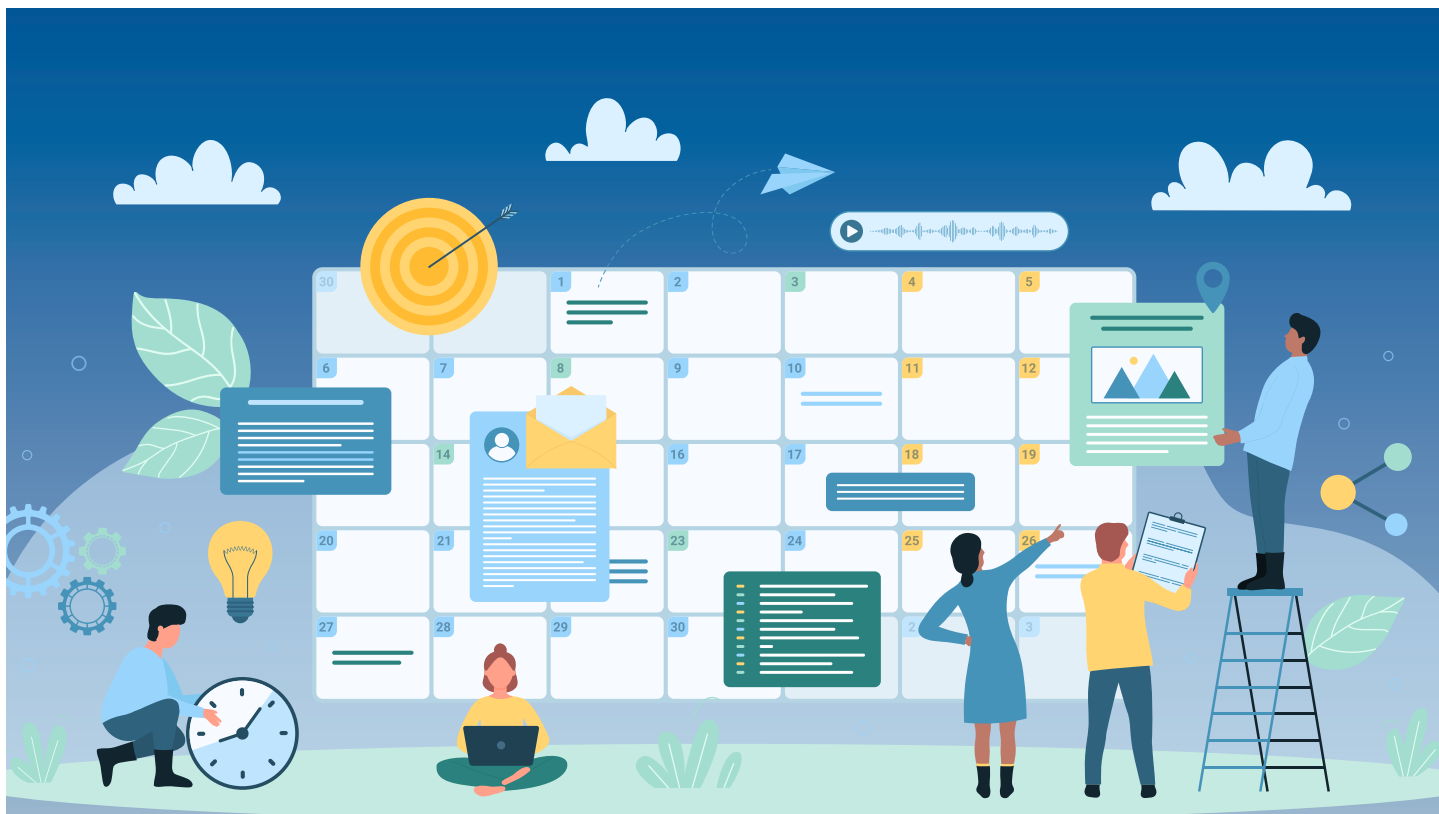
A Leadership Coaching Webinar Series from BTS Spark



Tuesday, Jan. 27 | 4-5 p.m. | Strengthening Your Leadership Muscles

Monday, Feb. 23 | 4-5 p.m. | Difficult Conversations

Thursday, March 26 | 4-5 p.m. | Leading in Uncertainty



When Do You Hit Your 40-Hour Week?

Hitting 40 Hours on Tuesday? AWSP's Four Main Priorities Include Protecting Members Like You from Burnout

**Dr. Scott Seaman,
Executive Director, AWSP**

There is nothing better than reminding you about the power and impact of your leadership. You truly are the number one influence on improving outcomes for each and every student in your school. Without your passion, energy, vision, and drive to create the best school possible, it just doesn't happen. It all starts with you, but at what cost?

Great Schools Don't Happen without Great Leaders

Many principals and assistant principals across the state are reporting hitting 40 hours by Tuesday and Wednesday each week. That's not healthy, nor sustainable, and in the end, it's bad for kids, staff, and the school community. You can't be your best

for others when you are running yourself into the ground. Something has to change.

As your professional membership association, we are constantly advocating for and elevating the important role school leaders play in the PK12 system. Great schools don't happen without great leaders. And, great schools don't happen overnight. It takes time and effective, sustained leadership to create

hope-filled school culture, systems to support that culture, and the learning outcomes to illustrate that belief.

Grow. Support. Sustain. Protect.

At AWSP, and your philanthropic foundation (the Washington School Principals Education Foundation), we are doing everything in our power to help support you so you can make the greatest impact in your school. Our priorities remain clearly focused on growing, supporting, and sustaining our school leaders. And, this past year, we heard loud and clear the need to add a new priority focused on protecting you and your impact. *Grow. Support. Sustain. And now... Protect.*

What does protect mean? It means that your physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional safety matters. You and the impact of your leadership matters. It means that the system should prioritize taking care of you just as much as everyone else. It means your safety matters. Your health matters. Your well-being matters. Your needs matter. Protecting you so you can lead your students, staff, and school community matters.

Protecting You Means Protecting Your School Community

We can't afford not to protect our school leaders—YOU. Improving the outcomes of our students depends on effective, sustainable, and healthy school leaders who can lead the work. You need to be able to lead the

changes the system requires and do so without union grievances, parent complaints, legal threats, physical threats, misused climate surveys, unchecked social media attacks, and the fear of being placed on administrative leave due to unsubstantiated accusations. You need to be protected so you can lead. That's where we come in.

In Difficult Situations, AWSP Can Help

If your school culture is being undermined by a small minority group of loud voices, reach out to us, we can help with that. If you are feeling overwhelmed by the demands on your overflowing plate, reach out to us, we can help with that. If you are needing assistance with your own collective bargaining agreement, we can help with that too. If you need some strategies to improve the impact of your building leadership team, we can help with that. If you are looking for creative ways to engage and lead with your students, we can help with that. If you need help capturing the evidence of your impact for your own evaluation, we can help with that. If you'd like powerful and relevant professional learning brought to your entire district, we can help with that too. Bottom line, we stand at the ready to help with anything and everything to support your success.

Your work is too important not to be prioritized and protected. Please don't let another day go by or another "40 hours by Tuesday" week happen without reaching out to us for support. Our mission is to help support you in the work while simultaneously advocating



PROTECT

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for larger systems changes to better protect principals. Principaling is the best job in the world and carries the greatest impact on student outcomes. It's time for our educational system to protect you, so you can lead. Our kids are counting on it. ■

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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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