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WEA Visionary Leadership Quest
Scheduled for July 18-20
in Casper
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The WEA is an organization dedicated to creating the best educational environment for all learners and the best working environment for all educational employees.

The WEA is to advance public education at all levels by: creating equitable educational opportunity for all learners; promoting the highest quality standards for the profession; and expanding the rights and furthering the interests of the education personnel. The WEA will continue to build a learning community which will provide a high quality education for all.

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Member Involvement Makes a Difference

I want to thank everyone who called, emailed, and talked to their legislators during this past session. I also want to personally thank those of you who attended SHAPE Wyoming in Cheyenne during the legislative session. Legislators were very aware of the many educators present at the Jonah building, that Monday. Your involvement truly made a difference in the passage of some very important education bills. I would like to give a special shout-out to Rachel Gibson. Rachel traveled to Cheyenne several times to testify on House Bill proposed amendments to House Bill 24, the National Board-Certified Teacher bill. She gave her first-ever testimony in front of the Senate Education Committee and did a fantastic job bringing a teacher’s perspective before the committee. Thank you, Rachel for your help in getting this accomplished! You can see Rachel in action here: https://vimeo.com/315782249

The 2019 Legislative session was highly successful for K-12 and higher education. Our members’ personal stories, shared with your legislators, helped WEA’s lobbying efforts to be effective this year. Please see pages 3-4 for a summary of this year’s legislative session.

When members get involved in our organization at the state, regional, or local level they can and do make a difference for education in Wyoming. I invite all of you to talk with your local and regional leaders and ask them how you can become involved. The more involved you are in your Association, the more you will value your membership. Attending local and regional meetings is a first step in becoming involved in your association. Talk with your local leaders about how you can become active at the local level. Recruiting new members is one of the best ways to foster a healthy, engaged membership at WEA. Now is an especially good time, as we celebrate the success of the Pro-Rated Dues campaign and

Here are more great ways to get involved:
- Attend regional meetings.
- Volunteer to do a training session at one of your regional meetings to share your skills and expertise.
- Help out with membership recruitment campaigns.
- Talk to members and non-members to learn and understand how the Association can identify and address their needs.

When members get involved, our fellow members grow professionally, have empowered voices, and the impact on student learning is remarkable. Regional presidents are always working to get members involved at the regional level, so reach out to your regional president and find out how you can get involved in your region.

At the state level, you are invited to attend the upcoming WEA Visionary Leadership Quest July 18-20 in Casper. For more information about this event, see the back cover of this magazine. There are many opportunities for you to apply to be one of the NEA funded members to attend different national leadership trainings throughout the year. WEA will notify members about these events and call for volunteer participants as dates and details become available.

Your involvement is crucial in ensuring that we continue to be the voice for education in Wyoming. I encourage you to get involved and continue to grow as a WEA member, and as a leader in your school, district, and region.
You are the Power!

The Wyoming Education Association's strength stems from our members. Our collective voice helps to ensure that Wyoming's students benefit from receiving the best possible education. This edition of the WEA News illustrates our strength, in regard to our ability to be the respected voice for education throughout the legislative session. It was thrilling to see our members, both from the classroom and retired ranks, join our lobby team. Legislators value the knowledge and skills of our staff lobbyists, President Vetter and Government Relations Director Tammy Johnson, yet the perspective of classroom teachers garners a different kind of attention and respect from legislators. Our membership is growing, and locals are getting revitalized statewide. Staff and leaders throughout the state are actively engaging members year-round. Our Region Presidents and Representatives have been joining your UniServ Directors to engage members at their worksites. WEA has budgeted support for our leaders, allowing them to take time out of their busy classrooms to visit each of the locals that they represent. A New Business Item passed at last year's Delegate Assembly requiring the Region Presidents to conduct virtual regional meetings, providing all members an opportunity to interact with their representatives on the WEA Board. This has provided an opportunity for members to engage with their Board representatives on a meaningful and productive level.

Membership Recruiting and Organizing is Year-Round! Gone are the days when the back-to-school season was the only time that WEA focused on recruiting new members to the Association. We now engage potential members year-round. We have divided these efforts into four phases:

Back to School
This is the most critical and effective time of year to engage new employees and potential members. Local leaders and Association Representatives (ARs or Building Reps) have one-on-one conversations with new employees and share the value of membership. New teacher orientations are great opportunities to showcase your local, WEA and NEA to new employees in your district.

4 for your Membership
Recognizing how busy members are during the back-to-school season, many locals launch a second wave of organizing when pro-rated dues membership recruitment begins. This starts November 15th and allows potential first-time members to join at a pro-rated cost. This year we implemented the 4 for your Membership campaign: Members’ 2020 WEA dues are waived if they recruit four new members before March 31st.

Early Enrollment
Beginning April 1st, potential members who have never before belonged to WEA can test out the Association for free. During this free trial period, participants will receive many of the benefits of membership. They will, however, be ineligible for legal services and they will not be covered under the complimentary life insurance policy.

Education Summer
Here at WEA, we are excited about the Visionary Leadership Quest to be held in Casper, July 18-20 (more information on back cover). This event seeks to engage our members and potential members, and to provide professional growth opportunities. During the summer, WEA works with locals to prepare organizing plans and to revamp and begin implementing our annual organizing cycle.

We are excited to continue to grow our membership and build our capacity. Together we succeed!
LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY
By Tammy Johnson

It was a good legislative session for education this year. We did not experience the significant funding cuts expected after last year’s session, thanks in part to the external cost adjustment being kept in the budget bill (HB0001/SF0001). Although no new revenue bills were passed, the legislature realized that the constitutional floor for funding must be maintained.

Key Bills WEA Worked in the 2019 Session

HB0022: Teacher Accountability – this essentially does two things: keeps the control over teacher evaluations in the hands of local school districts and eliminates legislation that was slated to start next year which required that student performance data be used as part of the evaluation process.

HB0024: National Board Teacher Certification – a clean-up bill which makes firm in legislation the process already in place: teachers receive $4000 stipend per year while certified as NBCTs. A 15-year maximum cap was put in place.

HB183/SF0075: Repeal gun free zones – this bill ran twice and was defeated twice. It would have allowed concealed carry of firearms “in elementary and secondary schools” “on college and university campuses” and “at sporting events.”

HB0129/SF0143: Civics Proficiency exam – defeated. Would have required passing the US Citizenship and Immigration test to graduate from Wyoming high schools. A very low bar, but invalid and inappropriate mechanism for our schools.

HB0297: K-3 Reading Assessment and Intervention Program – Allows school districts to choose and use appropriate universal screeners in K-3 reading assessment. The bill eliminates the required use of the WY-TOPP for gathering longitudinal data on grades K-2.

Love that Wyoming Constitution

Two bills aimed at changing the constitution that would have affected school funding died. The first, SJ0005 – Homeowner’s Bill of Rights, would prevent any increase in mill levies for school funding. The second, SJ0007 would have put the cost of building new schools back where it was in 1995 – on the backs of districts through local bonds. We know this is inequitable and changing the constitution to allow this would mean changing the fundamental right to an
equitable and adequate education. Thankfully, each year these kinds of bills run, the legislature shows the commitment to the oath taken – to protect and uphold the Wyoming Constitution – and the bills do not make it off the floor.

Where’s the Revenue?

We began the 2019 legislative session with seven revenue bills drafted. When the session wrapped up, only one bill made it to Governor Gordon’s desk – HB 0069: Collection of sales taxes by marketplace facilitators, which will collect about $7 million a year from business that should, but do not, collect sales taxes. Also included in the slate of revenue generating bills were those raising property taxes that would go directly to schools ($100 million a year), a lodging tax bill that would spill over approximately $1 million a year to schools, freeing up $20 million a year from the general fund, a school trust land access fee that would generate almost $1 million a year, an income tax bill (personal and corporate) that would generate $200 million a year, an indexed fuel tax that would generate $2 million a year, a tobacco tax equaling $22 million a year to the general fund, a wind tax that would generate $8–$17 million a year, and a corporate income tax on big box stores (that is already paid by them to their home states) which would have generated $45 million a year. Even a revenue neutral broad-based sales tax bill, which would have spread the sales tax burden over many different entities, failed in the legislature. This totals over $400 million dollars a year - just what is needed to meet the school funding deficit, with a bit left over to fund school construction. It’s clear that we have a solution to the school funding structural problem. While all of these taxes could not be implemented in one year, there are many, such as a fuel tax, a lodging tax, and the big box store tax, that are paid mainly by out of state people, and would be the first steps toward less dependence on the mineral industry and more faith in the people of Wyoming to build an economically stable and diverse economy in this state.

Did you use the WEA Cyber Lobbying tools?

This year the WEA lobbying team rolled out a new tool – The WEACyber Lobbyist page (wealegislativeinfo.com). The site provided talking points on key bills, links to contact your legislators directly, our new bill tracker, and access to our legislative updates. We hope you found the tool useful!

“This is one of the great stories of the session, and it’s what this session should be summed up with: You had men and women working, you had local input, you had both houses engaged. [They] got into the weeds, had robust discussions, and you get a great piece of legislation. That’s what this session, the 65th Legislature, was about: working together and getting good stuff done.”

- Governor Mark Gordon on signing House Bill 297

Governor Mark Gordon signed HB0022 into law. You can see many champions of public education including WEA President, Kathy Vetter (in purple), celebrating as this bill is signed.
Member Spotlight on Gratitude

Public Appreciation for Public Education Employees!
By Andrea Shipley

Last fall’s “Thank a Teacher” campaign was so inspiring, WEA will be extending it through Teacher Appreciation Week, May 6-10, 2019! We will be expanding the campaign to include all public school employees. This is a chance to share your gratitude with educational support professionals, counselors, food service workers, bus drivers, nurses...the list goes on and on! Each person nominated will have their name entered into a drawing to win $100 Amazon gift card. The winner will be announced on May 7th, National Teachers’ Day.

Here we showcase some of the inspirational messages we have received thus far about our WEA members and friends. Use these words of appreciation as a compass for your own work and know that your Association deeply appreciates your work all day, every day.

“You continually go above and beyond to make sure their needs are met. I respect and admire you and am grateful to work with you.”

“She has a great passion for educating students. She’s always the last one to leave on weekdays and usually spends at least 3 hours on Sundays getting lesson plans ready for the next school week.”

“She has an amazing ability to engage and educate her students. She is a true leader who imparts her knowledge on those she works with.”

“She works hard to challenge her students while building strong relationships.”

“She makes amazing connections with students and their families and just overall genuinely cares for her students. She takes her students learning very seriously and strives for her students to reach their highest potential. She is just an overall amazing person.”

“You are all things good!”

“Thank you for all that you do for our profession! I truly appreciate the time and effort you put into advocating for us!”

Gratitude has a profound effect on a person’s state of mind. Being grateful can transform our work environments and promote our cause. Best of all, it is well-deserved and the most meaningful coming from colleagues, parents, administrators, and students. Gratitude can reinforce why we are deeply committed to the success of every student. Join us in creating more joy and appreciation for our members and friends! Visit www.wyoea.org to thank a teacher, today!

4 for Your Membership Successes
By Andrea Shipley

This year, WEA launched a new spin on an effective way to recruit members during the pro-rated dues recruitment phase of our annual membership growth campaign. 4 for Your Membership is a threefold program that develops leaders who choose to recruit members, engages new recruits in organizing conversations with developing leaders, and recognizes WEA members participating in the program.

WEA is pleased to share that newly-seasoned local leaders have recruited more than 30 new members statewide, while learning new skills to further strengthen their locals. WEA is proud of the members who participated in this program and looks forward to more successes like this, in years to come.
Upcoming Professional Development Opportunities


The 4th Annual Wyoming English as a Second Language Conference will be held April 26-27, 2019 in Casper, WY. Please contact Dr. Jenna Shim at jshim@uwyo.edu or Kim Jones, kim811@myncsd.org for more information.

Wyoming PBS presents “Main Street Wyoming, What's in a Name?” with Dr. Phil Roberts. Aimed at grades 3-5, this series explains how Wyoming towns and other features were named. To find out more, visit: https://bit.ly/2CdvnRE

Teaching Contested International Issues: July 17-18, at Casper College. Aimed at social studies instructors, ELA teachers and librarians, this program focuses on the Middle East and Nigeria. The program is open to all with interested participants, with partial scholarships available. Contact mimi_stephens@brown.edu for more information.

The 2020 Census is coming soon! The U.S. Census Bureau offers a variety of materials and lesson plans for grades K-12 in history/social studies, geography, math, sociology and English. Visit here to find out more: https://bit.ly/2RBENwu

Rural Public Library Grants! The Pilcrow Foundation, a national nonprofit, public charity, provides a 2-to-1 match to rural public libraries through its Children’s Book Project. To learn more, visit: https://thepilcrowfoundation.org/childrens-book-project/

Don’t forget to visit the WEA website at wyoea.org for a list of PTSB credit-approved classes. Simply click on the ‘More’ link to view our Teaching and Learning page, for a list of professional development opportunities.
The Big Cs: One WEA Member's Inspiring Journey Through Certification and Cancer

by: Amanda Turner, WEA Information Specialist

From the caged snowy owl behind her desk, to the Quidditch broom propped casually against her filing cabinet, stepping into WEA member Anne Babiuk’s classroom feels more like a trip into Hogwarts than Rock Springs Junior High School. As a behavioral specialist, Anne works her own kind of magic in her students’ lives. “We work hard to establish a supportive learning community in my room,” Anne explains, “at the same time, I have my paraprofessionals out supporting students inclusively in the general education environment.”

Behavior specialist, Anne Babiuk in her Harry Potter-inspired room at Rock Springs Junior High School

Anne has worked in public schools for 16 years, having begun her career working in residential treatment for 7 years, before becoming a special education teacher. She has taught every grade level from kindergarten to 12th grade before as she puts it, “coming back to my first love working with junior high students with behavior, sensory and social/emotional needs.”

It’s more than Anne’s long and diverse history in education that makes her an exceptional behavior specialist: Anne is a National Board certified teacher.

Mary Ellbogen Garland is the president of the John P. Ellbogen Foundation. Working in partnership with the state of Wyoming, the Ellbogen Foundation pays half of the fees associated with National Board certification for qualifying Wyoming teachers. “Support for education is our hallmark,” explains Garland, “a lot of our support goes toward teacher quality. That is the focus of NBCT. It’s a teacher quality initiative.”

“House Points” complete with Gryffindor, Slytherin, Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw in Mrs. Babiuk’s room.

According to Garland, “National Board certification is the highest credential in the teaching profession.” Garland continues, “Teachers will say that this is the best professional development they’ve had. It’s different than a master’s degree in that it focuses on what they’re doing in their classroom and focuses on their students.”


Becoming a NBCT is a rigorous process. Only about 45% of teachers will certify on their first attempt, with 65% continuing on to certify over time. Anne Babiuk’s challenges on the road toward becoming a NBCT reached beyond academic rigor: “I decided to jump in and do the NBCT” says Anne, “because it was something I could focus on during a challenging time in my life.” Anne was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in the fall of the year that she completed her certification.
“I used my National Board process as an intervention to battle insomnia and the nasty side effects of chemotherapy. I just kept pushing and tried to keep life at home and school as normal as possible.”

“Taking the leap to do this was my proclamation that life was not going to end for me,” Anne remembers, “it was a grueling process, but it also allowed me to focus on something besides my fear.”

According to the American Cancer Society, for all stages of pancreatic cancer combined, the five-year survival rate is a devastating 7%. “It was terrifying, as a mother of three. It was a tough time for me and my family,” recalls Anne, “I used my National Board process as an intervention to battle insomnia and the nasty side effects of chemotherapy. I just kept pushing and tried to keep life at home and school as normal as possible.”

Anne Babiuk is among approximately 650 Wyoming educators to obtain National Board certification with assistance from the Ellbogen Foundation. There is at least one National Board certified educator in 41 of Wyoming’s 48 school districts. Wyoming is fifth in the nation in terms of the percentage of NBCTs in classrooms across the state.

For the Ellbogen Foundation, Garland says, “this has been a really gratifying journey. Ellbogen has loved supporting teachers and honoring them for the work that they do every day in the classroom for the students. It goes beyond the academic: it’s about social, emotional, attitudinal and behavior support that educators provide as National Board certified teachers.”

It’s been 8 years since Anne’s certification. She is cancer free and a proponent of National Board certification, “I became a CSP: Candidate Support Provider immediately after receiving my certification because I felt so passionate about the positives. It can be a very revealing process. When you are open to critique and truly evaluate your procedures and outcomes, you have an opportunity to grow in a meaningful way.”

**Wyoming is 5th in the nation in percentage of National Board certified teachers**

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**Need to Know About NBCT**

- As many as 65% of participating teachers will certify over time
- The John P. Ellbogen Foundation works with the State of Wyoming to cover half the costs associated with certification for participating teachers
- Certification must be renewed after 5 years
- Certified educators receive a $4,000 lump sum payment each year that they are certified, for up to 15 years.*

*An amendment to House Bill 24 threatened to slash this payment to $2,000 in the 2019 Legislative Session. This amendment was not adopted. National Board certified educators will continue to receive the $4,000 stipend.

Learn more about the National Board Certification Process at www.wnbci.org
“I attended Chadron State College for both my undergraduate and graduate coursework. Chadron State was just what I needed, when I needed it. Chadron’s online program was a perfect fit for me while earning my master’s degree, teaching full time, and starting a family.”

Keri Homan
Principal at Morrill Elementary School
Master’s in Educational Administration

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- Social Science (elementary and secondary)
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- Special Education – Early Childhood Special Education (Birth-Kindergarten)

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- Secondary Counseling*
- PK-12 Counseling*

*Not all required courses available online. For complete course listing, visit csc.edu/graduate/degree.csc
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**Educational Administration, Curriculum and Instruction**

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WEA Spring Conferences and Retreats

Central/Northeast Region Retreat

Saturday, April 27 in Casper at the Hilton Garden Inn

All Central and Northeast Region members are invited to attend a retreat. Door prizes and lunch will be provided. Registration starts at 9:00 am and sessions at 9:30 am. The agenda is still a work in progress. Confirmed presenters include: David Glenn of NEA Member Benefits, Rachel Quist of California Casualty, and WEA President Kathy Vetter. WEA Central/Northeast UniServ Director, Judy Trohkimoine will be leading a session of True Colors training and Central Region President, Becky Murray will be sharing information from the NCUEA Conference, and Communications and Organizing Director, Andrea Shipley will be leading a session on effective communication in your locals. To RSVP please contact UniServ Director Judy Trohkimoine (jtrohkimoine@wyoea.org or 307-256-4858). Please share any special dietary restrictions with Judy. Please RSVP by April 24th.

WEA-R Retirement Seminars

April 6th: Northwest Regions, Worland High School, 9 am – 3 pm

May 4th: Southwest Region, Rock Springs District Office, 9 am – 3 pm

Join WEA-R to learn more about how the Wyoming Retirement System (WRS), Social Security benefits, personal investments and your WRS pension can best benefit you in retirement. Also, an attorney will be there to discuss wills and trusts. Vicki Swenson, president of WEA-R will provide a brief overview of Medicare: Parts A and B, Medigap/Supplemental Insurance and Part D, prescription coverage. Lunch will be provided.

Please contact me for more information on these seminars contact vicki.swenson@yahoo.com. Please share any special dietary restrictions with Vicki and RSVP at least 3 days before the event.

Education Summer Events

WEA Hosts BEWM and ESP Conferences in June to Develop New Leaders

SAVE THE DATE: Because Education in Wyoming Matters (BEWM) Conference scheduled for June 7-9 in Jackson Hole. BEWM members are identified as public education employees in the first 5 years of their career or as aspiring educators who are currently students.

SAVE THE DATE: Education Support Professionals Conference scheduled for June 7-9 in Jackson Hole. ESP members are identified as public education employees including clerical services, custodial and maintenance services, food services, health and student services, paraeducators, security services, skilled trade services, technical services, and transportation services.

Visionary Leadership Quest

Join WEA July 18-20 at Casper’s Hilton Garden Inn for a shared learning journey of transformative experiences to support our members. The “Quest” will further define our visions for what our state and local Associations will be and do as they grow in membership; engage all members in the important work we do on behalf of Wyoming’s students, schools, educators, and communities; and, grow in power and effectiveness to take on the important challenges facing public education in Wyoming. There is a first time participant track and an advanced track this year. To register, go to wyoea.org.
Save With Dave

Are you exasperated managing your student loans?

Currently 44 million Americans owe more than $1.4 trillion in student loan debt. This number is expected to double by 2025. With the problem only getting worse many are left feeling hopeless and paralyzed by their student loan debt. Fortunately, NEAMB has partnered with Savi to provide members a free online student loan evaluation tool to determine your eligibility for free federal repayment programs, as well as Public Service Loan Forgiveness and Teacher Loan Forgiveness.

The average Savi user finds over $1,500/year in new savings. When completing Savi’s online registration, you will enter your basic personal information, tax information, and can sync your student loans directly with your servicer. The online calculator will allow you to determine all the repayment options you are eligible for and show you what your potential forgiveness could be for free.

Once you see your options, you can choose to apply for the programs yourself or NEA members can take advantage of Savi’s convenient e-filing service and get one-on-one support from their student loan experts for $29.95 -- a 66% discount from our nonmember rate. Go to https://www.neamb.com/products/nea-student-loan-forgivenessnavigator to sign up for this new student loan program and see what you can save.
NEA’s Read Across America Day is a nationwide reading celebration that takes place annually on March 2—Dr. Seuss’s birthday. Across the country, thousands of schools, libraries, and community centers participate by bringing together kids, teens, and books. WEA locals also find unique ways to celebrate across the state.

The idea for the national day started in 1997 with a task force at the National Education Association and the first one was celebrated in 1998. Research shows that promoting reading is an important factor in student achievement and creating lifelong readers. Currently, NEA is expanding its branding of the program with its tagline, “celebrating a nation of diverse readers.”

This year marks the sixth year of Wyoming Education Association’s statewide literacy tour called the, “Cat-a-Van.” Vetter has been travelling to schools across Wyoming starting in March through June to bring the Association’s reading program to schools thanks to a grant from the NEA. Each school visit features a theatrical representation of the beloved “Cat in the Hat” by Vetter while a member of the staff reads the book aloud to excited children. As part of the
program, the WEA gifts a new Dr. Seuss book to the library.

As part of the celebration of reading across the state this year, Wyoming’s First Lady Jennie Gordon, and WEA’s President Kathy Vetter kicked off Read Across America by reading the “Cat in the Hat” to kindergartner’s in WEA board member Lydia Rayfield’s classroom at Cheyenne’s Henderson Elementary School.

“Being in the classroom with students and promoting literacy is something I am passionate about,” Vetter said. “This program is a great way for WEA to assist teachers in inspiring children’s natural curiosity, imagination, and desire to learn.” During the six years of the program, Vetter has visited more than 2,500 Wyoming students and each student has pledged to keep reading for future success. Thank you to First Lady Jennie Gordon for participating and thank you to Principal Brooks-Lyons for the warm welcome into Henderson Elementary School in Cheyenne.
WEA’s Amy Mason, Wyoming School Counselor of the Year
By Andrea Shipley

Being a school counselor comes with its challenges. Surprisingly, one of those challenges is educating others about the changing role of school counselors and how to best use them as powerful resources for students and their families for academic success.

“As a profession, we are getting better about promoting what we do, but so many people still don’t understand the role of a school counselor. There is a cloud of confusion,” Amy Mason, Wyoming School Counselor of the Year and longtime WEA member passionately explained. Many people remember the guidance counselor of the past, but the job and the title have both changed. “We are a resource to students, parents, and staff and part of a team supporting the whole child. We want to help with academic, personal/social, and career growth for all students.”

Amy started her career as a school counselor in Colorado Springs, Colorado after graduating with her master’s degree from the University of Northern Colorado. Lucky for Wyoming, she and her husband, who is also an educator and a WEA member, moved to Thermopolis. She spent 8 years working in Thermopolis and it was during these years in Thermopolis she made a strong relationship with WEA and current SE UniServ Director, Greg Herold and his wife Lisa Herold. The relationship with WEA staff helped her stay engaged in WEA and garner a deeper understanding of the work of the Association.

“When WEA is a powerful advocate for its members,” she reflected.

After her time in Thermopolis, she has held a variety of school counseling positions in Fremont County. Most recently, she is serving as the 7-12 school counselor in Shoshoni. She noted that students in rural communities often face challenges related to access to hands on experiences, variety in course offerings, ability for students to participate in activities/sports/events outside of the school day, poverty, and expectations to work or help at the family farm/ranch, but that every community and its students were unique.

When asked about the biggest concerns that she has been witnessing in her office, she explained that testing is negatively impacting students. “Overall, I am seeing more and more students coming in with questions and/or concerns about stress and anxiety, mostly relating to academics and standardized testing. Even students as young as third grade have expressed concerns that WYTOPP testing is stressful for them. Students want to do a good job, but they don’t always know how to handle the pressure that comes along with the high expectations,” she explained. The only silver lining is that, “Kids are starting to get more comfortable talking about their anxiety.” However, that is not to say that a visit to the counselor’s office is not still stigmatized. She confirmed that, “Kids still say they can’t be seen in the counselor’s office.”

One thing most people may not know about the constraints on school counselors is that on average, in Wyoming, each school counselor is serving nearly 250 students. In some school districts in Wyoming, those numbers are a lot higher. The averages get worse for much of the country. That challenge doesn’t stand in the way of Wyoming’s school counselors doing their best work for students and deeply relishing their work.
“Every day as a school counselor is a new adventure. That’s what I like most about this job—no day is the same.”

Hearing the inspiration in her voice makes it easy to see why she was selected as Wyoming Counselor of the Year. She even shared some exciting new work she is ready to launch in Shoshoni. She wants to embark on the ambitious process of creating a recognized ASCA Model Program and wants to collaborate with her district to do it.

This program will help her school counseling program become more data-driven and comprehensive. Schools including Cheyenne South High School and Greybull Middle School helped pave the way for other schools and leaders like Amy Mason across the state to create their own Recognized ASCA Model Program (RAMP). This program improves advocacy, demonstrates school counseling leadership, communicates the role of school counselors, targets common goals to close achievement gaps, aids in evaluation of your programs, enhances school data, and boosts collaboration with colleagues and administrators. Setting up the program is intensive requiring standards, certification and cooperation with the district to believe in the program and support it.

Amy explained, “RAMP helps validate our profession, advocate our profession and educate about our profession. Advisory boards create sense community involvement in the school counselling process and brings about collaboration for success.” She went further to say, “This would be a culminating moment in my career to achieve RAMP certification in Shoshoni.”

Going after a big goal like this is nothing new for Amy, though she would never toot her own horn about it. She is humble about her achievements, like most school counselors, but acknowledged that “being nominated by a peer who believed in me enough to nominate me as the school counselor of the year this spring was a powerful moment of recognition.”

“Being a member of WEA gives me peace of mind just knowing that the resource and support is there.” Amy also gets support by being a part of the Wyoming School Counselors Association Board of Directors. “Breaking down the isolation, especially with new counselors, helps them learn and know more about the work and where to get support.”

In the future, she hopes to collaborate together with WEA to create more awareness about the needs of school counselors for the benefit of Wyoming students. She went further in her effort to collaborate by recently submitted a grant to NEA with the help Elise Robillard, her NW Region UniServ Director for a peer mentoring program. On giving advice to anyone entering a career as a school counselor, she said, “It’s a great profession. Be prepared to build relationships and to advocate for yourself and your program. Start by networking with other school counselors and be a part of your professional associations like WEA and WySCA. Look for mentors and supports from within your school, your district, and the state.”

WEA congratulates Amy on her successes as well as all the other school counselors who are working hard every day with the rest of their colleagues to further ensure every student has the best chance at success.
**Member Spotlight**

**Members Experience the Legislature**

By Andrea Shipley

This year, WEA partnered with the Equality State Policy Center to train members in the art of grassroots lobbying. WEA members came from as near as Cheyenne, and as far as the Cody/Powell area, to try their hand at citizen lobbying. The training itself was well received. But, perhaps the most powerful experience for members was attending and testifying before the Senate Education Committee. WEA members, like Rachel Gibson of Torrington, later returned to the legislature to track important public education bills by accompanying the WEA’s government relations team during the session.

SHAPE attendee Heather Rutz of Torrington shared, “I always knew it was important for WEA to have a unified voice, but attending SHAPE helped deepen my understanding of how that voice makes the most impact for education and students.” Attendees also learned how to navigate WEA’s new cyber lobbying webpage (wealegislativeinfo.com). The site makes it easy for constituents to learn about bills and contact their legislators directly. In one action alone, 76 WEA members were mobilized to write individualized letters to their legislators, in a matter of days. This impacted the overall discussion on the targeted bill on the floor, and eventually promoted its passage.

Member Amy Cass shares her experience at SHAPE, saying, “Attending SHAPE Wyoming was a powerful and educational experience. I was able to see the legislative process in action and see just how much work goes into it. I was able to meet a lot of wonderful people from across the state that were there to learn and advocate for topics that they were passionate about. I was able to have a meet-and-greet with the governor, along with many legislators. I took part in the bigger picture of public education in this state. I don’t think I ever truly understood what this process looked like and how critical it is that public educators have a voice like WEA advocating for educators and education at this level. The work WEA does at the session is strategic and well-calculated to get the best results. I was truly amazed about how much I learned and how much WEA works for the greater good of Wyoming education and the educators.”

WEA knows it is critical to represent our members and public education at the legislature. Training opportunities like SHAPE Wyoming, and our cyber lobbying site make getting involved in the political process easy for our members.

**WEA Teachers Stand for Students at the Legislature**

One of the highlights of the legislative session is when WEA members bring their students to experience policy making in person. Many students of all ages find their way into and around the legislative halls, meeting with representatives, and learning more about the political process.
ESP Listening Tour: Tales from the Frontlines
By Andrea Shipley

Educational Support Professionals work to ensure that students achieve at their highest levels. They keep students emotionally and physically healthy and safe. They engage students and keep them connected to the larger school community. In some cases, they may be the one caring and supportive adult that every student needs to succeed. They provide instruction and academic supports, challenging and motivating students by maintaining high expectations. ESP’s meet the needs of the whole student, promoting quality education and fostering positive learning environments.

Until recently, ESP membership numbers had been showing a steady decline in Associations across the nation. WEA decided to take action to renew its field organizing efforts toward growing ESP membership. This December, WEA staff visited locals in targeted areas to gather feedback and information from our ESP members. NW Region UniServ Director Elise Robillard and SW UniServ Director Arthur Huron joined forces with local and statewide leaders to organize these listening sessions. WEA heard about ESP members’ experience in order to support their work in our schools and meet their needs as Association members.

Next, WEA formed an ESP organizing team and began strategically addressing the issues that were shared during the listening tour. The result? WEA ESP membership is growing, and our members continue to have the opportunity to share their feedback with WEA.

Catching up with ESP members, we learned we need to provide ESP focused professional and leadership development opportunities, and to recognize the diversity of thought and experience our ESP’s bring to the work of the Association. WEA looks forward to embarking on this work to further benefit public education employees and their students.

Not a group that is likely to boast of its success, ESP members across the state work hard in their locals to better their communities. Locals have recently held fundraisers for charitable groups supporting students and families, and awarded scholarships to local students, amongst other activities. WEA loves to hear about what you are doing in your communities. If you have a news tip on an activity or a colleague that is achieving great things for students, please email WEA Communications & Organizing Director, Andrea Shipley, at ashipley@wyoea.org. We would love to feature this work in an upcoming issue of the WEA News Magazine!
WEA-R Planning for Success
WEA News Article –
by Vicki L. Swenson, WEA-Retired President

By the time you receive this publication, Doreen McGlade and I will have attended the NEA National Leadership Summit in Denver which immediately precedes the Annual NEA-Retired Organizing Conference. Judy Trohkimoinen, staff liaison to WEA-R, will have joined us for the NEA-Retired conference. We are all certainly looking forward to getting together with NEA’s amazing leadership and staff, and our active and retired colleagues from across the country. My expectation is that all three of us will have learned a great deal and come back with enthusiasm and ideas for strengthening WEAR and growing our retired and pre-retired membership. All of WEA-R’s endeavors seek to also grow and strengthen WEA. We would appreciate hearing from you with ideas of how WEA Retired can help in your area. James Cash Penney said, “Growth is never by mere chance; it is the result of forces working together.”

WEA-R is planning retirement seminars for the Southwest and Northwest Regions: April 6th in Worland and May 4th in Rock Springs. (see more about registering on page 11). During each seminar, a Wyoming Retirement System (WRS) counselor will present the basics of various benefit plans. Jonathan Neher, an NEA endorsed financial educator, will present information on Social Security and how your Social Security benefits and personal investments work together with your WRS pension. We are also planning on a local attorney to be there as well to talk about wills and trusts. I will be doing a brief overview of Medicare: Parts A and B, Medigap/Supplemental Insurance and Part D, prescription coverage. Please contact me for more information on these seminars @ vicki.swenson@yahoo.com.

In January, 26 active and retired WEA members joined 40 other citizens at SHAPE Wyoming, a lobby training provided by the Equality State Policy Center. WEA staff was also a part of this well-presented and educational training. The following day, WEA-R held WEA-R Activate. We were pleased to be joined by WEA staff members. Greg Herold gave an overview of SHAPE Wyoming. Tammy Johnson, Government Relations Director, went over some current legislation. Judy Trohkimoinen gave a presentation on being a cyber-lobbyist. Judy gave us a good overview of the WEA’s Become a WYOEA Lobbyist site as well as the Wyoming Legislature’s wyoleg.gov site. Ron Sniffin, Executive Director, filled us in on the work being done by the Coalition for a Healthy Retirement System with specific information about the Wyoming House bill to provide a WRS COLA. While the COLA bill did not pass, running the bill this year drew the legislators’ attention to the dire need for a COLA. Please stay tuned to WEA updates and “calls to action” as we work for a COLA in the future.

WEA active and retired members campaigned for education friendly candidates this last election cycle. WEA-PACE dollars supported many of these candidates. Without contribution from WEA and WEA-R members, there would be no WEA-PACE dollars. Last spring during our WEA-R Annual Meeting, attendees prepared a PACE mailing that was sent to our entire membership. We were thrilled with the results of this project. Our members donated $4000 for the 2018 WEA PACE campaign. During our 2019 Annual Meeting, March 29th, we will have prepared our second annual WEA-PACE letter for mailing. I encourage you to contribute to PACE. Perhaps your local association would consider doing a PACE fundraiser each year.

Together we CAN and WILL make a difference in Wyoming’s education landscape!

“We cannot accomplish all we need to do without working together.” Bill Richardson

Please follow us on Facebook - “WyoEd-Retired”
Welcome Stefani Bengston

WEA is pleased to welcome Administrative Assistant Stefani Bengston!

Stefani was born and raised in Wyoming, growing up in Hillsdale, then moving to Cheyenne. She is an only child. Stefani graduated from high school in 2016 and participated in a CLIMB Wyoming Medical Careers Training program in 2018. Stefani came to WEA as part of an intern placement program through CLIMB Wyoming and plans to return to college to further her education.

Stefani enjoys learning about the many different roles within WEA and the impact WEA has on teachers and education throughout Wyoming. She is grateful and excited to be a part of the WEA family!

During her free time, Stefani is happiest when camping, being crafty, decorating her home, and spending quality time with her two-year-old daughter, Sierra.

SWEA Leadership Growth

By Andrea Shipley

Currently based out of the College of Education at the University of Wyoming, SWEA student membership continues to gain momentum as two community colleges and the university show an increase in engagement, with more college students and campuses across the state excited to join the effort. This winter, both the University of Wyoming and Northwest College invited WEA leaders to their campuses to provide training and guidance. As a result, three new community college members will further their leadership development by attending the NEA National Leadership Summit in Denver. These aspiring educators will be growing as WEA leaders as they transfer to university studies and impact classrooms in the years to come.

Additionally, students at the University of Wyoming continue to set a shining example of how to promote professional development, political action, and public service. Students from this chapter read to students on Dr. Seuss’ birthday and plan to participate in the Relay for Life in the spring. We continue to bring great work to life and network to strengthen the aspirations of students. This group of students is on fire!
Collaborate and Learn with Project ECHO!

University of Wyoming Project ECHO and Wyoming Department of Education invite you to participate in:

• **Virtual Professional Development** on-line & no-cost (PTSB approved)
• **Peer Learning & Collaboration**
• **Opportunities** for sharing best practices & successes

Scan the code to learn more and sign-up to receive information on the current education networks.

- Autism
- Assistive Technology
- Secondary Transitions
- Behavior Supports
- Student Health
- Early Childhood

Connect to the education networks via text message: text **echo** to **31996** for updates sent to your mobile phone.

Like us on Facebook @uwechoeducation
uwyo.edu/wind/echo
WEA’s Wayne Schatz Named AARP’s Retiree of the Year
By Judy Trohkimoinen

Long-time WEA member Wayne Schatz is a retiree star, so much so that he was recently recognized as the Wyoming American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) Retired Educator of the Year. “It was a shock to me,” he said about hearing that he’d received the award. “I just try to stay active, enjoy myself, and have fun. I don’t worry about awards.” This award is usually given to a retired educator, someone who has become active and involved in their community.

Wayne was an educator for 39 ½ years, all in Sheridan School District #2. His first assignment was as a team teacher at Coffeen School in 1969, an open concept school. After ten years Wayne wanted to try something new, so he transferred to Woodland Park Elementary where he taught 6th grade. “My real love was teaching Wyoming History, so I went back to 4th grade the next year. I just loved the 4th Grade curriculum.” After 20 years Wayne received his master’s degree in Computers of Education. He introduced students to simple robotics, keyboarding, and what computers can do for us. “Things have changed so much,” he said. “I grew up on a ranch outside Meeteetse with a party line phone and we had to be careful not to interrupt our neighbor’s conversations. Now we have a computer in our phones!”

After Wayne retired, he decided to stay busy and regularly volunteers for AARP, is an usher for the WYO Theatre and serves on the Sheridan School District 2 Board of Trustees. He is politically active and has often served on the Legislative Contact Team and on the Candidate Interview Team when WEA needs help interviewing Sheridan County legislative candidates. He is also very active in the Wyoming Retired Education Personnel (WREP) group. As a WEA-R member he finds both groups to be important because they help retirees to enjoy a better quality of life. Wayne’s main purpose is to help people, both retired and active educators. He is proud of the services that AARP, WEA, and the WREP offer. These organizations were among the coalition members who supported HB 314, which would have helped addressed a Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for Wyoming’s public retirees. Wayne says, “Older retirees are struggling and live deposit to deposit. As you get older, you have more problems with health and prescription costs.” A COLA would have helped to address this issue.

Wayne’s school board service has been exemplary! He has served for 10 years so far: two full four-year terms and now two years into a third term. This work is entirely different than being in the classroom. “The biggest surprise was all of the work ‘underneath the classroom’ so that teachers can teach. There’s financial planning, paperwork, and government regulations to consider. That’s not the most fun.” When asked his favorite part of being on the school board Wayne said, “We have a chance to review finances and make sure that we’re under budget so that we can offer teacher raises. We want to make sure that we have salaries that are comparable to other parts of the state. Sheridan is a wonderful community. We’re looking to do things better and people here are very giving.”

When asked what advice he would give to someone considering retirement, Wayne said, “Before you retire do some planning and find out what you enjoy. Continue to take care of your health as much as you can. Plan carefully so you can do the fun things you like to do, including family activities with children and grandchildren. A retired person has the option to fill time with activities that they enjoy. I’ve probably chosen to be overly active sometimes. I’m not ready to sit around and watch TV all day.” Wayne lives a full life worthy of aspiration!
Excellence in Teaching is Excellence in Learning

By Elise Robillard

In January 2019, WEA member Chris Bessonette, his colleagues, and students were surprised when it was announced at a school assembly that Chris won the prestigious Milken Educator Award. Often referred to as the “Oscar of Teaching” this award recognizes early and mid-career teachers for their excellence and accomplishments. The award comes with a $25,000 individual, unrestricted prize funded by the Milken Family Foundation.

When asked about this experience, Chris shares that he was completely caught off guard and he had no idea that this award even existed, much less that he had been selected as an awardee. He and his wife plan to use the award money to travel with their son and to further their passion for experiencing new cultures and places.

Chris has had a winding road to becoming a public school teacher. Originally from Oregon, he started working in education when he accepted a position at a boarding school in Austria in 1998. Later, when he returned to Oregon, he decided to combine his love of the outdoors with his desire to teach. This led him to the opportunity to lead one week sessions with 6th graders on field science excursions. He enjoyed working in an outdoor setting and sharing natural science with students, so he eventually accepted a position in Yosemite National Park teaching natural history, ecology, and science standards through hands-on learning to rotating groups of students of all ages. This position eventually brought Chris and his wife to Wyoming, where he worked for the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) in Lander for five years teaching backpacking, rock climbing, and leadership skills.

Eager to travel and teach, he accepted a teaching position in Germany at the Dresden International School teaching first grade. He found this teaching assignment both fun and exciting. He loved working with students from all over the world. In fact, in his two years there, he only had one student who was a native English speaker. He met his future wife and they decided to return to the United States to raise their family in the American West. This led him back to Wyoming where he taught kindergarten through second grade for three years with Teton Science Schools at the Journey School. For the past eight years, he has worked for Teton County SD #1 in Jackson Hole. He started as a traditional kindergarten teacher, and then joined the dual immersion program where he taught kindergarten for six years and now second grade for two years.

Chris has grappled with understanding why he, among all his accomplished and dedicated peers, would be recognized with the Milken Educator Award. He says he sees heroic teaching all around him, and so he is humbled by this impressive honor. Yet, he believes that his connection with Patrick Menyak at the University of Wyoming, and their work on a research project studying vocabulary acquisition in collaboration with the 2nd grade teaching team at Munger Mountain Elementary may be part of the reason he received the Milken Educator Award. This project brought research-based practices to his and his teammates’ teaching, including pre- and post-assessments to measure student growth. Chris has led this project and its impact on students’ learning has been amazing.

More than the monetary prize, Chris is grateful that his dedication to his students and their learning has been recognized. Munger Mountain Elementary, where Chris teaches 2nd grade, uses a dual-language immersion program. All students speak and learn in both Spanish and English. He hopes that this award will highlight, and allow him to promote, the importance of dual-immersion language programs. Teaching in this environment has reinforced his commitment to learning about world cultures, promoting intercultural understanding, and elevating minority students who, like their peers, aspire to accomplish great things with their lives. Chris Bessonette exemplifies great teaching – we congratulate him for his award and we thank him for his dedication.
Christine Fitzgerald (Seeking: WEA ESP Statewide Representative)
I would like to be the next statewide ESP representative. I work as a library para in an elementary school and have worked in education for the past 18 years. I have been very active with my local association. I believe that all ESP should be treated with respect and our voices should be heard.

Lane Cheney (Seeking: NEA RA State Delegate)
I teach music at Midwest School. I believe in NEA and what we can do together! I would be honored to serve at the national level.

Tracy Clement (Seeking: NEA RA State Delegate)
I would like to be a SE Delegate to the NEA RA so that I can represent Wyoming and advocate for public education. I have had the opportunity to be a Building Representative, working with policy and negotiations. I have served the past two years as a SW Delegate to RA. I humbly ask for your vote.

Judith "Judy" Crow (Seeking: NEA RA State Delegate)
Please vote for me for NEA RA State Delegate. I am the NE Region VP. In my local, I am a Building Rep, I have served various officer positions over the last 10 years. I am interested in member advocacy for ESP and certified school employees. I work as a para at Thunder Basin, and I teach at Gillette College.

Paige Gustafson (Seeking: NEA RA State Delegate)
As an active WEA member and advocate, I have testified in front of the recalibration committee about the importance of arts education, organized postcard writing parties focused on critical legislative issues, rallied community members in support of small class sizes, and attended leadership training to engage all members.
Rebecca Murray (Seeking: Central Region President)
As the current Central Region President, I am grateful to have the opportunity to run for this position again next year. I am passionate about educating children and supporting them as they develop a love of learning. I will work hard to build relationships, plan and implement meaningful and engaging member events, and grow our membership.

Toni Orr (Seeking: Central Region Vice President)
I have worked in the school district for 9 years. I became a member of my local Association 5 years ago when I was hired as a Special Education Teacher. I believe I can make a difference in our education system by assisting in adjusting our Association as needs arise and bringing creative ideas to the table to make our schools better for teachers, and in turn, better for students.

Heather Rutz (Seeking: NEA RA State Delegate & Southeast Region Representative)
In my 8 years of teaching, I have been an active member at the local, state and national level every year. I have served as a building rep, NEA RA delegate, and on the membership committee. I have also been involved with several other committees both at the local and state level. I am dedicated and passionate about advocating for our students and our staff members in public schools.

Amy Simpson (Seeking: NEA RA State Delegate)
Attending RA is important to me so that I can bring information back home to Wyoming where we can apply what is best for our state and locals. It is a privilege that I do not take lightly and I will do my best representing you at this important meeting. I humbly ask for your vote.

Jane Niemitalo (Seeking: NEA RA State Delegate)
I am a veteran WEA member with several years’ experience representing my locals at state and local levels. This is my second year as a DA representative and I was an NER Cluster RA delegate, twice. I believe that my experience makes me the best candidate for Statewide RA. I would appreciate your vote!

Rebecca Murray (Seeking: Central Region President)
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Johnna Nunez (Seeking: Northwest Region Vice President)
Hello, from a lifelong Wyoming Native that believes in the spirit of education. My dream is that we can foster engaging learning environments for all students, staff and administration. I provide a plethora of experiences including personal and professional education, social justice, and culture/climate of environments. I ask for your support as we support education, together.
2019 WEA Elections

As a WEA Member in Good standing, we are requesting that you participate in 2019 WEA elections. Please watch your email for voting information. An electronic ballot will arrive via email on April 15. If you do not receive a ballot, please contact WEA Membership Specialist, Linda Bottom at lbottom@wyoea.org. If you need to update your email address, please contact Linda prior to April 15.

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<td>Lannette Lahey</td>
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<td>Jane Niemitalo</td>
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<td>Heather Rutz</td>
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<td>Amy Simpson</td>
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<tr>
<td>NEA RA State Delegate (Category 2) – 1 delegate</td>
<td>No Candidate</td>
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<tr>
<td>NEA RA State ESP Cluster---(ESP Members with NO Local) – 1 delegate</td>
<td>No Candidate</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>CENTRAL REGION</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Central Region President</td>
<td>Rebecca Murray</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Region Vice President</td>
<td>Toni Orr</td>
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<tr>
<td>Central Region Cluster Delegate to NEA RA</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Casper College EA, Douglas EA, Glenrock EA, Niobrara County EA) – 1 delegate</td>
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<td><strong>NORTHEAST REGION</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Northeast Region Representative</td>
<td>Darlene Erickson</td>
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<tr>
<td>Northeast Region Cluster Delegate to NEA RA</td>
<td>Annie Gripp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Crook County EA, Johnson County EA, Newcastle EA, Northern Wyoming</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community College District EA, Sheridan Central ESP, Sheridan East EA,</td>
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<td>Sheridan West EA, Upton EA) – 1 delegate</td>
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<td><strong>NORTHWEST REGION</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Northwest Region Vice President</td>
<td>Johnna Nunez</td>
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<tr>
<td>Northwest Region Representative</td>
<td>Lannette Lahey</td>
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<td>Northwest Region Cluster Delegate to NEA RA</td>
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<td>(Arapahoe EA, Central WY College EA, D-4 EA, Dubois EA, Ethete EA, Ft.</td>
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<td>Washakie EA, Greybull EA, Hot Springs County EA, Lander EA, Lovell EA,</td>
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<td>Meeteetse EA, Northwest College EA, Powell EA, Riverton EA, Shoshoni EA,</td>
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<td>Ten Sleep EA, West Big Horn County EA, Wind River EA, Worland EA) – 4</td>
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<td><strong>SOUTHEAST REGION</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Southeast Region Representative</td>
<td>Ralph “William” Barnes Jr.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Heather Rutz</td>
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<tr>
<td>Southeast Region Cluster Delegate to NEA RA</td>
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<tr>
<td>(East Laramie County EA, Eastern WY College EA, Guernsey-Sunrise EA,</td>
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<tr>
<td>LCCC EA, Platte County EA) – 1 delegate</td>
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<td><strong>SOUTHWEST REGION</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Southwest Region President</td>
<td>Lori Eggleston</td>
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<tr>
<td>Southwest Region Vice President</td>
<td>Angela Thatcher</td>
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<tr>
<td>Southwest Region Cluster Delegate to NEA RA</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Big Piney EA, Carbon County #2 EA, Kemmerer EA, Lyman EA, Mt. View EA,</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pinedale EA, Star Valley/Cokeville EA, Sweetwater Early Childhood EA,</td>
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<tr>
<td>Western WY College EA) – 2 delegates</td>
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Getting to Know John Fabela

1. Name/Preferred Name? John

2. Current role in district/college/institution? How long have you held this position? Instrumental Music Instructor-6-12. I teach band, Jazz Band and Beginning Guitar. I’ve been back in Powell (I grew up here) since 2008. I’ve been teaching since 1987.

3. Current role in WEA? I am the Northwest Region President and the Vice-President in my local, Powell EA.

4. How did you get to where you are today/history? I was born in Worland and we moved to Powell when I was in third grade. After graduating from Powell HS, I earned a Bachelor of Music in Education from Hastings College in Hastings, Nebraska. My first job was teaching band in Gering, Nebraska from 1987 to 1990. In 1990, we moved to Sterling, Colorado, where I taught until 2008, when I had an opportunity to move back to Powell. I had parents and educators who supported and encouraged me in my pursuit of a career in music. I’ve been blessed to have worked with colleagues who care about kids and are recognized leaders in our profession.

5. Greatest joy in current position/What are we in public ed getting correct? I’ve had many joys in my current position, but one of the things I’m most proud of is seeing several of my former students become music educators. Having taught in both Nebraska and Colorado, I can say that Wyoming does make K-12 education a priority more than other states. We have legislators who do understand the importance of providing a quality education for every student. Advances in technology have made learning more fun than it was when I was younger. Even practicing a musical instrument is more fun when using play-along tracks or interactive software. Educators have a deeper understanding of learning styles and techniques for reaching students with special needs.

6. Greatest frustration in current position/What are we in public ed doing wrong? I’ve been teaching long enough to see a few education trends come and go. Some of the trends return with new labels. Too often, educators are forced to comply with whatever the current buzz word is in education. Change for the sake of change. Some current trends are not ‘one size fits all.’ For example, as a singleton teacher in my buildings, professional learning communities (PLCs) are not as effective for me. I relish opportunities when I get to meet with my colleagues from around my region and around the state and share successful strategies with each other. Community Colleges are not being appreciated enough in Wyoming. They are under-funded and their contributions to the life of Wyoming communities are not celebrated enough.

7. Unique skills? What do you bring to the table that allows you to be successful? Most of the opportunities I’ve been given in my life have been a result of my being able to play the trumpet and sing. I have traveled all over the US and Europe because of music. I’ve played my trumpet and sung professionally. I’ve been asked to play on studio recordings. My students know that I am one of them. I grew up where they are growing up. Through hard work and study, I have enjoyed a long and rewarding career in music. My hope is that my success will be an inspiration for my students to pursue whatever their passions are.

8. What advice would you give yourself in your first year of teaching? I would tell myself that the more I communicate with parents, the better my life will be. Don’t be afraid to make that call. At the beginning of my career, it was hard for me to reach out to parents and inform them that their child was keeping me from being as effective as I could be and other students from learning. I should have also made more of an effort to tell parents how awesome their child was and how their talent and hard work was contributing to the success of our program.

9. Was there a teacher/mentor who had a great influence on you? And if yes, what did you learn from them? Mr. Peyton was my first band director. He always acted like every day was a gift and like he couldn’t wait for us to come to his band room. He was proficient on every instrument and was a master at connecting us with literature that challenged us and made us all better musicians. Not a day goes by that I don’t ask myself, “How would Mr. Peyton do this?” My college band directors were also great influences on me. Duane “Bear” Johnson gave me a love for classic band literature and Tom O’Neal instilled in me a mantra for success, “Don’t be satisfied with mediocrity” that I try to pass on to my students. If we constantly strive for excellence in home practice, rehearsals and in performance, success will be the natural result.

10. How would you like your students to remember you? I hope they remember the aesthetic experiences, the chills we all got during an exceptional performance. I hope they remember the culture of excellence that we all created together, and the powerful effect music had on their audiences. I want them to be proud that they learned how to play an instrument and that they were part of a successful band or guitar program and that they have learned a skill that they can use for the rest of their lives. I am just a facilitator, the music never happened without my students.
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Join WEA July 18-20 at Casper’s Hilton Garden Inn for a shared learning journey of transformative experiences to support our members. The “Quest” will:

- Further define our visions;
- Engage members in the important work we do on behalf of Wyoming’s students, schools, educators, and communities;
- And help our locals grow in power and effectiveness to take on the important challenges facing public education in Wyoming.

There is a first-time participant track and an advanced track this year. To register, go to wyoea.org