



Washington State Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

“The Practitioner’s Best Friend”
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What does your local legislator know about your work?

“The difference between a politician and a statesman is that a politician thinks about the next election while the statesman thinks about the next generation.” –Hillary Rodham Clinton

Policy changes can move slowly and impact people – including our students and teachers – for years while we learn about actual consequences to well-intended mandates. For those of us used to the crazy pace of the classroom, the geologic-timing of governmental response can be frustrating. (Although, to be fair, if policy change happened quickly – that would have its own set of consequences.)

Here in Washington State we have what is termed “citizen legislators.” In general, while the “salary and time required for the job” significantly limits who can serve, it is also “difficult for legislators to obtain and maintain outside employment.” According to the [Washington Citizens’ Commission](#), (Washington) state legislators typically spend about 70% of a full-time job. Although their income from legislative work is greater than that for (other types of state) legislatures, it is usually not enough to allow them to make a living without other sources of income.

According to a 2012 [National Conference of State Legislatures survey](#), Washington state elected officials have average annual salaries of \$42,106. If we take the “70% of a full-time job” figure at face value, this means our elected officials are in jobs that would average annual salaries of ... wait for it... \$60,151.

Wow. Why would someone do such a difficult, important job for such paltry compensation? I mean – the complexity, the stress, the 24/7 public element of the position...it sounds so...so much like...TEACHING.

Clearly, both members of political and educational professions must work from a reserve of passion and dedication, and not omnipotence. Understanding that they are dedicated, what is the best way for these folks to learn about your day-to-day professional issues? From YOU. You and I must engage our citizen legislators and be the teachers we claim to be. Educate our representatives.

One recent example of this occurred in Eastern Washington. My colleague Dr. Lambert, from Whitworth University, and I convened a panel of student teachers, mentor teachers, a

supervisor, and professors to teach our area senators and representatives about the new exam required of preservice teachers, the educational Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA). One of the legislators left with this comment, "This was one of the best events of this type I have attended." Others agreed and thanked us for the format, which was a bit different than what they usually experience. Instead of asking them to come with all the answers, we invited them to come with questions while we supplied the "testifying panelists." Every participant seemed grateful and expressed a desire to work further on the issues *together*. I feel great confidence that each of these legislators is going to the state capitol with a much better understanding of what is happening in this area of the profession and will move purposefully toward action that supports quality teaching and learning.

We felt proactive. We felt like we had been heard. We did not wait up in the tower, sighing with our head in our hands, hoping that someone would come ask us about the issues of the day. We refused to gripe... and then sit idle. Understanding that communication is our duty as good citizens and educators, we felt good as we partnered with our citizen legislators.

We educators always have our eye on the next generation, and so do our legislators. How can you help our well-meaning citizen legislators to become better informed about our profession?

Suzann Girtz, Ph.D.

Asst. Professor

Teacher Education

Gonzaga University, Spokane, WA

girtz@gonzaga.edu

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