

Derek Sarley – Vice President Candidate Statement

As school directors, we constantly deal with issues like tight budgets, contested negotiations, failed bonds, and passionate constituents. It's not always easy to remember why this is some of the most fulfilling work we can do.

Then we see the students. The big ones at graduation, the little ones on a preschool visit, and all those in the middle who catch us with their perceptiveness every time we listen to their voices.

Their success is why we do this work, and it's why I am running to serve as WSSDA's next vice president.

WSSDA is strong. Our impact increases by the year. I'm confident that will continue no matter whom the membership selects for this position. I can offer you diligence, persistence, an open mind, and a ready ear. I truly love this work and enjoy sharing ideas and experiences with others who do it.

For those I haven't met, I'm in my second term on the Walla Walla school board. I ran for the seat of a retiring board member who had served so long, and with such distinction, we named the board room after her. I've worked to live up to her example.

At the state level, I am a graduate of the 2017 Leadership WSSDA class. Three years ago, I completed a colleague's term on Nominating Committee. For the last two years, I have served on the Legislative Committee. These experiences have broadened my perspective to encompass the larger issues that can impede or improve so much of the work we do.

I've been around long enough now to learn there is no such thing as a normal year in public education. That's why it's critical we stay focused on our most important work: ensuring every student in every school has an outstanding education and equitable opportunities in life after graduation.

WSSDA can be the most powerful voice for students in our state. But we must be absolutely steadfast – both in our work and our advocacy – in avoiding situations where stakeholders express support for equity as a concept, yet allow its eclipse when final decisions are made. All means all.

Clearly, challenges remain, particularly with funding. There is a widely-held impression that school funding in Washington state has moved from inadequate to lavish the past few years. Would that it were so.

Our students have social and emotional needs that must be met for them to thrive, before and after graduation. Society has decided this is a task for schools, while not providing sufficient resources to ensure we can hire the requisite counselors, social workers, and mental health professionals. As we move through a challenging state budget cycle, we must continue building long-term support for the services our students need, even as we work to prevent the most damaging immediate cuts.

While we are calling on others to help us meet these needs, we must hold ourselves to the same high standards, never allowing the challenges our students face to excuse our own failure to teach them.

This work is never easy. Even before COVID-19 shuttered our facilities, we were buffeted by forces more often focused on the adults in education, not the students. In the midst of that storm, it can at times be hard to appreciate all the ways we have been expanding opportunities and reshaping practices that pushed so many students out, rather than up.

This is our work. I would be honored to help play this part in it. Thank you all.