

# FEAtures

Newsletter of the Ferndale Education Association •

February 1, 2007

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**Candy Ford** *Vice-President - Eagleridge*  
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**Kris Skewis** *Head Negotiator - Horizon*  
**Adam Goldstein** *Negotiator - Windward*  
**Beth Andres** *Negotiator - F.H.S.*  
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**Lindsay Dorr** *Mt. View*  
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**Marilyn Rockwell** *F.H.S.*  
**Drew Sampson** *F.H.S.*  
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**Adam Goldstein** *Head Rep - W.H.S.*

## What IS the "HCA", and Why Should I Care Anyway?

Really, the only reason you should care is if you think it might help you to have \$681.80 pre tax dollars per year back in your paycheck. Back in your paycheck? If you use your benefits allocation, yes, because \$681.80 is the amount the "HCA" is worth annually in dollars deducted from your state health care allocation. Does every district deduct the full HCA retiree subsidy from their employees' health insurance allocation? No.

In 1993, the state began requiring school districts to subsidize the State Health Care Authority (HCA). At that time, many school districts chose to deduct that \$10 per month from the health care allocation received from the state. This resulted in a reduction of the benefit dollars for active employees in order to subsidize the plan available for purchase by retirees. Since 1993, the HCA has increased from \$10 per month to the current amount of \$55.15 per month.

HCA jargon has changed over the years. The subsidy used to be universally called the "carveout". Unfortunately, use of the term legitimized the "carving out" of the retiree subsidy from the insurance benefits allocation. Former State Attorney General and current Governor Christine Gregoire coined a more accurate term when she called it the "subsidy" in 1994, in a ruling which said, in part, "The subsidy is neither required to be paid from the allocation nor does it operate to reduce the allocation established by the Legislature in the budget act. Which funds the subsidy is paid from is a proper matter for collective bargaining between district employers and employees."

Strong bargaining to mitigate the impact of the HCA retiree subsidy has paid off for association members in districts all around Ferndale. The full subsidy is paid by the district, and not deducted from the health insurance benefits allocation, in most school districts in the Fourth Corner UniServ Council. Included in the list are: Arlington, Stanwood, Lynden, Mt. Baker, Bellingham, Darrington, San Juan, South Whidbey, Upper Skagit (Concrete), Burlington, Lakewood, and Mt. Vernon. In Blaine, Conway, Anacortes, Meridian, Sedro Wooley, Coupeville, La Conner and Oak Harbor, between 30% and 91% of the HCA retiree subsidy is paid by the district. In fact, many districts across the state now contribute additional funds to the health care allocation available for each employee!

In Ferndale, 0% of the HCA retiree subsidy is paid by the district. The subsidy is paid, all \$681.80/FTE of it, by you.

*Please take the time to let the FEA bargaining team know how you want your issues prioritized. Attend a bargaining forum, participate in bargaining team visits, contact a bargaining team member individually, and/or fill out your bargaining team survey! We value your input!*

## Don't Wait Unit April

by Susan Gelhar, FEA Legislative Rep

A legislative rep provides information to the local association about what is going on at the State Capitol and at OSPI. Another part of the job is to report back on WEA events and issues that affect members. The following information comes as a result of a resolution passed at last year's Rep Assembly to improve communication about member benefits and financial services. The WEA has taken steps to strengthen the program and to encourage members to make use of the financial planning services offered (a \$300 value!).

One step was to add a feature to the WE newsletter, an article each month highlighting a financial topic. Another good starting point is the website [www.washingtonea.org](http://www.washingtonea.org). On the tabs across the top banner, go to Member Services and drop down to Member Benefits. From there, select WEA Financial Investments. (Member Services is the same drop-down that will give you "How dues are spent" with a link at the bottom for "a penny-by-penny breakdown"!)

The company contracted to provide financial planning is AIG VALIC. They have been WEA endorsed for over 30 years. AIG VALIC Financial Advisors are available to work with individuals or groups and they do not pressure clients to buy their own products. They provide guidance and tools to establish retirement savings goals, determine investment preferences, identify risk tolerance, and design asset allocation strategies.

It is highly recommended that younger teachers make time for this critical task. Some members of the WEA Lifelong Compensation Task Force are warning of possible changes to the state's regulation of TRS Plans 1 and 3 that could impact future benefits. State Legislators need to hear from teachers during this current session to help them understand the importance of retirement issues, regardless of age or plan.

### More resources and calculators:

Check out the "Just for Teachers" section on the Securities and Exchange Commission website, <http://www.sec.gov/investor/teachers.shtml>. It provides general information about saving and investing, asset allocation, diversification, and rebalancing. The site also includes calculators as well as tips and resources for teaching personal finance in the classroom. I recommend the Money Smarts quiz and the printable posters. Financial literacy is a hot topic in Olympia!

**YMCA Group Memberships:** Ferndale School district employees may purchase an annual YMCA membership at a discounted group rate. Memberships are for one year from 10/1-9/30 and are prepaid annually. However, you can join at any time during the year and pay a prorated amount.

Annual group membership benefits include:

- Reduced membership rates plus guest passes (12 visits/year)
- Full use of Downtown Bellingham, Ferndale, and Lynden facilities
- Priority registration for programs
- Savings on fees for Y classes and programs
- Free aerobic, yoga, bench, and weight room orientation
- One free fitness test
- A.W.A.Y. program member - cards honored at other facilities across the nation

Free one-week passes are available to first time users at the main desk of each YMCA. You need to have picture ID and be a resident of Whatcom County.

## Benefits Byte

by Cheryl Frazier, FEA Benefits Rep

### New Website:

Several members have experienced difficulty with the new website links listed below. However, I've gone to the site several times with no difficulty, using an iMAC at school. The site does not seem to be case sensitive. However, it is critical to login under Employees Benefits and NOT on the first screen.

Go to [www.baldwinrgi.com](http://www.baldwinrgi.com) and click on "Services" on the lower left of the page. On the next screen, click on "online login" (**small red letters** to the right of "Employee Benefits").

Then enter:

Company: **Ferndale**  
User Name: **JFerndale**  
Password: **885422**

Click on "My Benefits" on the upper left screen.

"Useful Web Links" will allow you to search for providers and plan information. You will need to scroll down to see the results.

Please email me if you cannot access the site: [cfrazier@ferndale.wednet.edu](mailto:cfrazier@ferndale.wednet.edu)

**For Your Information:**

- New Educators -Save the Date!
- The Fourth Corner Uniserv will be holding New Educator Nights. Get involved; enjoy dinner, discussion, and topics. March 1st at Mr. Vernon's Skagit Brewery or March 6th in Bellingham.
- Call for details at 733-2233, ext. 229.

**Teacher Humor:**

A new teacher, trying to make use of her psychology courses, started her class by saying, "Everyone who thinks you're stupid, stand up."

After a few seconds, little Johnny stood up. The teacher said, "Do you think you're stupid, Johnny?" "No Ma'am," he said, "but I hate to see you standing up there all by yourself."

***A Day in the Life of a High School Teacher***

by Jenny Kubic

This morning started early. My daughter has jazz band on Tuesdays and Thursdays at Vista Middle School, which starts at 7:00 AM. After dropping her off, I headed to the high school. My goal was to get the FEA snow ballots copied and distributed before 7:30, and have an email sent out to members explaining the purpose of the vote and the process. I made it by 2 minutes. (Thanks Melissa!) I had morning prep, so after gathering some files of student papers to grade, I headed to the staff room. I have so many papers to grade it was hard to choose. I decided on the recent tests my freshmen took on China. I settled in to work at the end of the table and graded papers while some teachers met in preparation for the walk-through they were participating in that day. As they discussed their plan for the day, the topic of conversation drifted to snow days (no pun intended) and how best to make them up. Of course, I was interested in the conversation and I put in my two cents worth. When will we know? This was the question. Not yet....I tried to concentrate on my papers again, and managed to get a whole class set graded before the end of my prep.

I had two sections of AP US Government to teach and we were going to the library computer lab for taking online political quizzes. The teachers participating in the walk-through would be coming in to observe for about 10 minutes as well. The students were very interested in the activity, and almost all of them made it through all three quizzes

and the notes. One class had a lot of questions, which kept me on my toes. With that and the hike to and from the library two times, I think I walked a couple of miles. Lunch came just in time. Again the topic was how will we make up the snow days. For every suggested plan, someone had a conflict. We laughed about it, but had concerns too. The bell rang ending lunch before I was ready as usual.

My last class of the day is a tough one. End of the day. Freshmen. World History. Need I say more? It is a large class, with a diverse group of students. I am lucky, I have an aide to help me in meeting the needs of my students. It is still very challenging, and every day when the bell rings at the end of the day, I feel like I really earned my paycheck. Today the students were especially hard to get on task. One disruptive student angered another student who then had an outburst and needed to be removed from class. Things settled down a little after that, but I was glad when the class was over. We'll try again another day.

Next, we had a staff meeting. On the agenda - 1) garbage (no kidding) 2) How to use the IMS to look at student test scores and 3) a grant that needs revision. The first two items were pretty short and sweet. More garbage cans will be put on campus in the hope that kids will use them. Next item, we have a website with our students' test scores that we can access to help us know which students need more support for passing the WASL. The third item was longer. We have a grant. It is providing a lot of money for the high school, but we have to do what we said we would do in the grant to keep the money. We are not all on the same page on what it was we said we would do, so we are going to revisit this and decide what we will be doing next. There were a lot of questions. Another meeting is scheduled for next week for department heads to meet with the administration to talk about more specific issues. I made it home before dark and managed to fit in a long walk! Then home for dinner, my family, and getting ready for tomorrow.

WEA says "We're Listening!" The next WEA All Member survey will be online January 29-February 9, 2007. Watch for an access link from your local president. Make your voice one of the 80,000 strong!

***Back at the Table Again***

by Kris Skewis-Negotiator

Negotiations have begun! We are seeing information from our members in four ways:

First, we have surveyed FEA members so we can have data on topics from all members across the district.

Second, we are in the process of holding meetings at individual buildings to better understand members, ideas, and individual building concerns. Please check with your head rep for more information about the dates and times for your building.

Third, this year we are holding Negotiations Forums from 4-6 PM on Thursday, Feb. 8, and Monday, February 12, in the Horizon Middle School Library. This is a great opportunity for all members to come together from across the district to discuss their concerns with the FEA Negotiations team. For example, school nurses could discuss their case loads, early elementary teachers might discuss time needed for reading assessments, or traveling teachers may want to discuss their lack of consistent planning time. Please contact Kris Skewis at ext. 9877 to make an appointment.

Fourth, we are having individual conversations with members. Remember, we represent you and are always open to hearing your ideas, concerns, or comments. Don't hesitate to email or call your [FEA Negotiations Team](#):

Beth Andres - ext. 9291  
bandres@ferndale.wednet.edu  
Rocky Diaz - ext. 9669  
rdiaz@ferndale.wednet.edu  
Adam Goldstein - ext. 9156  
agoldstein@ferndale.wednet.edu  
Kris Skewis - ext. 9877  
kskewis@ferndale.wednet.edu  
Lyn Sherry, UniServ Representative  
lsherry@WashingtonEA.org

This year's District Negotiations team consists of: Elvis Dillinger, Chuck Foster, labor mediations consultant; Tony Harduar, Principal at Central and Beach; and Aaron Kombol, Asst. Principal at FHS.

The teams have set up meetings for the following days and times: Jan. 24, Feb. 27, March 7, March 19, April 4, March 17, all from 4-6 PM; and May 10, May 23, June 6 from 1-5 PM. We are prepared to keep meeting into the summer if necessary. Watch for updates!

**President's Pen** by Tracie Morris

Wow, are we ever communicating! I don't know if it was the budget crisis or the snow issue that got all of us discussing and working together cooperatively as a team, but I'm excited and pleased. We are talking more with members, other union groups, and with administration. Administration and FEA met in August to discuss our new contract changes and we plan another meeting soon. We have had Labor Management conversations regularly in meetings and by email. We are all working together to make Ferndale the best place to work. I hope you are feeling that you are being heard. If not, let me know.

The High School Climate Survey results were shared the the District last summer and we will be revisiting those issues shortly. The district wide Climate Survey will be shared with the district at the next Labor/Management meeting. We felt as your representatives that if members are asked to complete a survey, something should be done with those results. We had 68% of our membership respond last year and hope for a greater return this spring.

Indoor Environmental Quality (IEQ) is a concern in our district especially this time of year. Just a reminder about the process. Please contact your custodian and administrator first. If nothing is done, let me know. I will speak with the district to make sure the situation is resolved. We have some wonderful resources with UniServ that we can tap into if needed. There is also a work team at WEA that will be able to advise us ([www.washingtonea.org](http://www.washingtonea.org)).

**Congratulations** to our WEA Prep Assembly delegates: Susan Gelhar (FHS), Kathy Miller (Skyline), Dave Esser (Mt. View) and Tracie Morris (Skyline). The Rep Assembly is March 29th-31st. We will report back to our rep council at the April 19th meeting.

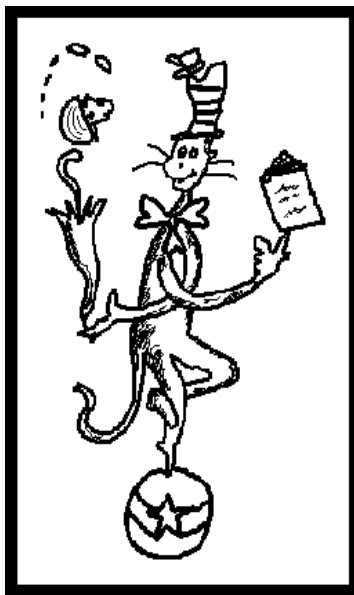
**Pre-Retirement Seminar:**

**Where:** 4th Corner Uniserv  
**When:** March 16-17  
 Please contact them right away if you are interested.  
[ebarnhouse-lopez@washingtonea.org](mailto:ebarnhouse-lopez@washingtonea.org) or  
<http://www.weafourthcorner.org/>

NEA Books Across America

March 2, 2007  
 Project 236 at 2:36 PM. Join millions of students and educators in reading *The Cat in the Hat*. Celebrate the books 50th birthday.

For more information go to:  
[www.nea.org/bookacross](http://www.nea.org/bookacross)



**Ferndale Education Association  
 2006-2007 Meeting Calendar**

**Location: Babe's Restaurant**  
 Scheduled at 4:30 unless specified otherwise.

Feb. 1, 2007	Executive Board	4:30 PM
Feb. 15, 2007	Representative Council	4:30 PM
March 1, 2007	Executive Board	4:30 PM
March 22, 2007	Rep Council	6:15 <u>AM</u>
April 6, 2007	Executive Board	4:30 PM
April 19, 2007	Rep Council	4:30 PM
May 3, 2007	Executive Board	4:30 PM
May 17, 2007	Representative Council FEA Scholarship Awards	4:30 PM
June 7, 2007	Executive Board Planning Session	TBA

All members are invited and *encouraged* to attend. This is the chance to meet with other FEA members, to let your voice be heard, and as an added bonus, you get a delicious meal at Babe's Restaurant absolutely free! Please come join us at any of the scheduled meetings. We'd love to have you there!

FEAtures is published 11 times a year, August through June, to inform Association members of activities, negotiated policies and district-wide points of interest.

Letters, guest columns, announcements, and story ideas are welcome. Email [dschulz@ferndale.wednet.edu](mailto:dschulz@ferndale.wednet.edu).

## *Reasons to Join WEA-PAC* by Candy Ford

Okay...so ya know when your FEA rep uses chocolate to entice you to attend an association meeting to discuss joining WEA-PAC and you're thinking to yourself, "Do I really have to do this???" Here are some reasons why you should attend that meeting and how it may be beneficial to you.

WEA-PAC is WEA's voluntary political action committee, which makes both campaign contributions to our pro-public education candidates (supporting BOTH major political parties) for the legislature, statewide office, and school boards. Money is also used to reach out to voters through direct mail and paid media ads.

Politics and politicians regulate pretty much every aspect of our work lives in public education. 75% of public school funds come from the Washington state legislature. Like it or not, your job is directly controlled by politicians. They set the state's salary grid, decide how much money will be budgeted to reduce your class size, provide time and funds for job training, set the length of your work day and the school year, dictate your certification standards, decide how much money your district can raise in its levies, enact school reform, student performance, and curriculum policies, and dictate the general parameters of everything from health coverage to retirement benefits.

Maintaining the I-732 COLA and I-728 Class Size Initiatives is possible only through working hard to keep pro-public education candidates in office. WEA-PAC gives members a united voice and helps make certain that the people who make decisions about public school funding understand and support our issues. Together we can work to ensure that those elected to our state Legislature fulfill their paramount duty of funding public education.

Many members think they already belong to WEA-PAC, but unless you complete a WEA-PAC membership form every year, you are not. Payroll deduction is not an option at this time, but we have an Easy Pay option through your checking account. WEA-PAC membership dues are \$20.

Every child deserves a quality learning environment and a quality teacher. Contributions to WEA-PAC help ensure our Legislature understands the needs of our children and supports their futures. If the family foundation behind Wal-Mart is willing to spend millions of dollars to fight against public education-what can we do?

### *Can we count on you to join WEA-PAC?*

***Take the Lead in Fun!***

Our illustrious leader and association president extraordinaire submitted a proposal to WEA Fourth Corner Uniserv for an organizing grant to help make members and communities become familiar with WEA's *Take the Lead for Public Education* campaign. Lo and Behold, FEA was awarded one of the largest grants (\$1500.00) with the theme, "**Take the Lead in Fun!**"

We are hoping to organize some kind of Amazing Race-style event where each school has a team of at least two people who perform "tasks" that helps FEA members, the public, and/or parents understand the importance of the *Take the Lead campaign* and build a sense of community and unity.

This campaign is trying to inform Washington State voters about the need for the Legislature to fully fund education. Some key points are:

- **Making Education Funding a priority** - Washington ranks 42nd nationally in per-pupil spending.
- **Succeeding with Competitive Compensation for Educators** - Washington ranks dead last in average teacher pay among west coast states.
- **Improving Student Achievement** - Washington has the 46th largest class size in the country.
- **Strengthening the Education Profession** - Students benefit when educators have the right to advocate for their profession and their students.

FEA is in the process of forming a committee to help plan and organize this event. We will need to develop some kind of timeline, decide how to choose participants, make sure all schools are involved, and set up criteria for the tasks at each school. One great idea given so far is to have the "race" begin at North Bellingham and move north to each Ferndale school until we reach Custer. (Sounds like a great way to get in shape for Ski to Sea!) Then have all FEA members and FSD employees involved in the Coalition and maybe even administrators meet at Hovander Park for a big picnic.

If you would like to be part of this planning committee or have some wonderful thoughts and ideas on how to get this information out to members and public, please contact Candy Ford at Eagleridge Elementary - ext. 9728 or cford@ferndale.wednet.edu. We hope to see everyone at the first **FEA Amazing Race** coming soon to a channel near you!

## *A Day in the Life of a 5th Grade Classroom Teacher*

*by Dee Schulz-Eagleridge*

### *Special Project Funds:*

Every school has \$100 allotted to them annually by FEA. The allotment money should be spent in a manner that publicly promotes the Ferndale Education Association. Members at each building should decide together how to spend the money.

Past projects have included buying books for students, small gifts for volunteer appreciation week, musical instruments, food for special events, and yearbook ads. Items have been labeled in some manner or signage posted indicating FEA's contribution. (Example: "Compliments of the Ferndale Education Association")

Please save all receipts and apply for reimbursement to Cheryl Frazier, FEA Treasurer, at Skyline.

### ***More New Members Welcomed!***

**Mary Beth Hughes** is a new 6th grade teacher at Mt. View. She has 12 years experience, mostly in 6th grade at Ebenezer Christian School. She loves working with 6th graders who, she says, will do almost anything, which can work both ways!

**Stacy McCormack**, Mt. View's new Title I teacher, has taught in the Mt. Baker School District for the last 10 years. She has a 5 year old son and 2 1/2 year old daughter. She and her husband own "The Keg" restaurant. Stacy loves working with the variety of grade levels and the collaboration piece, which is strong at Mt. View.

**Ryan and Megan Mitchell**, both teachers at Custer welcomed Maliah Rae Mitchell to their family on January 3, 2007. She was 8 lbs 6 oz. and 21.5 inches long. Congratulations!

It's 4:30 AM and I'm not allowed to hit snooze again or I'll be late. I crawl, groan, roll out of bed, throw on my swimsuit and work out clothes, grab a cup of coffee and head to my car. I know my workout partner will show up at 5:00, and I know she will plague me forever if I wimp out. After a 25 minute drive to Lynden, a 45 minute swim, and a 25 minute return home trip, I'm home needing to get ready for work in a hurry. Thirty minutes later, the kids are ready, the dog has been walked, breakfast consumed, lunches made, and we are heading out the door for school. It's 7:30 AM. I drop off my daughter at the middle school, and my son and I are at Eagleridge by 7:45 (45 minutes before my contracted time). From 7:45-9:15 I collaborate with my grade level team, make my copies, plan, correct papers and definitely have another cup of coffee, or two.

School begins at 9:15. My 24 smiling 5th graders show up ready to learn. Okay, back to reality. They all do show up, many of them smiling. We go through our busy day. Today I have no planning time, so it's a whirlwind of activity, flying through five different subjects without breaks. It's reading and writing before lunch, then math, social studies and science after lunch. Lunch is my only chance to catch a breath, and oh yeah, take a bathroom break.

The students get out of school at 3:30. I walk them to their buses, then jog back to my room because I have 20 students waiting for me. I teach Journalism, an after school enrichment group and we write the school newspaper. The kids are involved and excited, but trying to conference with 20 students each session is a challenge. They do a great job. At 4:45 I'm outside waiting for my students to be picked up by their parents. I'm responsible for them until they are all gone. At 5:15 the last child is picked up. I head back to my room, clean up a bit, and try to prepare for the next day. I usually give up half way through.

My two children and I now head home. It's dark. I get home about 5:45 and it's time to make dinner. By 7:00 (most nights) dinner has been eaten and homework for the kids done. (It just depends on how much homework those middle school teachers give...smile). Time to walk the dog. Finally, by 7:45, everyone in the family is taken care of. Now it's time for me to correct. I spend anywhere from 30 minutes to 2 hours correcting a night. It's important for me to keep up or my weekends are ruined, and we usually have family plans. Tonight, I have writing to correct (scoring all 6 traits of a final draft), social studies, and math assignments. During this time I get a few calls from students needing help on their homework. Every child in my room has my home number for homework help. I also get one call from a parent who doesn't understand our current math algorithm. If I'm lucky, everything is packed away by 9:00. I usually crawl into bed by 10:00 PM, and set the alarm to start it all over again.

Don't take me wrong. I love my job. I enjoy what I do and the students bring me great joy every day. I absolutely love the people I work with. They are such dedicated professionals who make it possible for me to come to work every day. I'm thrilled when the students achieve a goal and the excitement just lights up their face. My heart also breaks as I see the many challenges my students face every day. I also feel frustration when I open the Record Journal and read that someone says, "... (the snow days) are going to shorten their (the teachers) summer. I think teachers already get more time off than they should." It breaks my heart to think that the public still believes that about teachers and they don't see the time, energy, and soul we put into our jobs.

Well, it is late, and there are more papers to correct. I know that all of you can probably relate to the hectic pace we all share. Please share your "Day in the Life" story with us. Send it to Dee Schulz at Eagleridge or via email at dschulz@ferndale.wednet.edu.