

**Washington School Counselor Association  
Government Relations Committee Board Report  
June 2011**

This year, for the first time ever, school counselors had the assistance of a professional advocate to bring our collective voice to the State Legislature and to other important events that took place in Washington. Our June report is a summary of what we accomplished while trying to advance the visibility of our profession and protect our members during the economic down turn. In November the WSCA Government Relations Committee worked with our legislative liaison to develop a legislative agenda in an effort to outline public policy supported by the association and develop achievable goals. With our legislative liaison's help, we also determined appropriate processes for implementing this legislative agenda. We are now pleased to report solid progress in achieving our goals.

**Goals for the WSCA Government Relations Committee**

- **Begin relationship building with members of the House and Senate Education Committees**

Although this is not the easiest goal to quantify, it may be the most important work of legislative advocacy. Once the majority parties had assigned members to the education committees, we began meeting with both Democrats and Republicans in December to introduce ourselves and talk about our goals for the 2011 legislative session. Our message was fairly simple: WSCA would like to 1) support policy bills that directly support the work of counselors and 2) be available as a professional resource to legislators and staff. We also explained our intention to avoid issues of great controversy for the 2011 session and until the association had time to better understand the landscape of the legislature and/or consult with its membership. We were able to meet with all of the members of both education committees at least once during the session. Legislators shared with us their personal experiences with counselors and some provided advice as we began our advocacy work. We also worked with some legislators on specific bills, and developed relationships with key players in legislation that was directly related to counselors, such as bills on anti-bullying legislation, social/emotional learning, and dropout prevention.

- **Meet with legislators to talk about the role of the school counselors, especially how we play a major part in current education reform**

The Chair of the House Education Committee met with WSCA representatives several times and said she thought school counselors were key to the state's efforts in education reform. Much of the education reform work was put on hold this session because of overwhelming budget deficits and efforts to change teacher evaluation systems. We will continue to monitor the work of the Quality Education Counsel and participate when appropriate.

- **Identify potential WSCA champions in both House and Senate**

We were pleased to lay the ground work with legislators who are supportive of school counselors and will continue to meet with members in the interim before the beginning of the 2012 legislative session. Also, House legislative staff has already contacted WSCA and asked for professional guidance around bills being considered for the 2012 session. We have several members who have volunteered to work with staff on ADHD and ADD policy. WSCA representatives will also serve on the work group to develop state policy around issues of bullying. By working in tandem with legislators on issues they care about, WSCA

will continue to develop relationships and encourage our champions to advocate on our behalf when possible and appropriate.

- **Organize a WSCA lobbying day (Feb. 3, 2011)**

Our 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Day on the Hill was a great success. Almost a dozen WSCA members traveled to Olympia for the day and met with nearly every member of the House and Senate who is assigned to an education committee. We made personal connections with legislators and asked for their support on bills of specific concern to our members. Other stakeholders, such as the Washington Education Association, Stand for Children, and the League of Education Voters, also met with school counselors during lunch and shared their goals for the session. With each of these groups, we had a robust discussion of current issues and different stakeholder's perspectives. We are looking forward to continuing our developing relationship with these leaders in education advocacy and reform.

- **Pass a resolution in support of school counselors for National School Counseling Week**

A House resolution recognizing National School Counseling Week was read by House Education Committee Chair Tomiko-Santos during a hearing on February 3rd. WSCA members in attendance were asked to stand and be recognized by all who were present.

- **Develop a “cheat sheet” document that outlines education efforts and interim work groups that may be of interest to WSCA**

We will begin to develop this list over the interim.

- **Monitor proposed bills to ensure that school counselors continue to feature in bill language related to dropout prevention, career and college readiness, data tracking systems, comprehensive guidance and counseling, and increasing on-time graduation rates. WSCA monitored bills dealing with end of year Math assessment as well as bills affecting compensation and reduction in force policy. We also monitored these bills:**

### HB 1163 Bullying Prevention

HB 1163 was sponsored by Marko Lias and outlines the next steps in Washington State's bullying prevention work. The new law requires the offices of the Education Ombudsman and the Superintendent of Public Instruction to convene an ongoing work group on school bullying and harassment prevention. A WSCA member will be asked to serve on this stakeholder committee. The law was signed by the Governor and requires the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges and the Higher Education Coordinating Board to compile and analyze policies and procedures adopted by community and technical colleges or four-year institutions of higher education, as appropriate, regarding harassment, intimidation, and bullying prevention.

### HB 1599 Pay for Actual Student Success Program

This bill created an incentive for schools to lower dropout rates by providing a financial reward to schools who make measurable improvement. After many iterations, the final bill was delivered to the Governor and signed into law. The legislature only made a small appropriation for the program

this session, but laid the ground work for future investment. One of the provisions of this bill would allow schools to hire “graduation coaches” (certificated or classified staff who would work on dropout prevention with at-risk students) with the award money. WSCA’s legislative liaison and Government Relations Committee Chair worked closely with the bill's prime sponsor to amend this bill and clarify that these coaches will work in coordination with certified school counselors to implement dropout prevention programs.

### HB 1004 Social Emotional Learning

Although this bill did not pass the legislature this year, WSCA members spoke to legislators and testified in the policy committees about the need for social emotional learning as a compliment to traditional academic subjects. This bill would have required the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction to promote and encourage incorporation of social emotional learning into basic education instruction in public schools. It also would have created the social emotional learning public-private partnership account. We were pleased to see the issue raised in the legislature this year and will continue work on this issue in upcoming sessions. The final budget also contained a directive to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction to develop a best practices model policy regarding how to use graduation coaches. Both WSCA and the Public School Employees Association will work with OSPI to create a best practices document that schools can choose to follow in implementing a dropout prevention program that includes the use of graduation coaches..

- **Develop relationship with State Board of Education to keep school counselors in forefront of conversations surrounding graduation requirements**  
Toward the end of session, our Government Relations Committee Chair was able to begin conversations with one State Board of Education member, and will continue to develop this relationship during the interim.

Respectfully submitted,

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Government Relations Committee Chair

Melissa Gombosky  
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If you have any questions, or would like to get involved this summer or during the upcoming school year, please contact Kim Reykdal, Olympia High School Counselor at [kreykdal@osd.wednet.edu](mailto:kreykdal@osd.wednet.edu) or 360-596-7033.