

Our quarterly profile of educational leadership in Washington state.

# Sue Anderson

## Educator Effectiveness Director, OSPI



*In this edition of Honor Roll, we are proud to feature Sue Anderson, the 2017 recipient of the AWSP President's Award. Presented each spring, this honor is given to a person outside of the association who has advocated on behalf of principals and the principalship in Washington state.*

### What made you decide to go into public education?

After college, I had an inkling I might want to teach and was very interested in experiencing living in another culture. I joined the Peace Corps and spent two years teaching biology and chemistry in the Democratic Republic of Congo. I loved teaching — the ways kids constantly surprised and amazed you, the creativity involved in figuring out new and better ways of supporting their learning, the sense of being part of something enduring — and entered a master's program in education when I returned to the U.S. I was hooked, and I've never looked back.

### What was your favorite thing about being an assistant principal?

I loved many things about the job. Being part of a school team — having that opportunity to work with the admin team, school staff, and students to make positive things happen — was great. I generally liked that each day was so different, and often had little resemblance to the day you had planned on your calendar. And while there were heartbreaking lows in the work, there were also times that filled you with indescribable joy. I've had many different roles as an educator and

loved them all; this was both the most challenging and the most rewarding.

### You're the Director of Educator Effectiveness at OSPI. What exactly does that mean? What do you think are the keys to being an effective educator and how do we create more of them?

I think of our work as ensuring that school districts and our education partners have the policies, programs, and financial resources they need to support teachers and principals in becoming their best educator selves. We're able to do that in our office through our work on TPEP, National Board certification, and the BEST program for new teachers. All three programs receive solid support from the Legislature, which helps a great deal.

I believe the keys to becoming an effective educator are being curious about your strengths and challenges (and using the instructional and leadership frameworks to better discern those!), ensuring you have the resources you need to grow in the challenge areas, and then working at it — preferably with thoughtful colleagues. For teachers, principals play a key role in supporting this, but they can't do it alone. How can principals leverage the skills — both formal and informal — of the teacher leaders in

their schools, to coach their peers? This is pretty natural in schools that have fostered a growth culture. Our revised Focused evaluation process really supports this, because it keeps the conversation about effective practice, not about the score.

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There are also the skills of being able to talk with teachers about their practice in ways that really support their learning and thinking. We have a long history in our state of providing professional learning for mentors, coaches, and principals on Laura Lipton and Bruce Wellman's learning-focused conversations, and the people who use these skills find them to be really helpful.

One other key to becoming an effective educator is to know what students think about things, both at the school and classroom levels. The best way to know this? Ask them! The work some districts have been doing with student

perception surveys in the past year has been really exciting. It's helping educators become aware of things they might not otherwise know.

**What do you do to unwind and relax when you're not working?**

Hiking, skiing, and canoeing with my husband, Rick, joined by our kids and friends when they can, are high on the list. I also love to run, read and bake. I joined a community choir last year (no audition – whew!) and that has been a wonderful addition to my life.

**What's the best book you've read recently, professionally or personally?**

I just read, "Waking up White," by Debby Irving, and it was the right book at the right time for my own personal and professional growth. For TPEP, we've been working with Heidi Schillinger on racial equity, and she talks about becoming "color brave." This book has helped me on that journey. ■

resources are not diverted away from learning. They maintain a culture of high standards and one where every single adult deeply believes, at their core, all students can and will achieve because of the experiences and encouragement the adults provide.

Our most effective principals – transformative, critically conscious, gap-closing principals — are systems leaders heavily focusing on culture and maintaining an unwavering belief in the following fact:

*We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us. We already know more than we need to do that. Whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't so far.*

-Dr. Ron Edmunds

As you examine your data, schedules, policies and procedures throughout the year, and each year as you

tweak the master schedule and your messaging, and as you evaluate the managerial and technical side of your school to find and respond to gaps in opportunity, remember where it all starts. Don't be a fish, but if you are, make sure you know you're wet. ■

<sup>1</sup> Terrence E. Deal and Kent D, Peterson (2009). *Shaping School Culture: Pitfalls, Paradoxes, & Promises*

<sup>2</sup> Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Harvard Professor (2010)

<sup>3</sup> Claude M. Steele (2010). *Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do*

<sup>4</sup> Carolyn M. Shields (2013). *Transformative Leadership in Education: Equitable Change in an Uncertain and Complex World*

<sup>5</sup> Michael Eric Dyson (2017). *Tears We Cannot Stop: A Sermon to White America*



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