

Walla Walla School Board Vital to Student's Success

January is School Board Appreciation Month in Washington State. I want to express my sincere gratitude to our dedicated board members and ask the Walla Walla community to join me in the same.

Mr. Derek Sarley, Board President and member since 2015
Ms. Kathy Mulkerin, Board Vice-President and member since 2021
Mrs. Ruth Ladderud, board member since 2012
Mrs. Terri Trick, board member since 2018
Mr. Eric Rindal, board member since 2019

School board members uphold a tremendous responsibility. As publicly elected officials, they volunteer countless hours to ensure all students of Walla Walla Public Schools part with the necessary skills and abilities to lead successful adult lives. Whether enrolled, enlisted or gainfully employed upon graduation, our school board continues to prioritize the achievement and success of all students. They represent you as a link between the community and the classroom and they take this responsibility seriously.

Walla Walla school board members spend considerable time crafting policies, adopting curriculum, participating in ongoing professional development, ensuring financial accountability, and preserving the historic investment in our school facilities. While doing so, they continue their relentless focus on putting kids first, prioritizing what is best for all children across our twelve campuses.

Being an effective school board member is no easy task. The time spent in board meetings represents a small fraction of the many hours school board members devote to the district. They must read and study about many complex educational issues while ensuring accountability toward daunting levels of increased state and federal mandates. They work together as a team towards a common vision - "Developing Washington's Most Sought-after Graduates" - ensuring all students gain the knowledge and skills to be responsible, reflective, and productive citizens. School board members know their decisions affect our children - what they learn, who will teach them, and what types of facilities are adequate for their learning experiences. They make a difference for every child in Walla Walla Public Schools.

To say this is a dynamic time in public education is an understatement. In a now globally-competitive world, increased expectations for student outcomes are now measured through federally-mandated high-stakes assessments. Meanwhile, staggering increases in the number of students living in poverty, a demographically shifting student landscape, and children with heightened social and emotional needs, reveal the urgency to adapt our educational system. Rather than shying away from the challenges faced, our Walla Walla school board has embraced these as opportunities to improve our schools. To name just a few recent initiatives, our dedicated and responsive school board has: implemented research-based dual language programs where dozens of students graduate every year with the prestigious Seal of Bi-literacy; removed financial barriers

for students and families resulting in record participation and attendance at events and programs; established a “We All Belong Here” campaign that has greatly improved school safety, belonging and acceptance; focused on increasing inclusivity and access for students who qualify for special education; developed multiple career and technical education pathways for students interested in pursuing the trades and similar ventures; and finally, engaged in an historic bond campaign that provided critical facility improvements, delivering on every promise made, all without increasing local tax rates.

As a result of their accomplishments, your Walla Walla Public Schools board of directors have been named a “Board of Distinction” four years in a row from the Washington State School Directors Association. Moreover, just recently they received the highest recognition possible, earning the “2022 Board of the Year Award” for medium sized districts, besting all 74 of their counterparts across Washington State.

Once a year is far too infrequent to recognize and honor the dedication, hard work, and selfless commitment of our school board members. However, I would ask that you please take a moment this month to thank those who currently serve and those who have served before them. The future success of our students, Walla Walla community, and democracy depends on the continued leadership and guidance from our devoted and representative school board.

Dr. Wade Smith
Superintendent of Schools