

## Teachers' Movements Gain Community Support by Centering Social Justice

(Editor's Note: Below SEE reprints a small portion of a two-part interview from Truthout.org)

Leading teacher militant Gillian Russom has been a high school history teacher in Los Angeles for 18 years. She's been an activist-member of the United Teachers Los Angeles for most of that time and currently serves on the union's board of directors. She is a contributor to the book *Education and Capitalism*, published by Haymarket Books. She spoke to Truthout about the causes of the new teachers' movement and how labor activists must move toward social justice unionism.

**Ashley Smith:** The teacher's strike wave has swept the country and looks like it's becoming a national movement. What's behind this?

**Gillian Russom:** There are a few factors that come to mind. One reason, which I didn't know until recently, is that teachers have had the greatest downward mobility since the 1970s. It's a profession that's in crisis; that has experienced a devaluation over a long period of time.

Another one is how the recession impacted education and teachers. States and school boards imposed austerity on public education. People saw co-workers laid off, class size increased and relentless cuts to programs. As a result, the downward mobility we've experienced over decades got dramatically worse since 2008.

On top of these, there's the experience of being a teacher in an economic crisis and what you see and experience. I remember West Virginia teacher Emily Comer talking about teachers witnessing the impact of the opioid crisis, job losses, poverty and homelessness on their students and families.

We teachers see these problems on a daily basis in our students' lives, and because of the nature of the profession, we are made to feel like we have to solve them and make things tolerable for the kids in our classes. Eventually, you reach a breaking point when it's no longer possible to cope, and you start demanding accountability from school boards and the government.

All of this is happening amid an official political debate in which neither party has been speaking for us. Both have carried through attacks on public education and the media has parroted their positions, relentlessly targeting teachers as the source of the problem. There was the Time Magazine cover with former chancellor of Washington, D.C., public schools Michelle Rhee declaring that the whole problem in education was the "bad apples" (bad teachers) that should be fired.

All of this public discourse was at odds with our experience as teachers. We know politicians' so-called solutions of austerity and scapegoating teachers has only made things worse. We also feel that our immediate community actually supports us. Over the last few years, we have started to speak for ourselves and put forward our solution to the crisis in public education.

We tried to do all sorts of things before we started this strike wave. In West Virginia, where it all started, teachers said, "We tried lobbying; we wrote letters; we organized town hall meetings, but nobody listened." So, it finally boiled over and produced this enormous explosion of strikes in which we took matters in our hands and have started to force on the system solutions in the interests of teachers, students and the whole working class.

Read the full interview here: <https://truthout.org/articles/teachers-movements-gain-community-support-by-centering-social-justice/>

## Ethnic Studies Summer Institute

By Tracy Castro-Gill

**Starts:** Monday July 29 at 8:30am

**Ends:** Friday August 9 at 3:30pm

**Where:** John Stanford Center for Educational Excellence  
(2445 3rd Ave S, Seattle, WA 98134)

### Course Overview

This two-week, 60-hour institute is designed to prepare educators to implement culturally responsive and critical pedagogies in teaching ethnic studies content. It is open to all educators with Seattle Public Schools full time classroom teachers having priority registration. Content will cover ethnic studies definitions and frameworks; how to teach ethnic studies, including culturally responsive, relevant, and sustaining pedagogies and critical pedagogy. Sessions include student, parent, and anti-racist educator panels, affinity group discussions, networking opportunities, and sessions on how to create content for specific racial and ethnic groups.

### Registration:

Registration is free for Seattle Public Schools employees and priority is given to currently contracted SPS classroom teacher. SPS employees should register through Employee Self Service (ESS) to receive priority registration.

Non-SPS participants register through Seattle University's College of Education Professional & Continuing Education. The registration fee is \$200.00 per person.

### Partnership

- Seattle Public School's Ethnic Studies Program
- Seattle Education Association's Center for Racial Equity
- Seattle University's College of Education - Professional & Continuing Education

### Offers

60 clock hours or 6 CEU's

### Sign Up For Non-Sps Participants

<https://seattleupce.catalog.instructure.com/browse/coe/courses/es-rq19>

# Educators' Vision

Published By the Social Equity Educators (SEE)

April 2019

## May 8th Statewide Day of Action for a Capital Gains Tax

By Whitney Kahn, Parapro substitute

"The legislature funds basic education, not perfect education," Senator Mullet's legislative assistant said to us as we sat in his office. I was stunned that the word 'basic,' designed to mean 'K-12' was being used to mean 'substandard.' This is how the legislature views our schools. I was left thinking, 'With Democrats like these, who needs Republicans?'

We had come from all over the state to Olympia in an emergency response to two amendments to a school funding bill, made in the dead of night, which would undermine educator salaries & union rights. More of the same. Pitting the idea of education funding against living wages for educators.

It felt similar to the way the legislature 'funded McCleary' last year by transferring local property taxes to statewide funds. This cynical move means insufficient gains for rural districts at the cost of cuts for urban districts. In Seattle that means hundreds of educators, counselors, and school librarians get cut.

Who wins from this bad deal? Not homeowners who are further squeezed, surely not our students, but the Seattle-area millionaires and billionaires who continue to go untaxed. Washington has a tax system where the poorer you are, the higher tax rate you pay, and where if you buy school supplies you pay a sales tax, but if you buy a private jet you're exempt. You pay taxes on your home, but none on millions made from the sale of stocks, bonds, and investment property. Changing this starts with demanding a capital gains tax to fund schools.

You don't need to feel bad for Seattle cuts in order to demand this capital gains tax. You just need to ask if your district has a full-time nurse in every school, if your salary covers all your expenses, if you have counselors, and if your class size allows your students to flourish.

But you know what? When I heard this slimy legislative assistant talk about "basic education" vs "perfect education", I was mad, but I wasn't hopeless. That's because over the past year, educators around this country have shown their power. In districts across the country, including many in Washington, educators who went on strike won big gains. Beyond that, in states like West Virginia, Kentucky, Oklahoma, and Arizona, educators have shown that statewide action can even get Republican-controlled legislatures to increase public education funding. That's like getting a worm to do a backflip! Surely, if it can work there, it can work anywhere.

We have a big opportunity. On May 8th, at least 22 Oregon Education Association locals across Oregon will be walking out with very similar issues to what we're facing. There will be hundreds of educator cuts because the legislature isn't funding education (their legislature is Democrat-controlled, same as ours). SEA member and Garfield High School Teacher Rosa Powers will put forward an NBI to the WEA convention coming up in Spokane April 25-27 that I hope you'll support. It says that we should join Oregon on May 8th with our own day of action. Locals would determine their own involvement, but we would be united in our demands:

- Lift the local levy lid for funding now
- Tax capital gains to fund education across the state
- Call a special session to make this happen now, like was done in 2013 to give Boeing their record-breaking \$8.7B handout

Our students deserve perfect education, and we can help make that happen.

Educators, parents, and students have launched the "Against Cuts & Displacement of Communities" (ACDC) campaign to organize across the state to tax the super-wealthy to fund schools.

Sign up to get involved and stay informed at: [www.TinyUrl.com/ACDCwa](http://www.TinyUrl.com/ACDCwa)

## New Business Item 25: State-Wide Day of Action for Full Funding

(Editor's Note: Below is a NBI SEA member and Garfield High School Teacher Rosa Powers submitted to the WEA Representative Assembly held in Spokane April 25-27.)

**Background:** Washington has dragged its feet for almost two decades in fully funding schools, and districts still face deep cuts after a false fix. Meanwhile, underfunding has Oregon urging members to take action and stage walk-outs in protest on May 8th.

**WEA Will:** Demand respect for the dignity of WEA members and the families we serve by calling for and providing support to all WEA locals to participate in a state-wide day of action on Wednesday May 8th. Specific actions will be determined by locals, such as; walk-outs, walk-ins, community rallies, red for ed visual solidarity and legislative action sessions. The purpose of this state wide realization of our power is to force the legislature hold a special session expanding education funding statewide with no attacks on union rights, or concession cuts to local funding. This means immediately lifting levy lids and passing a strong capital gains tax on wealthy Washingtonians to fully fund our schools.

### Upcoming Social Equity Educator (SEE) meeting

All Seattle Education Association (SEA) members who believe in bringing social justice ideas into our classrooms and union are welcome and encouraged to attend. Our next 2 meetings are:

**Saturday, April 20th • 10am-Noon**  
Capitol Hill Library (425 Harvard Ave. E., Seattle, WA 98102)

[www.facebook.com/events/340238279951435/](http://www.facebook.com/events/340238279951435/)

**Saturday, May 18th • 10am-Noon**  
Douglass-Truth Library (2300 E Yesler Way, Seattle 98122)

[facebook.com/events/397256057728609/](http://facebook.com/events/397256057728609/)

For more information check out:  
[socialequityeducators.org](http://socialequityeducators.org)  
[facebook.com/socialequityeducators/](http://facebook.com/socialequityeducators/)  
Call or text: 206.550.1609



SOCIAL EQUITY EDUCATORS

### Educators' Vision

Published By the Social Equity Educators (SEE)

### SEE steering committee

Tracy Castro-Gill, Olivia Gelfner, Jesse Hagopian, Darrin Hoop, Bruce Jackson, Kaitlin Kamalei Jenkins, Rosa Powers, Lauren Ware-Stark, and Justin Vinson.

Educators' Vision is a monthly newsletter of the Social Equity Educators [socialequityeducators.org](http://socialequityeducators.org) [info@seattlesee.org](mailto:info@seattlesee.org)

### Mission

Social Equity Educators is a rank and file caucus of Seattle Education Association educators that focuses on democratic, anti-racist, and anti-oppression policies and practices in our classrooms, schools, and communities. SEE engages in local, national, and international social movements for liberation and radical change by building alliances and addressing the roots of institutional racism and other forms of injustice.

### Points of Unity

- ◆ Organizing and bargaining for equity from the bottom up
- ◆ Anti-racist, anti-oppression pedagogy and practices
- ◆ Supporting social movements through community alliances
- ◆ Full and equitable funding for public education
- ◆ Opposing corporate education reform

## Mandy Manning for WEA President

*(Editor's Note: The steering committee of Social Equity Educators voted to endorse Mandy Manning for WEA President. Manning won the 2018 National Teacher of the Year award from the Council of Chief State School Officers. She teaches English Language Learners in the Newcomer Center at Joel E. Ferris High School in Spokane, Washington. Last May, Manning visited the White House to receive an award honoring her from Donald Trump.*

*While receiving the award, she staged a silent protest. She handed Trump a stack of 45 letters written by her immigrant students, in which they explained their "hopes and dreams for the future" and their disagreements with Trump's rhetoric and policies toward refugees and immigrants. In addition, she wore several pins on her dress — one that read "Trans Rights Now," another from the Women's March, an apple with the LGBTQ rainbow colors, plus pins from the National Education Association, Peace Corps and Teacher of the Year program.*

*More recently, motivated by her outrage at the Trump administration's racist detentions of refugee and immigrant children at the U.S. border and the separation of children from their parents, she began organizing with other State Teachers of the Year to set up a group called Teachers Against Child Detention. They held a Teach-In for Freedom on February 17 in El Paso, Texas. Below is an interview of Manning by SEE member and Substitute Teacher Darrin Hoop about why she's running for WEA President and what she hopes to accomplish if elected.)*

**Hoop:** What are the main issues you want WEA members to know you support in your campaign for WEA President?

**Manning:** My 20 years in my classroom and visiting other people's classrooms, has revealed, confirmed, and taught me a great deal about our education system and all we need to do to ensure ours is a system not that serves itself, but that serves our students and all of us who work in our schools. This means working to ensure ours is not a system of oppression, but one that believes in every child's potential and in trusting, supporting, and respecting those of us working in schools to create learning environments in which all children can reach that potential.

As educators and education support professionals, we have the experience and expertise to lead this charge. After 10 years of active participation in Spokane EA and witnessing the power of our collective in our own state in others, I believe that our union and all of us working together, is our way to truly shape our schools into places of equity and community, not only for our students, but also for all school staff. With your support, I will be a leader who does not consolidate power, but who builds power amongst our members.

### 1. We must empower locals to empower members.

WEA is a massive organization. Our members serve approximately 1.1 million students in 295 school districts across our state. With 21 Uniserv councils serving 400 locals representing nearly 95,000 members, it stands to reason that WEA is an organization of systems. We must examine these systems and ensure that WEA operates to support a bottom-up decision-making and leadership process that places members at the helm of our organization. Each of our locals has individual needs and we must equip our local leaders to empower their members to take the lead on action to meet those community needs.

This includes empowering locals to work in solidarity to fight for the funding each community needs in order to meet the needs of their students. This fight should include restructuring our tax system to include a means for taxing the very wealthy - right now the focus is on a Capital Gains Tax, which would be a start. We must also reestablish levy flexibility, while also looking at funding inequity between districts. Much of this depends on the will of the body coming out of RA. We cannot back down from this fight - especially in light of the massive layoffs we are seeing across the state. We need local empowerment to make this happen.

### 2. Equity can only be achieved through action.

During the 10 years I've been an active participant in my local association at various levels of leadership, I have seen forward movement in becoming an inclusive organization. Much of that focus has been on ensuring we recruit members of color and create systems of support for rural members to participate in their councils, locals, and our representative assembly. Now, the true equity work needs to begin. It's not enough to invite participation, we must ensure every voice is heard and leads to action. Equity work must be intersectional, which means ensuring access for all of our members, particularly those whose voices have been limited or silenced throughout the history of our organization.

Beyond that, our equity work cannot only be inward. We must focus outward and ensure we are collectively working toward equity within our schools. This means supporting the implementation of ethnic studies in classrooms across our state and supporting Black Lives Matter in Schools, among other initiatives. This also means fighting for justice within our system by eliminating standardized assessments to make room for real teaching and make up for lost class days dedicated to testing. Eliminating testing will also benefit schools financially, as testing is excessively expensive and diverts funds away from the people in our system who are the ones directly impacting students.

### 3. Transparency and clear communication are essential to developing trust and community.

As we enter a new era of unionism under the Supreme Court Janus decision, it is more important than ever that we believe in our union leadership, at every level, from state to council to local, all the way to the building level. This means we need leadership who aren't too distant from what's happening in our classrooms and in our schools. Leaders who actively listen and involve all voices in decision-making. And, leaders who trust member experiences and empower members to act on their own behalf. We must develop effective means of two-way communication between members and leadership and being transparent in how WEA operates and why.

### 4. We must focus on connection.

Along the lines of transparency and clear communication, our organization must focus on building connections - connections between building reps and members, between local leadership and council leadership, and connections with state leadership. We do this by respecting one another, viewing every local as essential to our organization, and working together with an asset mindset. We all have strengths and experiences to bring to the table and we must honor the fact

that we have different but equally important needs. Our association must ensure we are honoring all voices and working for the needs of all communities and locals, regardless of size and geography. We must also make leadership affordable and accessible to all members and encourage all members to participate.

### 5. Members deserve bold, inclusive leaders for the future of WEA.

Authentic leadership listens and acts. If trusted with the role of President, I will be available and visible in your communities. WEA is member led and driven. Therefore, we must work to ensure members have access to leaders and to leadership. An authentic leader doesn't endeavor to maintain or hoard power, but rather gives power. With your support, I will listen to you and act with you. Our power is in our collective and I intend to strengthen that collective.

**Hoop:** The SEA's Center for Racial Equity is organizing around five themes of NBIs, Continuing Resolutions, and Bylaw Amendments for the WEA RA. They are: 1. Ethnic Studies 2. Recruitment, Retention, and Support of Educators of Color 3. Anti-White Supremacy 4. Adoption of a Racial Equity Analysis Tool for NBIs 5. Equitable Race/Ethnicity Selection of WEA Forms/Data Collection.

What are your thoughts on these issues? How do you see them connecting to the issues around supporting our immigrant students you are organizing and working on?

**Manning:** **Ethnic Studies** - Absolutely, we must see this implemented across the state - in order for that to happen, we must also look at implementation and ensure training in order to effectively roll this out - if teachers aren't properly trained or are not bought in, it could be more detrimental than effective and we know this work saves students' lives. So, we must do it right.

**Recruitment, Retention, and Support of Educators of Color** - This will require true assessment of our systems. How can we expect educators of color to work within a system which actively oppressed them as students and now does the same to them as educators. This conversation is bigger than teacher prep programs and support in the first few years - it will require an entire system overhaul. I'm sure you're familiar with her work, but Dr. Bettina Love's new book "We Want to Do More than Survive" gives an idea of how we can begin this work.

**Anti-White Supremacy** - This is essential. If we don't work to end white supremacy, none of these other themes will be accomplished.

**Adoption of a Racial Equity Analysis Tool for NBIs** - Yes, and we not only need to assess our NBIs, but also the system through which they are accomplished, starting with an assessment of our Association.

**Equitable Race/Ethnicity Selection of WEA Forms/Data Collection** - This is something that once accomplished at the WEA level needs to extend into the schools.

Personally, I am also passionate about immigrant children rights. I started Teachers Against Child Detention with Ivonne Orozco (2018 New Mexico Teacher of the Year). We must demand an end to immigrant child incarceration and work to provide supports for the children we have traumatized through our actions as a nation. We must also empower school districts with the tools and information they need to ensure their schools are safe places for our immigrant youth and their families. I am working on NBIs to support these causes.

**Hoop:** Why should educators support a capital gains and other progressive taxes to fund education?

**Manning:** We have a regressive tax system that is not effectively funding our schools and places the burden on our lowest earners. A Capital Gains Tax is a beginning to fix that problem - focusing on making the very wealthy pay their share, if not more.

**Hoop:** Do you support a coordinated statewide day(s) of action of all WEA locals this school year to push for this including a variety of actions up to a statewide strike?

**Manning:** YES

**Hoop:** If you are elected and could help lead this union, what kind of campaign and/or actions would you argue the union should take to win a capital gains tax? Keep in mind, right now 22 locals in Oregon are planning a May 8 walkout for funding and other issues and there will be a NBI put forward at the WEA Rep Assembly in Spokane by Social Equity Educators calling for a day of action in solidarity including a statewide strike.

**Manning:** I'm actually working on this right now. I want to plan daily actions individual members can take in the days leading up to RA - and provide community efforts as well. Stay tuned.

## Rosa Powers for SEA Vice-President!

*(Editor's Note: If current SEA President Phyllis Campano is elected to the position of WEA Vice-President at the WEA Representative Assembly in Spokane April 25-27, the current SEA Vice-President Michael Tamayo will automatically be promoted to be the SEA President. At the June SEA Representative Assembly, there will be a special election for a one-year term for the SEA Vice-President until the regularly scheduled election next year. If this happens, Social Equity Educators has endorsed and encourages all SEA building reps to vote for Garfield High School Teacher Rosa Powers for SEA Vice-President.)*



### I'm Rosa Powers and I'm running for SEA Vice President

Our power is in the action we take and our strength lies in the bonds we make with those who matter most; our fellow educators and the families we serve. I want to work for SEA to demand respect for our schools, to raise expectations of what is possible for our union and connect members across the state to realize our collective power.

As a union I believe we must:

**Demand A WA State Capital Gains Tax** - First and foremost we need money to address class size, to restore services cut over the past years and strengthen our ability to run our schools well. The best and fairest means to meet the paramount duty of full funding is to tax Capital Gains at the highest levels.

**Push Back On Standardized testing** - Stop doing what we know siphons money from districts and does not improve education for students.

**Expand Union Power** - Build stronger educator networks across the state to fortify our collective bargaining rights and to lift voices in every local across the state for greater unity.

**Invest in Racial Equity** - Mandate Ethnic Studies as a graduation requirement to improve education for all students and use Restorative Justice to address disproportionate discipline of students of color.

**Bargain With Transparency for the Common Good** - Set bargaining goals with SEA members and parent communities to create a vision for "The Schools Seattle Deserves" employing open communication of what we all fight for in the contract at all points thus strengthening our ability to hold the line in bargaining.

Organize early and be prepared to strike- Build and use our collective power to make hefty progress in our schools.