

## “Going All In”

Just ten months ago I found myself addressing a gymnasium filled with nearly 800 dedicated Walla Walla Public School faculty. During these annual start-of-the-year rituals that occur in schools across our great nation, our staff gathered at the WaHi gym, poised to tackle the 18-19 school year.

Together we watched and reflected on a short video clip by Gian Paul Gonzales, a 9<sup>th</sup> grade English teacher who was asked to lead the chapel service prior the 2011 Giants v Jets, Christmas Eve football game. What is now referred to as the famous “all-in poker chip rally cry,” his motivational address was the turning point for the then 7-7 Giants who, up until that evening, had lost 5 of their last 6 games. That night they beat the Jets, and ran the table that season, winning every game to follow including upsetting the much-favored Patriots in the Super Bowl.

Ten months later, as I reflect on this school year with my colleagues, I couldn’t be more proud of them and our Walla Walla community. Faculty across our campuses embraced the “all in” message, helping lead our district to one of its most successful in recent history. Although the list of accomplishments is far more than can be identified here, I wish to highlight a few we should all be very proud of.

- Despite increased credits and rigor, graduation rates are the highest they have been in years, blowing right past the state average for "all students" as well as our "Latino/a students"
- For the first time since the data has been tracked by the state, WWPS graduates attending 4-year colleges/universities have never been better prepared; less than 8% required remediation courses, nearly 67% less than the state-wide results
- We boasted the highest level of English attainment seen from our English Language Learners, surpassing the state for the first time on the measure
- Student participation is up in our clubs, athletics and activities thanks to our Board’s commitment to eliminate participation fees and supports from programs like the United Way Adopt-a-Blue-Devil Program and Big Blue Boosters
- Attendance is up and behavioral referrals are down across our campuses due to our district’s intentional social/emotional supports and “We All Belong Here” efforts
- Nearly 3 dozen students walked across the stage two weeks ago at graduation, earning their seal of bi-literacy, a testament to our incredible bilingual programming
- Student accomplishments are soaring at our Skills Center; a new criminal justice program has been added to expand our career and technical program tracks
- We boasted a banner year with our fine arts, athletics, and club/organization performance; from state championship track athletes to recognized musicians to lauded stage performances

Finally, as we are all aware, we received an historic 73% yes vote on our school bond; the 2nd highest approval rate in the history of Walla Walla Public Schools! Nearly a dozen Walla Walla businesses have already benefited from the bond, helping us replace roofs, fix our HVAC systems, and improve campus safety. We are on target to break ground at WaHi in less than 4 months on the highly-anticipated new science building, and look forward to much-needed renovation across other campuses over the coming years.

Although we are experiencing historic success across our district, work still remains to reach our vision of “Developing Washington’s Most Sough-After Graduates.” As we enter the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of our 5 year

strategic plan, we will continue to focus on our mission towards ensuring all students receive high quality instruction in an environment that fosters their talents, dreams, and imaginations.

Dr. Wade Smith  
Superintendent of Schools  
Walla Walla Public Schools