



# Emeritus Fellows' Leadership Pathways

OSPI/AESD Evaluation Brief, 2019–20

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## Introduction

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI)/Association of Educational Service Districts (AESD) Washington State Fellows' Network (Fellows Network)<sup>1</sup> is an exemplary model for building academic content, pedagogical strategies, and leadership skills for early learning, English language arts, mathematics, and science educators and administrators.<sup>2</sup> The primary goal of the three-year program is to build the capacity of its members to improve student academic and non-academic outcomes.

Fellows are members of the Fellows' Network, and they primarily include teachers across Washington. They meet four times each school year through Fellow convenings where they engage in rich, collaborative activities with colleagues in the same academic content area. Sample topics covered in the meetings include equity, change management, and data analytics and assessment.

Evaluation studies focused on the Fellows' Network have provided evidence that this model of professional development is effective. Studies confirm that Fellows achieve outcomes illustrated in the Theory of Action,<sup>3</sup> including the development of stronger pedagogical content knowledge/skills, changes in classroom practice, and positive influence on student mastery of content knowledge, as demonstrated in assessment scores.<sup>4</sup>

In 2019, the Fellows Advisory Committee (FAC) launched the Emeritus Fellows, which provides Fellows who completed the three-year program an option to continue. The first cohort of Emeritus Fellows began their work in September 2019. This study builds on the information that emerged from the Emeritus Survey administered in spring 2019 and provides a deeper understanding of the range of roles and responsibilities of Emeritus Fellows. The study examines Emeritus Fellows' reasons for continued involvement; their change in perspectives; application of knowledge, skills, and abilities; and exemplary traits. A case study offers insight into an enhanced model and how one Emeritus Fellow is accelerating the growth of new Fellows at her district. The final sections of the report describe a few of the challenges faced by Emeritus Fellows and their recommendations for going forward.

Between January and May 2020, ten Emeritus Fellows participated in a 60-minute interview or focus group to reflect on and share their experiences. The sessions were recorded, transcribed, and uploaded into a software package designed for qualitative narrative analysis. The qualitative narrative analysis allowed for the exploration of common themes across all of the information shared by the Emeritus Fellows.

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<sup>1</sup> OSPI Washington State Fellows' Network: <https://www.k12.wa.us/educator-support/educator-leadership/washington-state-fellows-network>

<sup>2</sup> Retrieved May 4, 2020, from <https://www.k12.wa.us/educator-support/educator-leadership/washington-state-fellows-network>

<sup>3</sup> Theory of Action: [https://www.waese.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/AESD\\_ToA\\_Logic\\_Model-8.17.17.pdf](https://www.waese.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/AESD_ToA_Logic_Model-8.17.17.pdf)

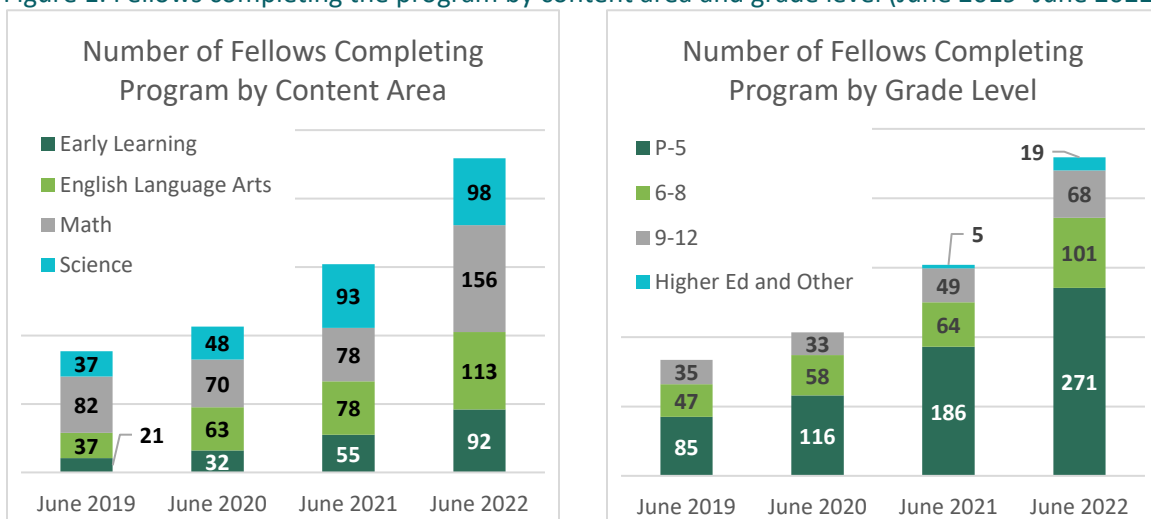
<sup>4</sup> Retrieved May 25, 2020, from <https://www.waese.org/aesd-professional-learning-network/evaluation/>

## Strong Desire for Continued Involvement

Emeritus Fellows have developed and refined their leadership skills by modeling best practices, creating collaborative learning environments, and cultivating leadership skills in other teachers. Collectively, these individuals form a deep bench of talent and teacher assets in Washington state. This talent management plays an important role in education and can lead to positive changes at the state, regional, and local levels.<sup>5</sup> For example, some state education agencies that invest time and resources in managing their teacher assets have found that talent management helps optimize planning and organizing efforts to produce future leaders. This approach is advantageous because it creates a pipeline of high-quality teachers and leaders who have a deep contextual background of local and regional values. The recruitment process can be more efficient and effective as needs emerge for particular skills and competencies identified in leadership succession planning.

Fellows are one of Washington state's critically valuable assets. As such, it is beneficial to gain a better understanding of the number of teacher leaders who will complete the program over the next three years and possibly become Emeritus Fellows. The charts below in Figure 1 illustrate the number of Fellows who will complete the program over the next three years by content area and grade band. The Regional Coordinators interviewed shared that when Fellows complete the program, they decide their continuing level of involvement. The level of involvement ranges from receiving the occasional email of resources to remaining deeply engaged in the program. Study participants expressed that their Regional Coordinator is an important facilitator of their involvement, explaining that their Coordinators continue to be critical partners and lifelines who provide expertise, feedback, and guidance when facing challenges in the field.

Figure 1. Fellows completing the program by content area and grade level (June 2019–June 2022)



<sup>5</sup> Harun, N, Hasnaa, N., Mahmood, N. & Othman, S. (2020). The effect of talent management factors on teacher's leadership at the secondary schools. *Management Science Letters*. doi:10.5267/j.msl.2019.7.039

The majority of interviewees also continue to collaborate with Fellows by attending the Fellow's Network's quarterly convenings, conferences, and meetings and by collaborating informally. The convenings are vital to help Emeritus Fellows feel connected and up-to-date. An Emeritus Fellow shared, "I find out about more opportunities that I wouldn't know about if I wasn't part of the Network." They continue to learn and reflect on their practice by engaging in book studies and discussion groups with other Fellows and Emeritus Fellows. They find the opportunities to interact with subject matter experts and hearing updates from the field nationally and locally invaluable. An Emeritus Fellow shared, "I've never, in my first year, thought that it would be as impactful on my career as it's been." They also expressed feelings of belonging to a learning community. Another explained, "One of the greatest aspects of all was the networking [and] getting to meet like-minded, forward-thinking teachers around the state to brainstorm ... We'd all go get dinner and have a good five, six hours to continue to talk about what we're doing. That was a really special thing about the whole program."

OSPI and ESD leadership have had initial conversations about how to use the highly trained Emeritus Fellows who want to lead and continue. Currently, Regional Coordinators have Emeritus Fellows help deliver professional development, such as through the convenings and local professional chapters in their region. Regional Coordinators continually explore innovative ways to bring their Emeritus Fellows together. They use Emeritus Fellows in their region to maintain flexibility and adapt to each region's unique circumstances and available resources. Some offer Emeritus Fellows in-person or virtual meetings separate from the Fellows' convenings, while others provide them with break-out sessions during the Fellows' convening. Some use them to revitalize legacy groups, such as the Science Leadership Network.

Several Regional Coordinators interviewed shared that the Emeritus Fellows' meetings differ from Fellows' meetings, as the Emeritus Fellows bring their shared, deep knowledge about concepts and practice, such as the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) and equity. Their prior experience allows for a launching point for discussion and planning at a systems level, for example, around the design of regional professional development curriculum.

## Perspectives over the Course of the Program

The curriculum for the Fellows' Network was developed in collaboration between the Regional Content Area Coordinators and the Fellows Advisory Committee. It is intentionally designed to be cohesive and provide Fellows with experiences that promote critical pedagogy. The curriculum for each content area (math, science, English language arts, early learning) has common, statewide materials and resources that have been adapted to meet the needs of local schools. Thus, it is relevant to novice and expert teachers alike.

Each year's curriculum is designed to be taught independently from the previous year so new Fellows do not feel like they are behind their peers. This approach provides ample opportunities for new teachers to connect with and work alongside of expert teachers, as both may be first year Fellows.

The foundational topic of racial equity<sup>6</sup> is woven throughout all content areas. Different overarching topics (e.g., formative assessment, inclusive instruction) are covered each year, and teachers are guided through thoughtful activities that start with leadership of self and expand to leadership of others. Likewise, focused conversations may start with their own practice and then expand to the school or district. Reflecting on the journey, Emeritus Fellows in the focus group were asked to describe how their perspectives shifted as they progressed through and completed the program. An Emeritus Fellow shared:

I look at ELA initiatives with a much more global perspective of ... the impacts of making decisions about what texts we use or how we approach assessments, from a bigger picture, not just the one coming from being a classroom teacher. [Before] it was very much, 'How will this impact my kids in my classroom?' and now I ask, 'How does this impact the system as a whole?'

Emeritus Fellows also expressed how they were initially concerned only with their personal practice and then later share a concern for meeting their colleagues' professional development needs. An Emeritus Fellow shared, "As an Emeritus, I feel like my leadership has expanded more to a district-wide level than just in a school. But also, as an Emeritus, I'm really trying to support other fellows and bring other fellows into our ESD program."

Each year, Fellows complete an action plan that outlines short-term goals and strategies to achieve those goals. During each quarterly meeting, Fellows review their goals and reflect on outcomes. Through this process, Fellows' gain experience in the cycle of evaluation, a key skill for leaders. After three years of developing and implementing an action plan, Fellows increased their expertise and confidence. They described how access to professionals outside of their district allowed them to gain a leadership perspective with courage to take risks and confidence to pursue tasks in unfamiliar areas. One Emeritus Fellow shared:

I was asked to facilitate our secondary math adoption. I did that and then the following year, I facilitated our elementary math adoption across eight buildings. Just taking on that role ... I had never really done that. So, I researched and figured it out to facilitate this in a way that we got a decision that's shared. Fellows elevated me to a place where I was getting access to tools and relationships with other educators around the state that I would never have gotten otherwise.

Emeritus Fellows described having more confidence and seeing themselves as leaders. An Emeritus Fellow shared, "I see myself as a leader ... because I have had those opportunities to lead professional development, not just within my district, but now to other teacher leaders in our ESD."

Equity and access are priorities for the Emeritus Fellows, and they feel prepared to lead difficult conversations with peers about changing practice. Many interviewees underscored the importance of the equity work they are bringing to their district as a result of what they have

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<sup>6</sup> Visit <https://www.k12.wa.us/about-ospi/about-agency> to learn more about OSPI's vision, mission and values.

learned in the program. They shared that one of their most significant learnings was the CBAM, which provided them with structure and confidence to approach the topic of change. An Emeritus Fellow shared that, originally, "I'd be shut down by colleagues. [They said], 'Oh, that sounds really difficult,' or 'why would I want to do that?' Getting people to change what they do in their classrooms was a lot more difficult than I thought it would be." A second focus group member echoed this sentiment. She shared that she finds herself continually referencing aspects of the book, so she keeps it on her desk for everyday situations. They feel this gentle approach to helping colleagues embrace change leads to system improvements, such as moving from deficit-based language toward more strengths-based language in the school.

## Application of Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

Emeritus Fellows apply the knowledge, skills, and abilities they have developed through the Fellows' Network. They hold key positions formally and informally among their colleagues and take on a wide range of roles to make substantial contributions in their buildings, districts, and across the state for some. They function as instructional coaches, curriculum experts, researchers, evaluators, and leaders with richly contextualized professional knowledge for their unique school environment.

Exhibiting strong communication and collaboration skills, several of the Emeritus Fellows interviewed lead professional learning circles within their buildings. Book studies and regular reviews of student data are among the topics covered. Some Emeritus Fellows actively participate in decision-making for their department or district around curriculum, education resources, and teacher professional development needs. In sum, Emeritus Fellows report they are motivated to apply their talents in the following ways:

- share and promote the role of the Fellow's Network in teacher growth,
- provide professional development in their region and district,
- transfer professional knowledge to peers,
- support the district-wide implementation of curriculum,
- participate in building and district decision-making,
- write grants,
- participate in research and evaluation activities, and
- collaborate with administrator to help set visions.

Emeritus Fellows apply their innovative talents to expand and accelerate their colleagues' professional development. Several are using creative methods to integrate the cycle of modeling, practicing, and reflecting real-time within the classroom. An interviewee described how she reaches many teachers across the building more quickly using a studio approach to provide professional development on teaching foundational reading skills:

We're doing something called a studio where we have a different grade level team each Wednesday and provide professional learning throughout the day. We go into their classrooms and model lessons, debrief, and then plan the next lessons together.

## Emeritus Fellow Spotlight

**One Emeritus Fellow offers a rich portrait of continued leadership in which she employs the tools of the program to bolster Fellows' learning and accelerate the development of content expertise and leadership skills.**

The Emeritus Fellow brings together ten Math Fellows on an ongoing basis in between the Fellows' Network convenings to extend and apply what they learned. They systematically try strategies in the classroom and reflect on students' responses to the strategies, such as mathematical mindsets<sup>7</sup> and Number Talks<sup>8</sup>. The Emeritus Fellow also creates opportunities for the Fellows to build their leadership skills.

Working closely with the Fellows, the Emeritus Fellow accelerates learning by quickly identifying teachers' skill gaps and finding resources to close these gaps. This strategy maximizes efficiency of the continued training and development after the convenings. In addition, the Emeritus Fellow guides Fellows to think beyond the classroom to a systems perspective. She instills a sense of responsibility for the Fellows to think about how they will lead their teacher colleagues and help them grow. The Emeritus Fellow provides encouragement and builds the confidence in Fellows to step outside their classroom and work across grade levels to lead. She shared:

“One of our Fellows, who is a first-grade teacher, has been collaborating and working closely with sixth-grade teachers ... There is a willingness and readiness within that professional learning circle to work alongside of the Fellow even though they are at very different grade levels.”

The Emeritus Fellow continues to maintain an action plan focused on high-level outcomes for the Fellows she mentors. Her goals include:

- increased ownership and pride of the district's common math vision, and
- increased focus and intention to implement the common math vision in the classroom.

The Fellows align their action plans to the Emeritus Fellow's action plan and frequently revisit their plans to update and reflect on their progress. Fellows' reflections describe the outcomes from increased ownership and pride of the common math vision (Figure 2).

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<sup>7</sup> Boaler, J. & Dweck, C. (2016). *Mathematical Mindsets: Unleashing Students' Potential through Creative Math, Inspiring Messages and Innovative Teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

<sup>8</sup> Parrish, S. (2010). Number talks: Helping Children Build Mental Math and Computation Strategies. Math Solutions.

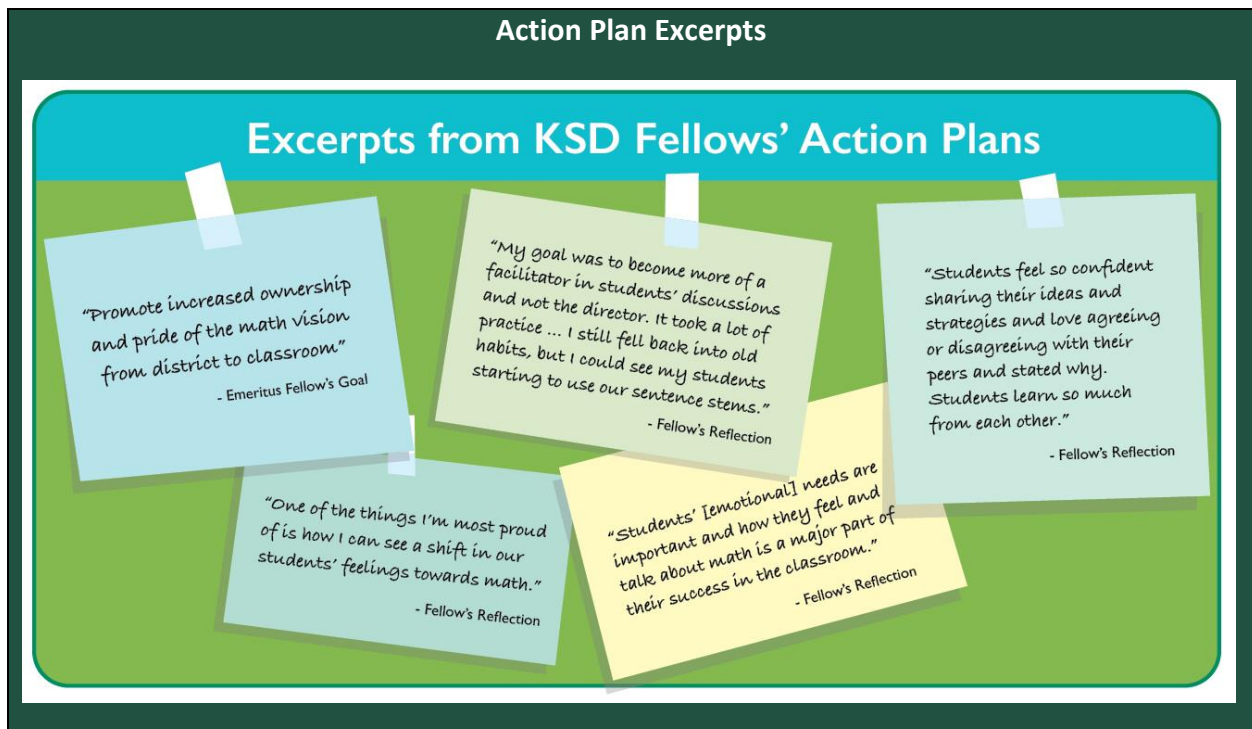
## Key Conditions to Accelerate Teacher Leader Development

In the interviews, the Emeritus Fellows who work with Fellows in their district identified the following three key conditions needed to accelerate the development of teacher leaders.

- **Building administrator support** – The building administrator promotes the value of the Fellow throughout the building by highlighting the Fellows' work and helping them overcome obstacles. They also stay updated on the Fellows' progress, learn from their experiences, and assist them with planning ahead to accomplish goals.
- **District-level support** – District-level support, provided by a superintendent or teaching and learning director, ensures that Fellows' work is aligned with district goals.
- **Instructional coach or specialist support** – This person spans across grade levels and supports Fellows' work in their classroom by facilitating the action plan process and reflection. They also assist with teachers' leadership goals within their building.

While the job title of the staff who provide the support described above may differ for each district, the important take away is that the acceleration of Fellows' growth is a deliberate, coordinated effort shared by district and building leaders.

Figure 2. Fellows' action plan excerpts





**Action Plan Excerpts**

“My goal was to become more of a facilitator in students’ discussions and not the director. It took a lot of practice ... I still fell back into old habits, but I could see my students starting to use our sentence stems.”

–*Fellow’s Reflection*

“Students feel so confident sharing their ideas and strategies and love agreeing or disagreeing with their peers and stating why. Students learn so much from each other.”

– *Fellow’s Reflection*

“Students’ [emotional] needs are important and how they feel and talk about math is a major part of their success in the classroom.”

– *Fellow’s Reflection*

“Promote increased ownership and pride of the math vision from district to classroom.”

– *Emeritus Fellow’s Goal*

“One of the things I’m most proud of is how I can see a shift in our students’ feelings towards math.”

– *Fellow’s Reflection*

## Emeritus Fellows’ Recommendations

While some Emeritus Fellows interviewed were very satisfied with their current role in their district, some expressed feelings of being underused with respect to their skills, knowledge, and abilities. Emeritus Fellows were asked to share their experience and provide their ideas and recommendations about ways to fully use their assets outside of their classroom.

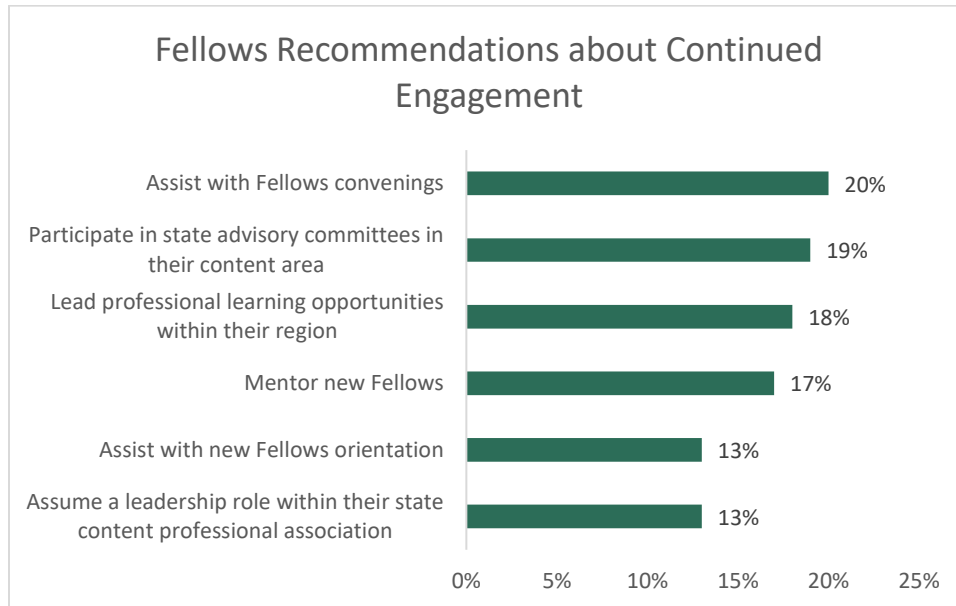
Overall, many of the interviewees who teach in classrooms expressed a desire to dedicate themselves to working with teachers as instructional coaches and professional development providers. One Emeritus Fellow who is a classroom teacher said:

“My dream job would be to continue to move into an instructional coaching role, but those are kind of dying everywhere. I feel like what Fellow does is sharpens you up to become one down the road, but the unfortunate thing is I feel like school districts are getting rid of those roles.”

Some focus group participants recommended using Emeritus Fellows as ambassadors for the Fellows’ Network. Ambassadors could help build a deeper understanding of the Fellows’ Network and the benefits (e.g., strengthened leadership skills) of program participation. This work could help alleviate challenges around support for increased responsibilities, as some Emeritus Fellows cited no difference in their relationship with their administrator after they completed the program.

Most Emeritus Fellows shared that they are eager to maintain some level of involvement in the Fellows’ Network. One Emeritus Fellow recommended, “cycling [us] back to tie us into the new Fellows-type stuff. Even if we got paired up with someone or a few people, we could be their point person.” In a survey administered by OSPI in September 2019, approximately 161 Fellows who became Emeritus Fellows recommended ways to remain engaged, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Fellows Recommendations about Continued Engagement



In the focus groups, Emeritus Fellows expressed a strong interest in, and dedication to the Fellows' Network. They recommended that OSPI and the ESDs provide opportunities for them to do the following:

- Serve as ambassadors to promote the Fellows' Network,
- Contribute to the development of a unified vision and goals for Emeritus Fellows,
- Assist in the delivery of conference presentations, and
- Co-author articles

## Conclusion

The guidance of OSPI, the ESD Regional Coordinators, and the Fellows Advisory Committee has been instrumental in building an effective teacher leadership program across Washington state. This study revealed that Emeritus Fellows attribute their growth as leaders, in part, to the robust, research-based curricula and expertise of the Fellows' Network. Emeritus Fellows' traits revealed in this study include:

- Savviness in selection and implementation of evidence-based practices,
- Awareness of the importance of moving slowly to affect change,
- Responsibility to provide the best learning opportunities possible for each student,
- Eagerness and enthusiasm to transfer professional knowledge to others,
- Strong interest in improving outcomes of learning for all students,
- Tireless work toward a shared vision of teaching and learning, and
- Willingness to take risks to learn and improve.

This study adds to the growing knowledge of Emeritus Fellows in Washington state. This information is important to investigate because a large number of teachers who complete the three-year program decide to become Emeritus Fellows. A majority of the Emeritus Fellows explained that they joined this group to stay connected to the network of ESD Regional Coordinators and teacher peers. ESD Regional Coordinators continue to be a lifeline to Emeritus Fellows, especially for Emeritus Fellows who are geographically isolated.

The study revealed that Emeritus Fellows continue in their current roles at their school and, in addition, seek out other opportunities to use their knowledge, skills, and ability for the betterment of their colleagues. The eagerness and passion of the Emeritus Fellows to lead and improve teaching and learning raises important considerations about how to fully use Washington state's teacher assets so they can develop a high-performance learning environment. Further exploration of ways to mobilize these teacher leaders would be beneficial to maximize the education landscape in Washington state.