



News release

March 28, 2025

Jackson High's Future Leaders Academy recognized by the Washington Senate for advancing civic health



Olympia, WA - Nearly 50 high school seniors from Henry M. Jackson High School in Everett traveled to the Washington State Capitol on Thursday, March 27, as part of the inaugural cohort of the Future Leaders Academy, a flagship program of the nonprofit Building Bridges Project, launched in partnership with the Everett School District and Jackson High School.

The daylong field trip was led by Snohomish County Councilmembers Nate Nehring and Jared Mead, co-founders of the Building Bridges Project. It marked a milestone in student civic engagement, highlighted by the Washington State Senate's unanimous adoption of Senate Resolution 8627, "Celebrating Civic Health," introduced by Senator John Lovick (D-44th Legislative District).

This resolution was especially meaningful because students in the Future Leaders Academy played an active role in its creation. As part of their program curriculum, students worked directly with Senator Lovick to help conceptualize and request the resolution. They saw firsthand how symbolic actions like these can bring public awareness to important issues such as civility, civic engagement, and youth leadership.

The day began with guided tours of the State Treasurer's Office and the Secretary of State's Office, where students were greeted with a surprise personal tour by Secretary of State Steve Hobbs. Secretary Hobbs shared the history and responsibilities of his office, walked students through its halls, and even offered them the opportunity to create their own state seal impressions. Several eligible students took the important civic step of registering to vote during the visit.

The group then attended a Senate Pro Forma Session, where they watched from the gallery as Senator Lovick delivered an inspiring floor speech in support of Senate Resolution 8627. In his remarks, Lovick emphasized that "our youth are not only the leaders of tomorrow—they are leading us today," directly recognizing the Jackson High School students and the Building Bridges Project for their efforts to promote civility and civic health. Senator Shelly Short (R-7th Legislative District) also spoke in support of the resolution, echoing the call for respectful conversation and civic engagement across

differing perspectives.

Senate Resolution 8627, now officially adopted, honors the critical importance of civic health and recognizes those helping to bridge divides in our communities. While it does not carry the weight of law, the resolution serves as an important public acknowledgment of the need for respectful dialogue, bipartisan cooperation, and the cultivation of leadership among the next generation.



Throughout the day, students engaged directly with lawmakers. Representative Skyler Rude (R-16th District) and Representative Lauren Davis (D-32nd District) each met with the group, shared their legislative experiences, and answered thoughtful student questions. The day concluded with a return visit from Senator John Lovick, who closed the experience with a candid discussion about leadership, public service, and the importance of staying involved in civic life.

Councilmembers Jared Mead and Nate Nehring, who co-founded the Building Bridges Project together, shared in a joint statement:

“We were proud to lead this trip and even more proud of the students who showed up with curiosity, respect, and a willingness to learn from every voice they encountered. Having leaders from both political parties meet with them and answer their questions showed, in real-time, that we can work together despite our differences. That lesson—that democracy depends on civil discourse—is one of the most important things we can pass on to the next generation.”

“This was more than a field trip—it was a launchpad for lifelong civic engagement,” added Josh Estes, co-founder of the Building Bridges Project. “These students didn’t just witness democracy in action—they participated in it. From registering to vote to helping request a symbolic Senate Resolution, they’re already demonstrating what it means to lead with purpose.”

Dr. Ian Saltzman, Superintendent of Everett Public Schools, praised the experience, saying:

“We are so proud of our Jackson High School students for representing our district with such thoughtfulness and leadership. Opportunities like this—where students see firsthand how their voices matter—are the foundation of strong civic education. We are grateful to our partners at the Building Bridges Project and the Washington State Legislature for supporting this work.”

The Origin of the Building Bridges Project

The Building Bridges Project is a 501(c)(3) organization that was sparked by a timely conversation between Snohomish County Councilmembers Jared Mead and Nate Nehring in the aftermath of the January 6th attack on the U.S. Capitol combined with other nationwide riots. Despite serving on opposite sides of the political aisle, their friendship and shared commitment to public service became a symbol of what bipartisan leadership could look like—rooted in respect, collaboration, and community. Determined to turn that moment into a movement, Jared and Nate launched the Building Bridges Project, joined by community leader and volunteer Josh Estes as a co-founder. Together, the trio set out to create opportunities for youth and community members to engage in civic dialogue, develop leadership skills, and bridge divides. Through initiatives like the Future Leaders Academy and public forums, Building Bridges is helping to shape a new generation of leaders who value empathy, equity, and shared purpose—regardless of political affiliation.

The Future Leaders Academy is a nine-month leadership development program designed to foster a culture of respect, understanding, and constructive dialogue across diverse viewpoints. Launched during the 2024–2025 school year at Henry M. Jackson High School, the program reflects the mission of the Building Bridges Project: to bridge political and ideological divides through education, community engagement, and advocacy—ensuring every voice is heard and valued.

As part of the curriculum, civic leaders and guest speakers visit students during their government classes to lead thoughtful lessons, discussions, and hands-on projects that promote civil discourse and active citizenship. Students explore the history of political polarization in the United States and apply their learning in various ways, including a visit to the State Capitol during the legislative session and dedicated community service projects.

To learn more about the Building Bridges Project or to support its mission, visit www.thebuildingbridgesproject.org.

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