

## ISTA REMARKS

ICPE DAY RALLY – FEBRUARY 19, 2024

Good morning and thank you all for being here today. My name is Jennifer Smith-Margraf. I am a Spanish Teacher at Tecumseh Junior High School in Lafayette, and I serve as vice president of the Indiana State Teachers Association.

It's an honor to stand before a gathering that represents a true cross-section of Hoosiers dedicated to public education. As ISTA vice president, I represent not just myself but the collective voice of teachers, retired teachers, education support professionals, and the communities we all serve.

The past decade has seen Indiana grapple with so-called 'education reforms'—from stripping teachers of collective bargaining rights to expanding charter and voucher schools and enforcing high stakes testing. These reforms, coupled with underfunding public schools, have made it increasingly difficult to maintain the high standards of education that we all strive for and has exacerbated our state's educator shortage. This isn't reform; it's regression.

Our fight extends beyond the quest for better pay and benefits. It's about securing conditions essential for our students' futures - smaller class sizes and adequate prep time for teachers. But, more fundamentally, it's about respect. Respect for the profession and for the democratic principles that underpin public education.

We're at a crossroads. We can continue down a path of policies that undermine our schools, or we can pivot back to what works: supporting and trusting our teachers, fully and fairly funding public schools, and restoring the rights that allow all educators to advocate for their students and themselves.

This isn't just an issue for ISTA members. It's a concern for parents, community leaders, and legislators. When educators are empowered to negotiate for better conditions, our students are the ones who benefit most. And when we talk about respect for educators, we're really talking about respect for the future.

In recent times, efforts to erode trust between educators and communities have emerged, masquerading as transparency initiatives. These efforts, while claiming to protect students, threaten educational freedom and professional judgment vital to our schools' success.

Despite these challenges, our commitment to a safe, inclusive, and enriching learning environment for all students remains unwavering. Our unity and collective action stand as our most potent assets.

As the vice president of ISTA, I assure you, we hear our members and the wider community. We're advocating tirelessly for these priorities at every level, committed to the cause and inviting each of you to join us in this effort.

Thank you for your support, for your commitment to public education, and for standing with us. Together, let's keep the conversation going and make a difference for the future of Indiana's public schools.