

Indiana State Teachers Association

ADVOCATE

Volume 43, Issue 4

Spring 2014



RISE ABOVE THE MARK

It's time to make a difference in **public** education.

Indiana teachers start a discussion on what politics have done to our classrooms



ista-in.org

We can't wait for you to visit our recently launched, redesigned and updated ISTA website to find resources, ideas and information that will help you in your daily work to create great learning experiences for your students.

Bookmark the ISTA website at ista-in.org as a reliable resource for ideas and information related to public education for you and your colleagues.

ISTA ADVOCATE

Volume 43, Issue 4, Spring 2014

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ISTA PHOTOS: KATHLEEN BERRY GRAHAM, 2014

Sure to make you :-)

We all need to smile more. So here are some great websites to visit that will do just that: Make you smile and improve your mood!

HoopLaHa.com. The site curates stories, photos and videos from all over the web. How is it different from other such sites? All of the information it gathers has a positive spin! It's even known for producing original videos that are uplifting and inspiring. Visit this site when you need a boost of positive energy. Or just when you need to smile.

Launchpadmag.com. This site publishes stories, art, poetry, nonfiction and book reviews created by kids ages 6 to 14. Great place for young authors and artists.

Goodnet.org. A media platform for people to use to activate their goodness. The free newsletter is wonderful. Check it out.



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follow ISTA on Twitter:

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I'm keeping an eye on your pension

Back in 1995, a group of forward-thinking legislators created a new legislative infrastructure to tackle what could have been a bona fide problem for the state and retiring teachers.

Back then, the General Assembly closed off the teacher retirement fund—now called the “old fund”—which by design was not pre-funded. It created a new teachers retirement fund—the “new fund”—consisting of employees hired after 1995 which has been pre-funded—so any teacher or administrator hired since 1995 is in a pension fund that is pre-funded.

The question then became—what to do about the obligations incurred for teachers in the old fund? The General Assembly had an answer for that, too—it created what is called the Pension Stabilization Fund. For lack of a better way to describe it, the PSF was a legislatively created big empty bag into which over time, the General Assembly systematically inserted surplus funds to offset its upcoming obligations.

Remember the late 1990s? Those were really good and robust economic years for the state. The General Assembly would put in lump sum amounts of \$200 million, \$150 million, \$100 million—whatever it had in any given year to contribute into the PSF. And the law said that the General Assembly could not touch that money for 10 years—and it abided by its own rules and kept its hands off.

Also remember that \$30 million of lottery revenues also goes into the PSF each year, the only lottery monies from the state that one could argue go to education. And, in these last couple of years, Sen. Luke Kenley (R-Noblesville) ensured that excess state surplus funds went to the PSF—with 100 percent of the state's excess surplus in FY 2013 going to the PSF.

Well, before too long the PSF accumulated more than \$2 billion. Currently the balance stands at \$2.6 billion and is expected to continue to climb. So, what does that have to do with the \$11 billion unfunded liability? Plenty!

Each year, the General Assembly knows it will have an obligation to teachers who are retiring. Because the old TRF fund was pay-as-you-go, the big unknown over the years was how much of the overall state budget will this retirement obligation require. The General Assembly now assumes a set percentage of the state's budget will be its annual obligation to the old fund obligations. After that, it dips into the PSF bag to make up the balance. That way, the state knows upfront what its obligations will be, year-in and year-out.

So the bottom line here is simple, there is no impending crisis for Indiana's teacher retirement fund. But remember that Indiana could have had a huge problem on its hands. Let's be grateful that earnest legislators and thoughtful stakeholders came together and set forth a plan to manage the situation.

What now? Our focus as ISTA members must be on current attempts to privatize the fund and to cut benefits. Rest assured that with your continued support, ISTA will fight all privatization efforts to protect the interests of all public school educators. Stay tuned.

Thanks for all you do.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Teresa Meredith". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Teresa Meredith
ISTA President



for Great Public Schools
INDIANA STATE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

Save the dates!

Save the dates for the 2014 ISTA Summer Conference—June 17-21—and Raise Your Hand at the Indianapolis Marriott East Hotel. This conference is designed to assist you in your efforts to engage every member of your local in building a powerful force to preserve and enhance public education and to foster workers' rights.

Emerging Leaders
by invitation only
JUNE 17-20

Leadership Sessions
JUNE 18-19

Collective Bargaining Sessions
JUNE 19-20

Political Action Sessions
JUNE 20-21

Dates to remember

April 26, 2014

ISTA Representative Assembly
Northview Middle School
Indianapolis

May 5-9, 2014

Teacher Appreciation Week

May 6, 2014

National Teacher Day

June 17-21, 2014

ISTA Summer Conference—
Raise Your Hand
Marriott East Indianapolis

November 17-21, 2014

American Education Week

November 19, 2014

Education Support
Professionals Day

Chalkbeat

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- OUR TEAM
- CONTACT US
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Hi, we're Chalkbeat, a news site covering educational change.

Scott Elliott
Bureau Chief, Chalkbeat Indiana @Chalkbeat

Chalkbeat is a nonprofit news organization covering educational change efforts in the communities where improvement matters most. The network has bureaus in New York, Colorado, Indiana, and Tennessee. Chalkbeat was created as a merger of GothamSchools and EdNews Colorado, independent news nonprofits now known as Chalkbeat New York and Chalkbeat Colorado. Our mission is to inform the decisions and actions that lead to better outcomes for children and families by providing deep, local coverage of education policy and practice.

Check out Chalkbeat!

Chalkbeat Indiana has just launched its new website, which will help policymakers and education influencers learn about the most important issues affecting schools, share their concerns about the Indiana school system and discuss education policy and practice. Chalkbeat Indiana is part of Chalkbeat, a national network of local education news websites in Colorado, New York, Indiana and Tennessee. Learn more about it at www.in.chalkbeat.org.



TWEETS WE LIKE!

RT @SeekingEdAnswer

Common standards may be a starting point, but sustainable growth begins with the individual student.

HuffPostEducation @ HuffPostEdu

The amount of money we spend on education is important, but not nearly as important as how the money is spent.

Rise Above the Mark @ RiseAboveMark

Help us return responsibility and trust to public schools and make the US a leader in public education.

Members of recognition

MELISSA JORDAN, who teaches at Woodrow Wilson Middle School in Terre Haute, and is a member of the Vigo County Teachers Association, was awarded a \$2000 NEA Foundation Learning and Leadership Grant in January. The grants support efforts to engage in high-quality professional development and to improve student success. Jordan will attend the 2014 Educator Academy in Iquitos, Peru and will work with scientists, researchers and fellow educators on science projects and field work. Jordan will use the work to lead science educator professional development in the Vigo County School Corporation.

For more information about the Student Foundation Achievement Grant program go to: www.neafoundation.org.

La Porte Community Schools bus driver, **GAIL CAINS**, went way beyond the call of duty in January when she was called to help at an area traffic pileup. Cains, a member of the La Porte Education Support Professionals Association, was awarded the La Porte Community School Corporation's Beyond the Expected Award for her efforts.

On Jan. 23, Cains received a call to be at the intersection of US 20 and IN 35. Minutes later she was headed the wrong way down Interstate 94 toward dozens of vehicles crushed together after a blizzard. Cains had been asked to transport injured motorists from the 46-vehicle pileup and get them to a hospital. Cains says the scene was a junkyard. "There was nothing but smashed vehicles the entire side of I-94."

Cains transported a total of eight passengers to the IU Health La Porte Hospital and says she will never forget what happened. "It was incredible, all the people that were working together," she said. "It was amazing to watch because (the rescue workers) had it pretty down pat, let me tell you."



Bus driver Gail Cains received the La Porte Community School Corporation's Beyond the Expected Award from Transportation Director Terry Busse for her efforts to help transport injured motorists to a hospital in January. Photo by Matt Fritz.

2014-15 NEA RA delegates announced

Each year approximately 200 Indiana delegates participate in the National Education Association's Representative Assembly. The NEA RA is the highest decision-making body within the NEA. With nearly 9,000 delegates from across the country, the RA is also the world's largest democratic deliberative body.

The RA consists of eight business sessions held over four days where RA delegates debate the vital issues that have an impact on American public education and set Association policy and activities for the year ahead. The 2014 RA will be held July 1-July 6, in Denver, CO. For more information about the 2014 RA or to see a listing of the 2014-15 Indiana delegates, go to: <https://ista-in.org/nea-representative-assembly>.

Dear Young Teacher Down the Hall,

I saw you as you rushed passed me in the lunchroom. Urgent. In a hurry to catch a bite before the final bell would ring calling all the students back inside. I noticed that your eyes showed tension. There were faint creases in your forehead. And I asked you how your day was going and you sighed.

“Oh, fine,” you replied.

But I knew it was anything but fine. I noticed that the stress was getting to you. I could tell that the pressure was rising. And I looked at you and made an intentional decision to stop you right then and there. To ask you how things were really going. Was it that I saw in you a glimpse of myself that made me take the moment?

You told me how busy you were, how much there was to do. How little time there was to get it all done. I listened. And then I told you this:

BY LORI GARD

I told you to remember that at the end of the day, it's not about the lesson plan. It's not about the fancy stuff we teachers make—the crafts we do, the stories we read, the papers we laminate. No, that's not really it. That's not what matters most.

And as I looked at you there wearing all that worry under all that strain, I said it's about being there for your kids. Because at the end of the day, most students won't remember what amazing lesson plans you've created. They won't remember how organized your bulletin boards are. How straight and neat are the desk rows.

No, they'll not remember that amazing decor you've designed.

But they will remember you.

Your kindness. Your empathy. Your care and concern. They'll remember that you took the time to listen. That you stopped to ask them how they were. How they really were. They'll remember the personal stories you tell about your life: your home, your pets, your kids. They'll remember your laugh. They'll remember that you sat and talked with them while they ate their lunch.

Because at the end of the day, what really matters is YOU. What matters to those kids that sit before you in those little chairs, legs pressed up tight under tables oft too small—what matters to them is you.

You are that difference in their lives.

And when I looked at you then with tears in your eyes, emotions rising to the surface and I told you gently to stop trying so hard. I also reminded you that your own expectations were partly where the stress stemmed. For we who truly care are often far harder on ourselves than our students are willing to be. Because we who truly care are often our own worst enemy. We mentally beat ourselves up for trivial failures. We tell ourselves we're not enough. We compare ourselves to others. We work ourselves to the bone in the hopes of achieving the perfect lesson plan. The most dynamic activities. The most engaging lecture. The brightest, fanciest furnishings.

Because we want our students to think we're the very best at what we do and we believe that this status of excellence is achieved merely by doing. But we forget—and often. Excellence is more readily attained by being.

Being available.

Being kind.

Being compassionate.

Being transparent.

Being real.

Being thoughtful.

Being ourselves.

And of all the students I know who have lauded teachers with the laurels of the highest acclaim, those students have said of those teachers that they cared.

You see, kids can see through to the truth of the matter. And while the flashy stuff can entertain them for a while, it's the steady constance of empathy that keeps them connected to us. It's the relationships we build with them. It's the time we invest. It's all the little ways we stop and show concern. It's the love we share with them: of learning. Of life. And most important, of people.

And while we continually strive for excellence in our profession as these days of fiscal restraint and heavy top-down demands keep coming at us—relentless and quick. We need to stay the course. For ourselves and for our students. Because it's the human touch that really matters.

It's you, their teacher, that really matters.

So go back to your class and really take a look. See past the behaviors, the issues and the concerns, pressing as they might be. Look beyond the stack of papers on your desk, the line of emails in your queue. Look further than the classrooms of seasoned teachers down the hall. Look. And you will see that it's there—right inside you. The ability to make an impact. The chance of a lifetime to make a difference in a child's life. And you can do this now.

“We need to stay the course. For ourselves and for our students. Because it's the human touch that really matters.”

Right where you are, just as you are.

Because all you are right now is all you ever need to be for them today. And who you are tomorrow will depend much on who and what you decide to be today.

It's in you. I know it is.

Fondly,

That Other Teacher Down the Hall

LORI GARD IS A TEACHER AND A PARENT TO FOUR CHILDREN. HER COLUMN APPEARS IN THE HUFFINGTON POST.



Diane Ravitch

West Lafayette ‘Rise Above the Mark’ film sparks debate about politics in Indiana classrooms

Hundreds of educators and community-minded citizens showed up on a cold Friday night on the last day of February at Clowes Hall in Indianapolis to see the premiere of the documentary “Rise Above the Mark.” The film explores the heartbreaking realities of public education in Indiana. It’s the story of what happens when politics enters the classroom. Opponents and supporters took sides and found little common ground in a panel discussion that followed.

The 65-minute documentary was produced in Indiana and made by the West Lafayette Schools Education Foundation. It takes a hard look at how charter schools, vouchers and changes to state funding eat away at public school support. Several minutes of the production critically focus on the grading system set up by former Indiana Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Bennett. The crowd jeered Bennett and alternately cheered when the film jumped to initiatives started by now Superintendent, Glenda Ritz.

Diane Ravitch—former assistant secretary of education under President George H.W. Bush, an ed historian and a nationally heralded critic of ed reform movements—was featured in the film and was one of the discussion panel members. Ravitch appeared to represent the sentiments of many of those in attendance. “I am opposed to testing and accountability. The only thing you learn from testing is what families have the most income,” she said to strong audience approval. She also condemned teacher evaluations determined by student test scores.

Ravitch criticized reform movements saying, “Somebody figured out how to de-fund education. They haven’t realized yet that vouchers and charters take money away from our public schools. All of these people who are making decisions about education...it’s as if they don’t have children.”

Alternatively, David Harris, founder and CEO of The Mind Trust and Robert Enlow, president and CEO of the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, debated Ravitch and said vouchers and charters offer ways for parents to send

their children to schools of their choice. Audience members booed. Ravitch said that those kinds of reforms create dual systems in which charter schools pick the students they want and leave the rest to public schools. “Support for public schools is not a consumer choice,” said Ravitch. “If you want to send your kids to religious or private school, pay for it.”

Randy Studt, a member of the West Lafayette Education Association who teaches German at West Lafayette Junior/Senior High School, attended the premiere. He said, “The film is a frank discussion of how politics has intervened in public education to drain off money to for-profit corporations and to strangle public education for all.”

Deb Glover, who also is a member of WLEA and who teaches at Happy Hollow Elementary, hopes that Rise Above the Mark will open possibilities about public education. “If it can make people listen, discuss, and work together to make changes in education in Indiana and in the US, then we are moving in the right direction.”

West Lafayette schools Superintendent Rocky Killion, who headed the production, said “This movie is not about a political party but it is about the injection of politics into public education. Killion hopes the production will start a dialogue about public education and about how to keep superstar teachers from leaving the profession.

“We stand at a crossroads right now in public education,” he told the audience. “It is my hope we will return decision-making, trust and responsibility to our local schools so that we are empowered to define and achieve our own success.”

SEE A CLIP

Additional screenings of Rise Above the Mark are planned at education-related conferences. To see a trailer, go to: <http://bit.ly/1kCFWww>.

HOT TOPICS: Child Poverty



Child Poverty takes its toll on Indiana

Is Indiana a state of opportunity for all of its children? According to the Indiana Youth Institute, there is a growing gap between wealthy Hoosiers and others. In fact, IYI claims that the rungs on the ladder to success in Indiana have grown farther apart for children who want to raise themselves out of poverty.

Data from public school systems across the state reveal that almost 50 percent of all Hoosier schoolchildren use free or reduced-priced lunch. Obviously a large number of young people in our state live in poverty.

“Growing up in poverty, it just has these terrible repercussions and you see these associations with much lower rates of high school graduation, lower performance overall in school, much lower rates of college attendance and the cycle perpetuates,” said Curtis Skinner, director of Family Economic Security at the National Center for Children in Poverty.

Skinner said the center's research is showing a troubling trend in the aftermath of the recession: Poverty rates are rising in what used to be the middle class, in two-parent households and in families where parents have college educations.

According to data released in the Annie E. Casey Foundation's 2013 Kids Count report, more and more Indiana children continue to struggle economically, with more and more Hoosier children each year living below the poverty line.

What factors influence getting out of poverty and how can we as adults help struggling children in our communities and across our state?

The answer is fairly simple: We should pressure Indiana policymakers to make substantially greater investments in education, particularly in pre-kindergarten programming, early literacy and in high school graduation efforts.

With more than one in four Hoosier children—236,000 children—living in poverty, clearly doing things the way we've always done them does not work. Indiana's child poverty rate has grown by 35 percent since 2005.

Although like most indicators, poverty rates are incomplete and imperfect measures, it's clear that poverty affects thousands of Indiana families and their children. Children growing up in poverty complete less schooling, work and earn less as adults and are more likely to receive public assistance and have poor health.

Although Indiana's demographics continue to change, it's critical that Hoosiers commit themselves to making sure that all children are prepared to be successful in an increasingly competitive world by creating educational policy that is research-based and practiced to be effective to help all students—reducing class sizes and attracting and keeping high-quality teachers become an utmost priority.