

# Indiana State Teachers Association ADVOCATE

Volume 44, Issue 3

Winter 2015



**Kathy Nimmer**  
2015 Indiana Teacher of the Year

**We're Better Together**



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](http://ista-in.org) as a reliable resource for ideas and information related to public education for you and your colleagues.

## Stay up-to-the-minute on Statehouse activity

Want to zero in on what's happening with the General Assembly? Or have a bill list in hand before checking in for an ISTA lobby day? Go to: [ista-in.org/2015-bill-watch](http://ista-in.org/2015-bill-watch) for real time updates to bills in the session.

**Register now!**

## 2015 ISTA Good Teaching Conference is March 21

Share your journey with colleagues from across the state at the 2015 ISTA Good Teaching Conference—Indiana's premier teaching and learning conference for educators. Join ISTA members for this free conference to master your profession and advance your career. Those who teach well recognize that there is always more to learn. Let it start here. Get details: [ista-in.org/2015-ista-good-teaching-conference](http://ista-in.org/2015-ista-good-teaching-conference).

## Don't forget! Get your professional development from ISTA!

Have you had a chance to check in with ISTA's Professional Resources Center? It's a new resource for members to share expertise, explore innovations and discuss the challenges of teaching in and across disciplines in Indiana's public schools. Be sure to check in at: [ista-in.org/professional-resource-center](http://ista-in.org/professional-resource-center).

# ISTA ADVOCATE

Volume 44, Issue 3, Winter 2014

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## It's time to speak up and take action

**T**he General Assembly is just more than a month into the 2015 session and ISTA has a number of significant goals for this long session. I know that you—as educators, school employees, student members, and retired teachers—seek ways to make a difference in your schools and in your communities every day. ISTA members are good at sharing information, supporting causes, speaking up, and taking action. Now I'm asking each of you to speak up and take action for education during the remainder of this legislative session.

Together we are fighting the challenges that come with inadequate resources which trickle down to every legislative priority but there are other matters central to our needs for better public education. Last week as I climbed the Statehouse steps with members-turned-lobbyists for the day, I made a checklist of three of the legislative priorities that top my list of goals for this session.

First, I believe legislators, educators, and the public need to find a more positive focus on the education profession—and that includes our bus drivers, cafeteria workers, school secretaries, and more who make our schools work every day. Indiana graduation rates are up. Dropout rates are down. Educators improve learning and help children reach their potential every day. I believe ISTA members are determined to do all they can to support and nurture in ways that bring success to our classrooms. Join me in support of initiatives to focus on the positive things in Indiana classrooms.

Second, let's look at the way professional development helps us to be better teachers. National Board Certification is a license renewal program available in 25 certificate areas from PreK–12. Teachers who complete the program have demonstrated professional

knowledge, skills, and practices required of an outstanding educator. Yet Indiana lacks across-the-board funding for application or stipends following certification. To date, Indiana has 160 board certified teachers yet our neighbors disproportionately exceed that number—Ohio with 3,337 and Illinois with 5,842. Tell your legislators to support efforts to professionalize teaching by allocating resources for National Board Certification. See pages 6 and 7 of this issue for more on National Board Certification.

Third, I frequently hear educators across the state voice their concerns about evaluation. Since 2009, 36 states and the District of Columbia have altered their teacher evaluation systems, including increasing the number of times teachers are observed or tying teacher ratings to student achievement. The stakes can determine pay and job security. Members tell me the evaluation process confuses them about what's expected and distracts them from the task of teaching. Let's improve the evaluation process and advance that positive focus on the profession.

ISTA members understand the significance of speaking up and taking action. Do it with me now. Join me for one of ISTA's lobbying days. I will be in the Statehouse several days before the April 30 closing. Speak up. Take action. Tell your legislators what's important to you and your profession.

## Dates to remember

**February 10, 2015**  
Lobby Day at ISTA Center  
Indianapolis

**February 21, 2015**  
ISEA Representative  
Assembly  
Indianapolis

**February 24, 2015**  
Lobby Day at ISTA Center  
Indianapolis

**March 3, 2015**  
Lobby Day at ISTA Center  
Indianapolis

**March 17, 2015**  
Lobby Day at ISTA Center  
Indianapolis

**March 21, 2015**  
ISTA Good Teaching  
Conference  
Indianapolis

**April 6, 2015**  
Lobby Day at ISTA Center  
Indianapolis

**April 11, 2015**  
Outreach to Teach  
East Washington Academy  
Muncie

**April 25, 2015**  
ISTA Representative  
Assembly  
Indianapolis

**May 4 – 8, 2015**  
Teacher Appreciation Week

**May 5, 2015**  
National Teacher Day

**June 17 – 19, 2015**  
ISTA Summer Leadership  
Conference  
Indianapolis

**June 28 – 30, 2015**  
NEA-Retired Annual Meeting  
Orlando

**July 1 – 6, 2015**  
NEA Representative Assembly  
Orlando

## Thanks to NEA Fund contributors!

Thank you to ISTA members who made generous donations to the NEA Fund for Children and Public Education this past year! The NEA Fund works every day to make sure that elected leaders support public education. Contributions help the NEA Fund realize the



dream of great public schools for every student in America. To see this year's list of donors go to: [ista-in.org/nea-fund-contributors](http://ista-in.org/nea-fund-contributors). If you would like to contribute to the NEA Fund, contact: Diana Crum at [dcrum@ista-in.org](mailto:dcrum@ista-in.org).

## It's not too late to celebrate Read Across America 2015

Read Across America Day for 2015 will be celebrated on Monday, March 3, but your school can hold festivities on a day that works best for you!



If you haven't planned any events go to the NEA RAA website at: [readacrossamerica.org](http://readacrossamerica.org) or follow @NEAReadAcross on Twitter. Or get one of NEA's resource kits for last-minute ideas by contacting Kathleen Berry Graham at: [kberry@ista-in.org](mailto:kberry@ista-in.org) or 844-ASK-ISTA.

## Delegates to elect NEA Board member at ISTA RA in April



**What:** ISTA Representative Assembly

**When:** Saturday, April 25, 2015

**Where:** Watch the ISTA website at [ista-in.org](http://ista-in.org) under Representative Assembly for time and location details.

**What:** Delegates will hold elections for one board position to the NEA Board of Directors. Candidates must notify the ISTA Executive Director no later than March 1, 2015, in order to declare candidacy. Campaign statements will not appear in the ISTA Advocate but only on the ISTA website. Check the website at: [ista-in.org](http://ista-in.org) for additional information. See page 8 of this issue for candidate statements by those who had declared intent to run and submitted statements by October 31, 2014. RA delegates will also conduct Association business, hold district elections, pass the 2016 ISTA Legislative Program, and are expected to approve the ISTA budget.

## ISTA Scholarships and Awards

ISTA's awards range from scholarships for future educators to the Horace Mann Hoosier Educator of the Year Award to our Outstanding Minority Educator along with awards for Education Support Professionals and the prestigious

Pacesetter Award. The March 1 deadline for awards and scholarships is fast approaching. Visit our website for details on each of the awards, plus guidelines and applications at: [ista-in.org](http://ista-in.org) and click on ISTA Awards.

### Too much TV?

How many hours in a typical school week do students spend watching TV, relaxing, or other unscheduled activities? *Source: Harris Poll*



20 or more	47%
10 – 19	24%
5 – 9	15%
4 or less	14%

### Members of Recognition

Congratulations to the 2014 winners of the ISTA Quality Local Award.

- **ASSOCIATION OF PORTER TOWNSHIP EDUCATORS**  
Submitted by: **WENDI HECKLER**
- **NEW ALBANY FLOYD COUNTY BUS DRIVERS**  
Submitted by: **BETTY BATLINER**
- **WEST CLARK TEACHERS ASSOCIATION**  
Submitted by: **CONNIE DIETRICH**

The Indiana School Counselor Association has awarded its 2014 Exemplary Middle School Counselor Award to **DANA STRABAVY**, LaSalle Intermediate Academy, South Bend and its Exemplary High School Counselor Award to **GREG CHAFFIN**, Bloomington High School North.

And congratulations to the finalists for the Indiana Department of Education's Top Teacher of the Year

for 2015. Nine of the 10 finalists were ISTA members. See page 7 for the list of finalists and the cover story on Teacher of the Year, **KATHY NIMMER**. For more information on the Teacher of the Year program, go to: [doe.in.gov/toy](http://doe.in.gov/toy).

This fall, 1,660 ISTA members shared thoughts to identify professional development needs by taking an online survey. By random drawing, three of the participants received Barnes and Noble gift cards for sharing their opinions.

Thank you gift cards went to:

- **CHERYL SIMMONS**, Kokomo Teachers Association
- **NICHOLAS FLOWERS**, Lawrence Education Association
- **CAROL TUCKER**, Spencer Owen Education Association



#### TWEETS WE LIKE!

**@TNTP:** Professionalizing teaching means that excellence would be the guiding hallmark, says @JoellKlein in @USAToday. <http://ow.ly/EoQNM>

**@AdamVanOsdol:** If testing data reveals children aren't learning...how can we simply put that information on hold? via @levesquepat <http://excelined.org/news/open-letter-patricia-levesque-accountability-drives-results>

**@StateImpactIN:** Textbook fees cost families hundreds of dollars each year, and now Glenda Ritz wants to eliminate that fee. <http://ipm.io/ltYZwd5>

**@StevenSinger3:** We'd put our faith in standardized tests if we knew any standardized children.

**@Lily\_NEA:** Student debt threatens the next generation of public servants, our econ & our future as a country #DegreesNotDebt

# 'I don't do things half way'

**C**lassroom real estate sometimes tells a story. In the back row of Room K105 at Harrison High School a senior with close-cropped, black hair and a Bohemian skirt and a junior wearing a Marvel Comics Incredible Hulk t-shirt might have been mistaken for sitting on the fringe for all the reasons that come with the seats with the lowest ticket value. But not so in Kathy Nimmer's fourth-period creative writing class. Not only is it one of the only elective classes you can repeat at Harrison and get credit, but the students in every seat in the house are paying attention to Indiana's 2015 Teacher of the Year.

And just to be fair, the front row in Nimmer's classroom probably wouldn't curtail misbehavior or guarantee extra instructor attention anyway. Why? First, Nimmer has a certain eloquence balanced alongside a strength and confidence that is tangible from the center of her classroom where she prompts her students through the secret meanings of impassioned poems and creative works. Second, Nimmer is blind.

Her path to being honored as Teacher of the Year is storied. In second grade at age 7 Nimmer started to lose her vision and was diagnosed with a rare degenerative disease called rod and cone dystrophy. At age 11 she left her home in Munster to begin weekly commutes by Greyhound bus to Indianapolis for classes at the Indiana School for the Blind and Visually Impaired where she graduated as valedictorian. At age 23, she said, "I had the total step down and lost all sight." Nimmer added, "But along the way, I always had great teachers who always inspired me."



Now Nimmer is inspiring others as a 23-year English and creative writing teacher at Harrison on the outskirts of West Lafayette. Nimmer's guide dog, Elias, who is known to all and loves his treats from Nimmer's colleagues, comes to school every day. He sprawls at her side while she talks openly about her blindness and admits that it has never kept her from doing anything she loves—things like gymnastics—she performed in college and is still an avid fan or from being the best teacher she can be—she is National Board Certified twice. "I was longing for a challenge and needed something to make me think more deeply about my profession," she said about achieving the rigorous renewal. "It's a difficult process but it made me a more reflective teacher and it

## NIMMER'S TOP 10 TEACHING TIPS

**1 Feed your soul.** Whatever you need to do outside the classroom to make yourself happy, healthy, and energized, commit to that and never ever let that commitment waver. If you are not okay in your heart, you cannot be what the students need you to be in the classroom.

**2 Connect with students by getting to know them in person.** Compliment their work, their athletics, their style, their attitude. Small talk is never small!!

**3 Have passion for your subject.** If you sound like you are bored, the students will meet you in that bland place and their engagement will drop remarkably.

**4 Have a great sense of humor.** You do not have to be a professional entertainer, but when you show readiness to laugh at situations and at yourself, you create an openness that students recognize: Laughter is a great bridge.

# Indiana's 2015 Teacher of the Year

introduced me to a community of educators who have the same commitment to education.”

Nimmer said she looks forward to the next year and the inherent duties of the Indiana Department of Education's top award as Teacher of the Year. She'll travel to several conferences, speak at many events and journey to Washington, D.C. to meet and dine with President Obama in April. With a soft swell of emotion and a swirl to Elias' head she explained the two simple things to which she most looks forward with this honor as Indiana's best teacher. "I want Elias to be in the White House." And her second? "My happiest times are when I'm within the four walls of my classroom. It will never be the same room after this. I am eager to see what happens with this opportunity but after all of it I will be delighted to be back in my classroom."

Does she use her own life journey to help her students overcome challenges? "There's no magic formula. Some days making my classroom a positive and encouraging place where my students can grow and fail and try again is a lot about who I am and how I operate as a person," she said. "I don't do things half way." Nimmer knows this next stage will bring change and challenge. "The rest of the story has yet to be told. You never know what's left out there," she admitted.

And back to those two seats along the rear rim where the distractions, texting and Facebooking might be happening in other arenas, after class senior Cassidy Routsong said she took Nimmer's writing lecture again this year because it's the greatest class she's ever taken. "It's very creative

## 2015 INDIANA TEACHER OF THE YEAR FINALISTS

Nine of the top 10 Indiana Teacher of the Year finalists for 2015 are ISTA members.

### Tina Ahlgren

Shortridge Magnet High School  
for Law and Public Policy,  
Indianapolis Public Schools

### Gail Alexander

Heritage Jr/Sr High School,  
East Allen Community Schools

### Dawn Boling

Highland Hills Middle School,  
New Albany Floyd County  
Schools

### Peter De Keaver

Penn High School, Penn-Harris-  
Madison School Corporation

### Carol Draeger Thomas

Rise Up Academy, South Bend  
School Corporation

### Matthew Ehresman

Center Grove Middle School  
Central, Center Grove  
Community School Corporation

### Audrey Feters

Flint Springs Elementary,  
Huntington County Community  
School Corporation

### Kathy Nimmer

William Henry Harrison High  
School, Tippecanoe School  
Corporation

### Jennifer Query

Lawrence Central High School,  
MSD of Lawrence Township

### Roger Tyler (non-member)

Connersville High School  
Fayette County Community School  
Corporation

and very entertaining, but what I like best is that a lot of people who don't have a lot in common take her class and she compliments everyone, makes everyone feel special, feel valued, and she moves us forward." And junior, Sara Fultz, who rearranged her schedule for next year, said with full-smile excitement, "I can't wait to take it again next year."

## INTERESTED IN NATIONAL BOARD CERTIFICATION?

Indiana's National Board Certification program has been in place since 1997. To date, 160 Indiana educators have completed National Board Certification. Kathy Nimmer, 2015 Indiana Teacher of the Year, received her first National Board Certification in 2003 and a second in 2013.

Certification is a rigorous program available in 25 certificate areas. Completion of the four components means a teacher has voluntarily gone much further and demonstrated professional knowledge, skills, and practices required of an outstanding educator.

National Board Certification fulfills the requirements for renewing an Indiana educator license yet only a few districts provide support in

collective bargaining agreements for the hefty cost of the program or additional compensation after completion—a few offer as much as \$1,000 – \$3,500 per year post certification. "Studies show that teachers with National Board Certification have a very positive impact on student achievement," said ISTA President Teresa Meredith. "ISTA is working on legislation this year to find funding for school corporations to help with the cost of the test or to provide financial incentive."

ISTA members are eligible for fee support of \$500 through the Indiana Foundation for the Improvement of Education Scholarship Program for National Board Certification. Check the ISTA website at: [ista-in.org/ifie-nbpt-national-board-certification](http://ista-in.org/ifie-nbpt-national-board-certification) for more info.

**5 Be spontaneous!** While you need to plan, you also must recognize the need to take advantage of teachable moments, to ride a tangent to a fun and different outcome and to show flexibility in meeting students where they are on a given day.

**6 Communicate with parents proactively and positively.** Reach out with regular group updates, but also reach out with commendations for students on a variety of topics: Parents love hearing that their kids are doing well!

**7 Overplan so that there are no awkward time gaps at the end of the period.** Have more than you ever will have time to cover and be ready to fill those minutes with content that matters or creative outreach that deepens relationships.

**8 Make your physical classroom environment attractive, inspiring, comfortable, and reflective of what matters to you and your content area.** While you should not decorate instead of planning and grading, you also should not let the opportunity to create a warm and welcoming classroom slip by.

**9 Use variety in lesson planning so that no two days in one week have the same structure.** Mix whole group, small group, independent, serious, silly, analytic, and technology-based approaches so you and your students do not burn out with too much predictability.

**10 Do not be afraid of sprinkling games into your classroom.** Handled in an upbeat manner and structured in a fun and organized manner, a dose of competition can energize the lesson.

## Candidates issue statements for NEA Board of Directors position

The candidates seeking office prepared the following statements which have been printed in their entirety, unabridged, as they were received, but limited to 200 words or fewer. ISTA Rules Governing Elections, (III. A., 2., b. and c.) prohibit the use of Association staff and equipment on behalf of any candidate for Association office. The election for the office listed below will be held at the 2015 ISTA Representative Assembly, April 25, in Indianapolis.



### Candidate for NEA Board of Directors **Hilda Kendrick**

My name is Hilda Kendrick and I am a candidate to serve you on the NEA Board of Directors. I want to serve in this position because I am concerned

about the damage the current demonizing and defunding of public schools does to our students and our profession.

I am concerned about how over-testing of students and underfunding of public schools have negatively affected our students, our schools, and our communities. I am concerned about how unfair teacher evaluations have eroded the positive spirit in many schools, causing competition to replace cooperation.

However, I know that simply complaining about the problem will not make the problem go away. That is why I want to help fight back the attacks on public education as one of your voices on the NEA Board.

My promise to you is, if elected to the NEA Board, I will be accessible and responsive to you. I will hear your concerns and act to see that those concerns are heard by our NEA leaders. I will be a forceful advocate for our students, for public education, and for you.

Together we can help restore the respect all who work in public education deserve.



### Candidate for NEA Board of Directors **Jennifer Smith Margraf**

Chris Bradford once said, "Only by binding together as a single force will we remain strong and unconquerable."

As your NEA Director, you can count on me to work on behalf of all ISTA members at the national level to ensure that we not only remain unconquerable but reach our potential as the strongest force for public education in Indiana and the nation at large. I will be your voice representing our collective wisdom and judgment on a wide range of topics, just as I have done as a local president, district council chair, Issues & Concerns committee member, IPACE member, ISTA board member, and NEA resolutions committee member. We have been tested and challenged by many who seek to undermine the core values that we believe in, but we have risen and will continue to rise to meet every challenge that comes our way. Join me as we continue to move forward into this new era with a renewed sense of purpose and confidence in who we are as an organization and our ability to lead the education field in the years ahead. I ask for your confidence and your vote for the NEA Board of Directors.