

ISTA RA 2021
KEYNOTE ADDRESS
ISTA PRESIDENT KEITH GAMBILL

The president's office, as you can see behind me, has this sweeping view of the state capitol. But for me that is not my favorite view. My favorite view is looking at each and every one of you. I know that, at this moment, it's virtual. My view now may be different, it is still familiar and every bit as awe inspiring, remarkable, and special, because I get to see you doing what you love.

Over this past year I have seen you transform our profession in ways that two years ago would have seemed impossible. You have done things this year that no other educators have ever done before, and you have been brilliant! You've reached a level of mental and physical exhaustion that would have broken most people. You've received countless emails, written, rewritten, adapted, altered, and changed – on the fly – many, many lesson plans. You've wiped down surfaces, adapted procedures, stared at a screen of black boxes. You've mourned the passing of family, friends, and colleagues. You've faced chilling announcements that you will need to quarantine, or the test is positive. Many of you have been isolated and alone.

Through this darkness there have also been rays of sunlight and the promise of a better future. Many of you welcomed – maybe virtually – new members of your family, looking forward to the moment you could hold the newest addition. Weddings, birthday parties and other celebrations were also different, but no less special. You've taken up new hobbies, maybe even took time to handwrite and mail a card instead of sending a text, and if maybe you even binged watched TV.

You've also comforted kids who were scared. You've reshaped how to celebrate proms, promotions, and graduations. You've been there for our students; you've shown up bone weary and tired. You've inspired young minds. You've given students the ability to learn and to grow. You've built in them resilience, independence, and creativity. You have inspired. And you have been amazing!

I want to offer my most heartfelt thank you. Thank you for showing up, thank you for leading, thank you for never giving up on our students, thank you for the countless hours you've put in, thank you for your time, your energy, your love. Thank you for never giving in. Thank you for the countless ways you have sacrificed this year. From the best seat in the house, I've seen your work and I thank you.

This has been quite a year for our Association, too. In the midst of a pandemic and massive changes to our work life you have been there for the Association and our members. For the third-year straight membership is up in ISTA. Yes, folks even during a pandemic you've worked your membership plans and grown membership. Many locals settled successful contracts and are now working with their districts on the use of CARES ACT funding.



November 2019 at the state capitol was remarkable. The feeling of solidarity, comradery and determination was electric. That day we proclaimed three goals; resend the teacher externship, decouple tests from evaluations and fully fund our public schools – including paying teachers as professionals. Now this is a time when I REALLY wish we were together in person because I’m going to ask you to do something we don’t often get to do – celebrate! Stand up and cheer, scream, cry – get it all out! Folks do you realize what has been accomplished? This is your win – your advocacy over these years has finally paid off and you have much to be proud of!

Our fight continues – we still have work ahead of us as we shift our focus to the local level. You don’t have to be on the bargaining team to play a major role this fall. If you’re asked to attend a school board meeting, an information session, a rally – clear your calendar and go. Not everything in the state budget is perfect, in fact, some of it continues to harm public education. The first being the expansion of vouchers; the second is the creation of education savings accounts. As troubling as this expansion is, Hoosier families still choose public schools more than nine to one. We must harness our power to promote and celebrate our public schools. More than 170 school districts publicly came out against the original budget. The collaboration between local Associations and local school districts was a first for the state. Communities are united behind their public schools like never before and we must leverage this moment to propel our public schools forward.

This moment, this celebration, is because of you. Just as you adapted your work, you adapted your Association work. You’ve met over Zoom after spending hours staring at a screen. You sent emails, made phone calls, posted, tweeted, walked in, walked out. You’ve done the hard work and you are to be commended.

So, what’s next for ISTA?

Even with the passage of the state budget we can’t fall into the belief that our Association or public education is in the clear. Lawmakers will continue to find tactics aimed at distracting us from our goals – we cannot let them win. We won’t let them win. For example, Senate Bill 251 has altered our ability to collect dues through payroll deduction.

But by switching to Easy Pay, we take this tactic away from those who choose not to listen to teacher voices at the Statehouse. We must force them to focus on our goals to improve public education – not distractions.

For those who have already shifted to Easy Pay, please support, and encourage our locals that will be forced to make this change quickly. We’re all in this together. And by all – I mean all – Black lives matter, Asian lives matter, trans lives matter. Misogyny, racism, and homophobia are real for our members and our students. As an Association we must be leaders in ensuring that our members and students are able to live their authentic lives in a world that is free hate, ignorance, and prejudice.

Over the past two years, ISTA has taken steps to address racial and social justice issues. While we have made advancement this year there is no doubt that the pandemic has slowed



us down. You will see in our budget a financial commitment to this work in the shape of programs and personnel. Our Minority Affairs Committee, under the leadership of Ron Swann and Greylor Walston, has produced wonderful programs for all members – including Racial Justice Book Club and a panel discussion with educators of color featuring NEA’s Vice President Princess Moss. This committee is on the move and I ask everyone engage and participate in this work and opportunities.

We have come so far as an organization. Perhaps further in the past ten years than we could ever have imagined. During our founding, a legislator remarked to carve on his headstone here lies an enemy of public schools. The adage – the more things change the more they stay the same – remains true for us even after nearly 170 years. What also remains is you, our members. Like my dear friends and predecessors Damon, Judy, Nate, and Teresa, I witness firsthand your tenacity, your strength, and your courage. Let us move forward united and committed to making public education better for our kids, our schools, our future.

Thank you ISTA.

