

Mike Beranek

President, Iowa State Education Association

My name is Mike Beranek, and I am a retired 3rd grade teacher from West Des Moines School District. I serve as President of the Iowa State Education Association. The ISEA represents Iowa education professionals including preK-12 teachers, education support professionals, community college faculty, Area Education Agency professionals, retired educators, and aspiring educators. We promote quality public education by placing students at the center of everything we do while advocating for education professionals.

My third-grade classroom library was full of every book imaginable.

My students loved reading about Ruby Bridges becoming the first Black child to integrate the all-white William Franz Elementary School as a six-year-old girl in the biography "I am Ruby Bridges."

They heard about a young minister's son who discovered an Underground Railroad in his father's home. In this book titled "Brady" written by Jean Fritz, the young man is confronted with the horrors of slavery and he is forced to make his own decision about what he believes.

Third grade students became familiar with female activists Anne Hutchinson, Phillis Wheatly and others as they read "They Led The Way, 14 American Women" written by Johanna Johnston.

I planned lessons around books that brought them on flying carpets to other countries and introduced them to farmlands, jungles, oceans, people, and cultures they had never heard of before. This began their long educational journey toward developing solid critical thinking skills and a taste for knowledge through other cultures, ideas, and opinions.

The ISEA has always supported the free inclusion of ideas, identities, and cultures. Our public school professionals are the experts in the field of education and they help our students develop critical thinking skills.

Iowa's educators are trained in what are age-appropriate materials for our classrooms and what is included on our library shelves. When we can offer a range of resources, we are providing our students the opportunity to think critically about how they can live successfully in a democratic society and the world around them.

We stand firmly on the side of the experts in our schools and the parents or guardians supporting their children. We know parental input and involvement are critical to a child's success in school.

Every Iowa school district has protocols in place in which parents and guardians can participate in their child's educational program

BUT we take issue with any parent or guardian censoring materials for everyone else's child.

Our partnership in this lawsuit is one of many ways we are advocating to protect and promote the growth and success of all of the students in our care.

We will always support the students who walk through the doors of our schools and the professionals who guide them along the way.