I am a Special Education teacher in the metro area and a member of ISEA. I am lifelong Iowan who also graduated from Des Moines Public Schools. I attended Elmwood Elementary School, Hubbell Elementary School, Callanan Middle School and I graduated from Roosevelt High School in Des Moines. Roosevelt High School has and does receive recognition of its academic programs and the achievements of its students at the local, state and national level. In the Des Moines Public Schools and at Callanan Middle School and Roosevelt High School in particular I learned how to think independently, critically and the value of being civic minded. My education at Roosevelt High School has stood me in good stead at the University of Iowa and in the world at large. I have always felt the mixture of strong academic programs and emphasis on independent and critical thinking skills and political engagement that I received at Callanan Middle School and Roosevelt High School gave me an invaluable education.

I vividly remember my 8th grade social studies teacher at Callanan telling our class about the Tinker V. The Des Moines Community School Board Supreme Court Decision. She explained that in 1965, (less than 10 years before I was born), students that had lived in the neighborhood that I lived in and who attended Roosevelt High School (the high school I would attend) had protested the Vietnam War by wearing black arm bands and were suspended from school for doing so and their families took the case to the Supreme Court and the Warren court ruled in the students favor stating that, “students had freedom of expression rights that didn’t end when they stepped into the schoolhouse.” It filled me with pride and awe that students from Roosevelt High School in Des Moines had won freedom of expression rights for students in a Supreme Court Decision and that my Social Studies teacher wanted us to have this knowledge and be proud of this legacy of former Callanan Middle School and Roosevelt High students in Des Moines, Iowa.

I have been a special education teacher in the metro area for ten years and I want for my students what I felt was given to me as a Des Moines Public School student. I want them to believe in themselves and their future and our country’s future. I want them to love reading and as they begin to attend secondary school I want them to have a chance to explore what interests them whether that be vocational classes, science classes, the fine arts, or sports.

Sadly, as an educator the last ten years, I have not always felt I had the freedom of speech to advocate for myself as an educator, for my students, or always voice my professional opinion as an educator without the threat or fear of professional retaliation. In the last ten years as a Special Educator I have learned that the promise of freedom of expression and civic justice that I felt was mine for the taking as a student in the Des Moines Public Schools falls short for students and teachers in the current educational system in Iowa. The ISEA and its local uniserv branches are who have advocated for my students mental health needs, the fulfillment of my students IEP’s, for me to get a lunch break, for me and my students to have a safe classroom environment, for me to not have to attend meetings with administrators concerning my students education on the weekend, and to advocate for protected teacher planning time so I can better teach my students. I fear without collective bargaining, teachers will have no voice in their benefits and work conditions and not only will I have to leave teaching but the model for advocacy and civic mindedness that I felt teachers had and exuded and the vision I was given by teachers of my future and the impact I could have when I attended the Des Moines Public School will be completely gone.