

# *Human and Civil Rights Award Winner*



**Dirk Andrews**

**Virginia Uribe Memorial Award for Creative Leadership in Human Rights**

## **A PASSIONATE NEA DIRECTOR AND LOCAL UNION PRESIDENT, DIRK ANDREWS ADVOCATES FOR A BETTER WORLD FOR THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY** in Wyoming and across the country daily.

As a Wyoming Education Association Safe and Just schools cadre member, Mr. Andrews facilitates a frequently requested session on LGBTQ+ rights in education, designed to help eliminate discriminatory and abusive behavior toward LGBTQ+ groups and individuals. Mr. Andrews helps NEA members, school leaders, and community members develop programs that help defend students' rights and help them feel welcome and seen at their schools in Wyoming. As described by a fellow member, Dirk Andrews is "a caring individual, a great humanitarian, a passionate fighter for the LGBTQ+ community, and a glittering ray of light in what can often be a dark world." During his trainings, Dirk openly shares his own personal story of growing up gay in Wyoming schools; cultivating a powerful, yet safe environment for growth and listening where appreciation for diversity with regards to sexual orientation and gender identity is promoted.

These trainings come at no cost to communities in Wyoming and little to no costs for those outside of the state. As demand for the training grows, Dirk continues to train across the nation, including in Florida and South Dakota.

Ryan Rolfs, Executive Director of the South Dakota Education Association, describes Mr. Andrews' leadership: "Dirk doesn't see a wall of intolerance and view it as an insurmountable obstacle. Instead, he finds a way to scale that wall and drop down a rope on the other side for the rest of us to follow. Dirk's role as a leader and an advocate for LGBTQ+ students has made a lasting impact on our state's union and a lasting impact on the lives of countless students. As our organization takes up the mantle on these issues, as we continue this critical work, we will always be thankful for having a leader like Dirk in a neighboring state to show us the path forward."

In addition to his training and work with local and state associations, Mr. Andrews is also a tireless champion and advocate for more inclusive legislative policies; ensuring that Wyoming lawmakers represent all communities throughout the state. He spent so much time working with former Representative Liz Cheney on policy reform that he personally called and thanked her when she voted in favor of the Equality Act. Dirk is also a member of the board of Casper Pride, which through his creative leadership, has become an active advocate for improving conditions and opportunities for the LGBTQ+ community in the region.

As Kimberly Amen, Vice President of the Wyoming Education Association, explains, "Dirk and his husband were the first gay couple to be married in the State of Wyoming, and he has been both a symbol for and champion of LGBTQ+ rights since. He does not shy away from the battle; he embraces it and uses his voice to amplify others. Dirk will tell you that his "why" is to be a voice for those who don't yet have one or know how to use theirs."

Just as Virginia Uribe was a teacher who used her creativity to lead and advocate for a more inclusive and just society for LGBTQ+ youth, Dirk Andrews is a tireless and courageous educator leader paving the way for equality in Wyoming and beyond.