



June 28, 2023

STATEMENT of RANDY EVANS

Iowa Freedom of Information Council executive director

**on the settlement of the lawsuit against the
Bettendorf Community School District board of education**

Although it has taken nine months, we are grateful the Bettendorf school board and the district's administrators finally have faced up to the regrettable reality — that the board acted in violation of both the letter, and the spirit, of Iowa's open meetings law last year when school officials barred journalists and some interested citizens from attending a school forum.

Several hundred parents were at the forum, voicing their concerns about the school district's response to incidents of student violence at Bettendorf Middle School. But more citizens, and journalists, were not allowed in the meeting. And school officials failed to provide the required advance notice of the school board's gathering.

There is no greater obligation of a school district these days than ensuring students have a safe environment in which to learn. But the Bettendorf school board and school administrators let the public down by not properly conducting the school board's meeting on May 25, 2022 in compliance with Iowa law.

Our lawsuit would have been unnecessary had the Bettendorf superintendent and the president of the Bettendorf school board simply responded to our letter in which my journalist colleagues and I expressed our concerns about the decision to block journalists from attending that meeting. Officials' misguided interpretation of the law has ended up indirectly costing the taxpayers of the Bettendorf district \$6,500 to reimburse our legal expenses. The taxpayers also are on the hook for thousands more the district has paid its own lawyers to defend this indefensible closed-door meeting.

No government entity can earn the trust, respect, and confidence of the people it serves when government officials try to prevent the public from attending a meeting like the one held in May 2022.