

2016 NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

Human and Civil Rights Award Winner

They've Created a Beacon of Light for the Youth of their Community

◆ **Estela Ortega and El Centro de la Raza.** ◆

George I. Sanchez Memorial Award



Estela Ortega began her career of service and community organizing as a young adult through participation in a number of voter registration and anti-war initiatives in her hometown of Houston, Texas. Estela has engaged in coalition building, political advocacy and strategic development.

In 1972 she left Texas and joined the peaceful occupation of the old abandoned Beacon Hill Elementary School in Seattle Washington that would later become El Centro de la Raza. Under Estela and her husband's leadership, El Centro flourished. It became a cultural hub for community members to congregate, seek guidance, assistance and moreover find a second family.

El Centro de la Raza's mission is to provide services, resources, knowledge and skills to community members, visitors and the like, with special attention to participants' needs and condition, "and to do so creatively with warmth, cultural sensitivity, fairness, enthusiasm compassion, honesty, optimism, patience and humility in all areas of work."

Jaime, a frequent El Centro visitor says, "The Seattle Team for Youth (a program run through El Centro) was extremely motivational for me. Participating in this program pushed me to complete high school and get involved in programs that I wouldn't have usually gotten involved with."

Estela Ortega sits on the Board of Trustees for the Network for Excellence in Washington Schools which was behind the McCleary case in Washington State. McCleary triumphed by taking the state to court for not upholding Washington's constitutional requirement to provide ample funding for education.

She also co-authored the statement for Initiative 1351 which reduced class sizes for the students of Washington State. Estela consistently exercises her political knowledge and capital through her involvement with various boards and committees in the areas of civil rights, education, transportation, economic development and the environment.