NEA honors Dr. Veronica García for leading public education advocacy in New Mexico
Annual gala also marks 50th anniversary of the NEA Human and Civil Rights Awards Dinner

BOSTON—Because of her hard work and strong advocacy for public education and students, especially for disadvantaged children from poor families, Dr. Veronica García, the superintendent of Santa Fe Public Schools, has been awarded the NEA H. Councill Trenholm Award.

Since 1967, NEA has recognized and honored those who have fought — and continue to fight — for human and civil rights. This year, NEA honored the outstanding work of 12 American social justice heroes at its annual Human and Civil Rights Awards Dinner on Saturday, July 1, in Boston. The theme of the awards dinner is, “Living the Legacy: After 50 Years, Still We Rise.”

“Dr. Veronica Garcia embodies the spirit of Dr. Maya Angelou’s beloved poem ‘Still I rise,’” said NEA President Lily Eskelsen García. “Through her deeds and actions, this human and civil rights hero is still rising and carrying the torch forward. Tonight, we renew our commitment to stand for racial and social justice and pledge to continue to shed a light on her work as she guides and inspires us all.”

“I truly am humbled and honored by this recognition,” said Garcia. “I stand on the shoulders of many fellow educators and advocates who believe public education is a human and civil right that we must continue to champion and protect. I thank NEA for this award.”

A teacher and education advocate, García has had a remarkable career spanning more than four decades. In the early ‘80s, she coordinated 55 special education programs and related services for the Albuquerque Public Schools, before becoming the district’s assistant director of special education. From 1999 to 2002, she served as superintendent of the Santa Fe Public Schools; then, from 2003 to 2010, she served as the state’s first Secretary of Education. Later, she was executive director of New Mexico Voices for Children where she advocated for the health and well-being of New Mexico’s children, in particular its poor Latino and Native American children.

"Dr. Veronica Garcia continues to be a strong, highly effective voice for New Mexico's children by supporting early education and elevating educators in her district," declared NEA-New Mexico President Betty Patterson.

Following the tumultuous 2016 presidential election, which resulted in unprecedented fear and anxiety among New Mexico’s students, Dr. Garcia issued a public statement that addressed the concerns of the community. “We know that in order for our students to achieve their potential, schools must continue to keep the focus on teaching and learning while ensuring that our students feel safe, secure, and welcome,” she wrote.

“As superintendent of the Santa Fe Public Schools, Veronica Garcia moved quickly to reassure families and students that the schools were a safe zone from immigration enforcement overreach,” said NEA-New Mexico Executive Director Charles Bowyer. “I have worked with Dr. Garcia over the last 25 years in her many important contributions to public education; in each role she held, whether as New Mexico's first Secretary of Education or as executive director of New Mexico’s Voices for Children, she worked tirelessly to end inequality in all its guises.”
Garcia also established a student support hotline so students and parents could report incidences of bullying and harassment as well as a Superintendent’s Equity Advisory Council to focus on the concerns of immigrant, LGBT, Native American, Special Ed, and other groups of students that feel under attack.

To read her full bio, please click here. Watch this video of Dr. Garcia advocating for all students, regardless of their economic or immigration status.

This year, NEA also recognized the anniversary of its merger with the American Teachers Association, which represented black teachers in segregated schools. ATA originally created the Human and Civil Rights Awards Dinner, and, as part of the merger, NEA continues this tradition 50 years later.

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