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NEA recognizes Illinois Education Association for pioneering brain trauma education

Annual gala also marks 50th anniversary of the NEA Human and Civil Rights Awards Dinner

BOSTON—The Illinois Education Association (IEA) is receiving the National Education Association’s prestigious Rosena J. Willis Memorial Award for bringing the issue of how brain trauma affects children’s ability to learn to the forefront of education. Partnering with the Illinois Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, IEA launched a pioneering program to inform school leaders, parents, communities, and educators about the impact of trauma on students.

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.”

“The educators of the Illinois Education Association embody the spirit of Dr. Maya Angelou’s beloved poem ‘Still I rise,’” said NEA President Lily Eskelsen García. “Through their deeds and actions, these human and civil rights heroes are 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 their work as they guide and inspire us all.”

One in four students will witness or experience a traumatic event before the age of 4, and more than two-thirds by age 16. These children do not—and cannot, according to IEA—simply close their eyes to what they’ve seen or experienced. Each forced eviction, arrest of an adult in their home, incidence of violence they witness or abusive incident they suffer themselves, triggers in children an instinctive reaction to “fight or flee.”

IEA’s trauma-informed trainings have reached thousands of educators. These trainings help educators create cool, calm classrooms, with a mixture of empathy, flexibility and brain-based strategies.

One of IEA’s innovative programs is an IEA-sponsored film screening of Paper Tigers, a school-based documentary from Walla Walla, Wash. which shows the impact of “one caring adult” in the lives of traumatized teens. IEA hosted screenings of the film to 500 participants at a time, and each showing mesmerized IEA educators, parents and community members. Many teachers said that the film changed the way they think about what they do.

With help from the NEA Foundation, IEA developed three pilot programs in districts south of Chicago, providing members with the professional development they need to be ready to teach all children. Now IEA has established a train-the-trainers campaign to extend this program across the state and engage all members in learning how trauma impacts children and what educators can do to reach and inspire students who have experienced and witnessed traumatic events.

To read the IEA’s full bio, please click here. Watch this video about how the IEA is leading the way in bringing the science of brain trauma in children to education.
This year, NEA also recognized the **anniversary of its merger with the American Teachers Association**, which represented black teachers in segregated school systems in the South. ATA originally created the Human and Civil Rights Awards Dinner, and, as part of the merger, NEA continues this awards tradition 50 years later.

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*The National Education Association is the nation’s largest professional employee organization, representing more than 3 million elementary and secondary teachers, higher education faculty, education support professionals, school administrators, retired educators, and students preparing to become teachers.*