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NEA posthumously honors Dolores McCracken with human and civil rights award

McCracken is among a dozen recipients of the prestigious NEA Human and Civil Rights Awards

HOUSTON—For a lifetime spent advocating for students and public education, as well as strong unionism, NEA recognized the late Dolores McCracken with its H. Council Trenholm Memorial Award.

“Dolores McCracken is more than worthy of being honored for her life’s work: fighting for education, social justice, and strong unions,” said Lily Eskelsen García, NEA president. “We are proud to recognize her achievements and how her legacy will continue in Pennsylvania, the state she gave so much to. In her absence, she has inspired so many others to continue fighting to make the lives of students and educators better.”

The Pennsylvanian education champion McCracken understood that strong labor advocacy was the way that schools and educators could maintain the highest standards for students, and devoted her activism to supporting unions. Alongside the Pennsylvania AFT, she encouraged unions to back candidates sympathetic to labor, and formed coalitions with other leaders. McCracken lived the motto “strength in numbers” in her own activism.

Another passion of McCracken’s was social justice, spawning from a belief that schools should be environments free of racial, social, and economic bias. In order to uphold this belief, she partnered with social justice organizations, school safety boards, and other entities tasked with supporting at-risk youth.

Based on her record of advocacy related to schools and unions, McCracken was elected the first non-teacher to the position of Treasurer of the Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA) in 2011. Her first measure, once assuming the position, was to increase ethnic minority recruitment, retention, and participation in PSEA by tapping into urban communities of schools that were not historically represented by the organization.

McCracken was so effective in improving the PSEA that she rose to the role of vice-president and eventually ascended to the presidency in 2017. As president, McCracken saw the importance of establishing the PSEA Education Justice Committee as a permanent structure in the organization. This committee is tasked with reviewing and responding to inequities in Pennsylvania public schools, with the goal of reforming the school system to make it more just.

Dolores McCracken passed away in November of 2018, but leaves behind a legacy of stronger unions, a PSEA that advocates for social justice, and improved public schools in Pennsylvania. Her tireless work made her an inspiration to many and a guide for those attempting to make similar positive impacts.

Dolores McCracken was one out of 12 outstanding social justice heroes honored at NEA’s 2019 NEA Human and Civil Rights Awards, which took place on July 3, in Houston, Texas. Click on link to view video tribute of McCracken.

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