

Human and Civil Rights Award Winner



Grace Mayer

Mary Hatwood Futrell Award

EDUCATOR AND PRESIDENT OF NEA-SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO, GRACE MAYER IS A RELENTLESS FIGHTER AND EFFECTIVE ORGANIZER.

Combining labor relations techniques and grassroots organizing, her community recognizes her as a leader in improving the working conditions for all educators in Santa Fe and in the last year she secured a huge victory for parents!

Growing up with a speech disability in a household experiencing poverty and childhood trauma, Ms. Mayer expresses her pride in overcoming her disability and poverty and earning degrees from The New School for Social Research and The University of Pennsylvania. Meeting her personal goals, she now vigorously works to safeguard equitable and just learning conditions for students and working conditions for educators.

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, Santa Fe public school parents and educators struggled to find quality daycare given so many businesses were forced to close. Many parents and educators who had children during the pandemic were not going to be able to return to the classroom because of the lack of day care and appropriate services for their children. Ms. Mayer, however, sprung into action! In the past year, she successfully used collective bargaining to increase the salary of educators across Santa Fe and help the district open its first high-quality, low-cost Early Childhood Day Care Center for educators in an elementary school. Forty teachers and Education Support Professionals (ESPs) benefitted by allowing educators to return to the classroom and have a safe place for their children during work hours; reducing both the need to find child care away from the job site and mitigating the high cost of raising a family in the city. The Center and its program meets the needs of working mothers, parents who are educators, and also supports the district in employee retention by demonstrating a firm commitment to staff that they are valued and deserve an elevated quality of life for them and their families.

These efforts, some of which resulted from American Rescue Plan Act funding, have been lauded by the White House for the effective and creative usage of these pandemic emergency funds.

As Santa Fe Public Schools Superintendent Hilario “Larry” Chavez explains, “The [day care] center, which is a prime example of how the labor movement makes notable contributions through commitment, action, and negotiation, is a result of her [Grace’s] early vision and foresight.”

Understanding that childcare for workers across New Mexico is desperately needed, Ms. Mayer also organized diverse groups to advocate for free daycare, which the governor has now made more accessible to many New Mexico families. The state also allows daycare workers to work on their degrees without cost to improve the pipeline for early childhood and public school teachers.

These successes have improved the workers’ lives in the Santa Fe district. President Mayer’s efforts continue the legacy of former NEA President Mary Hatwood Futrell, a stark defender of gender equity.