

Human and Civil Rights Award Winner



Jeanette Arellano

César Chávez Acción y Compromiso Human and Civil Rights Award

“YOU ARE NEVER STRONG ENOUGH THAT YOU DON’T NEED HELP,” STATED THE CIVIL RIGHTS AND LABOR ACTIVIST CÉSAR CHÁVEZ. IT IS IN THIS SPIRIT THAT JEANETTE ARELLANO—EDUCATOR, ARTIST, ORGANIZER, AND ACTIVIST—uses her artistic talent to organize groups across racial and ethnic backgrounds to support and empower workers and their families. Serving as the art educator at Hayes Bilingual School in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Ms. Arellano is also a Milwaukee Teachers Education Association leader.

Ms. Arellano is a steadfast activist who combines labor relations techniques, grassroots organizing, and art builds to improve working conditions for the working class and immigrant workers. In her work with Voces de la Frontera, a local immigrants’ rights organization, she leads art builds and tutors community members with English proficiency and literacy and for the United States citizenship exam.

The Human and Civil Rights Committee of the Wisconsin Education Association Council expresses their belief that Ms. Arellano “embodies the spirit and philosophy of César Chávez. She has made notable contributions to the labor movement through commitment, action, negotiation, and most importantly, art.”

Ms. Arellano has worked across and collaborated with several organizations to engage in activities that dignify workers and their jobs while giving them hope for a better life. First working with the Public Ally organization, she developed and implemented a youth and family program focused on food justice. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Ms. Arellano founded the only cross-cultural and bilingual mutual aid effort in Milwaukee, Ayuda Mutua MKE, which assisted residents with food and resources. She also co-founded Raíces Revolucionarias, a Milwaukee-based women’s collective (colectiva de mujeres) centering on the importance of cultural work to strengthen communities.

As an art teacher at Hayes Bilingual School, Ms. Arellano empowers students to use their creative skills in meaningful and impactful ways. She also organized teacher leaders to successfully advocate at the school board to ensure that every child in Milwaukee Public Schools has access to art, music, and gym. Ms. Arellano, in collaboration with other artists in the Art Build Workers collective, demonstrates a commitment to workers’ rights. The collective partnered with the NEA on several occasions to create artwork that was key in prepping for large-scale labor movements and strikes like the United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA) strike, the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) strike, and May Day.

Jeanette Arellano is a tireless leader, educator, and activist who continues to advance the needs of workers, immigrants, and students in her community through arts, culture, and organizing.