

United Teachers Los Angeles

Rosena J. Willis Memorial Award



United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) is not just a union, it is a powerhouse of activism, advocacy, and social justice. Founded in 1970 through the merger of two organizations, UTLA has been at the forefront of fighting for equity in public education ever since. This commitment to justice is deeply ingrained in the union's DNA, and it is this dedication that sets UTLA apart and for this, it is recognized with the 2024 Rosena J. Willis Memorial Award.

From the very beginning, UTLA has been a trailblazer in promoting diversity and ensuring that minority voices are heard and represented within the organization. Leaders of color have played pivotal roles in shaping the direction of the union, breaking barriers and setting new standards. Through the years, UTLA has seen numerous firsts with their officer roles, paving the way for more diverse leadership within the organization, now representing a diversity index of over 65%.

Under the leadership of President Cecily Myart-Cruz, UTLA has continued to prioritize diversity and inclusivity, with a majority of their Board of Directors being women. Cecily's collaborative approach to leadership, by sharing power with members, is emblematic of UTLA's commitment to fostering a sense of community and solidarity within the organization.

UTLA is not content to simply advocate for its members; it is also deeply engaged in the communities it serves. Through standing committees dedicated to various minority groups and initiatives like the Black Student Achievement Plan and the LGBTQIA+ Task Force, UTLA works to ensure that all students feel valued and supported within the school system.

The union's commitment to racial justice is unwavering, with UTLA actively participating in movements like Black Lives Matter and advocating for the divestment of funds from school police to support Black students. UTLA's partnership with organizations like Students Deserve and Reclaim Our Schools Los Angeles demonstrates their dedication to working alongside the community to create meaningful change.

UTLA's history of successful strikes and advocacy efforts have not just benefitted their members, but have also led to groundbreaking victories for public education as a whole. Initiatives like Community Schools and Ethnic Studies for all students have been championed by UTLA through their collective bargaining agreements, solidifying their reputation as a union that fights for the common good.

Most recently, UTLA's solidarity strike in 2023 with SEIU Local 99 further showcased their commitment to building a broader labor movement and standing in solidarity with other unions. This unity and collective action have been instrumental in advancing UTLA's vision for a more just and equitable education system. UTLA's work follows in the footsteps of Rosena J. Willis, a member whose legacy is built on equity, inclusion, and advocacy.