

# Connecticut Education Association NEWS RELEASE



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## **State's Largest Teachers Union Amplifies Call to Diversify the Teaching Profession**

CEA champions efforts to create a diverse teaching force that reflects the state's racial and ethnic diversity

CEA is stepping up its efforts to diversify Connecticut's teaching force by launching a statewide awareness campaign aimed at encouraging more young people of color to pursue careers in teaching. Right now, more than 40 percent of Connecticut's schoolchildren are minorities, but only 8 percent of the state's teachers are people of color.

The new campaign, Teaching Is Calling You, highlights teachers as role models for their students as well as mentors for young people who may never have considered the positive difference they could make as future educators.

"Teachers are the single most important in-school influence on student learning, and it stands to reason that our educators must reflect the culture and diversity of their students," said CEA President Jeff Leake. "Having a racially and culturally diverse teaching force enhances all students' academic achievement by providing them with multiple perspectives that allow them to gain a greater understanding of the world around them."

Research shows that all students, and particularly students of color, perform better in school, are more academically engaged, and feel more connected to their teachers when taught by educators of color.

Leake added, "While others seem content to just talk about the lack of diversity in our teaching force, CEA is working hard to make real progress as we enhance the diversity of our education professionals. With support from the National Education Association, we are one of just a few organizations supporting real efforts that will help increase the number of minorities entering the teaching profession."

CEA has a number of initiatives to help diversify the teaching profession, including awarding scholarships to minority students pursuing teaching careers and building upon the Future Educators of Diversity Clubs across the state that encourage high school students to examine teaching as a profession.

Now the Association has taken its efforts a step further by creating public awareness TV, radio, print, and social media ads, with video vignettes that illustrate the positive influence teachers of color have on their students and school communities.

Centered on the theme Teaching Is Calling You, the TV and radio ads underscore the vital need for more minority teachers in our public schools. Ads feature young minority teachers Jennifer Guime, who teaches biology at Central High School in Bridgeport, and 2020 Connecticut Teacher of the Year finalist Marquis Johnson, a science teacher at Sage Park Middle School in Windsor, discussing the need to improve their communities and the future.

"Not seeing yourself in the curriculum at school and not having any teachers who share your cultural identity feels non-inclusive. All children should have black and Hispanic role models," said Johnson.

In the ads, the teachers pose questions such as *How do you make a difference? How do you take what's working and make it better? How do you change the world?* They respond, *You teach. Teaching is calling you.*

2020 Connecticut Teacher of the Year Meghan Hatch-Geary, who teaches English at Woodland High School in Beacon Falls, is part of the campaign.

“Not only do students of color need to see themselves reflected in their teachers,” she says, “but white students need to have the experience of being taught by teachers of color as well. I, as a white teacher, would benefit pedagogically and personally from working with teachers of color.”

Besides Johnson, Guime, and Hatch-Geary, 10 other Connecticut teachers participated in the campaign, including

- Victor Alers, Blackham School, Bridgeport
- Nalleli Becerra-Garcia, Cesar Batalla School, Bridgeport
- Michael Brosnan, Bridgeport TEAM Facilitator & New Teacher Training Coordinator
- Wesley Daunis, Johnson School, Bridgeport
- Sheena Graham, 2019 Connecticut Teacher of the Year, Harding High School, Bridgeport
- William King, Bassick and Central High Schools, Bridgeport
- Tracey Lafayette, O’Brien STEM Academy, East Hartford
- Carla Lopes, Johnson School, Bridgeport
- Annee Pham, Blackham School, Bridgeport
- Omayra Rivera-Filardi, Johnson School, Bridgeport

Woven throughout the campaign are teachers’ own unique and compelling stories about the need for minority educators in the classroom. Many of the educators discuss their own personal experiences with minority teachers who influenced their lives and helped them become educators.

At age 14, Becerra-Garcia moved from Mexico to the U.S., and didn’t know a word of English. “It was hard, but I had a teacher, who also came to the U.S. from Mexico, who helped me. I wanted to be that teacher for someone else.”

King, who grew up in Bridgeport and is now teaching there, credits his mother—an educator—and his former teacher Sheena Graham—for encouraging him to enter the profession.

Rivera-Filardi, who moved to the states from Puerto Rico, owes her inspiration for becoming a teacher to her own middle school art teacher, who nurtured her artistic talents and put her on her current path. “She cared. She made time for you. I model my classroom after hers.”

The ads were shot in both English and Spanish at Geraldine Johnson Elementary School in Bridgeport and in the surrounding community. They feature a diverse group of students from that school community, including sixth-grade student Gianna Bartlett, whose mother, Shanteika, says, “It’s important to have teachers who reflect the students in their schools, who know the community and its strengths and needs. When you teach in the community where you grew up, you understand firsthand the environment you’re in and what your students may be facing.”

Fellow parent Kimberly Duval-Hall, whose daughter Zsahi appears in the TV ads, says, “Diversity among teachers is very important. We need to see those faces that match ours in the classroom. Children need to be able to look up and realize, I too can be a teacher and have an influence in my community.”

CEA is deeply committed to this project, and with support from the National Education Association, will continue to enhance its efforts to create a diverse teaching force that reflects the racial and ethnic diversity of Connecticut.

Watch the ad and learn more about the campaign, Teaching Is Calling You, at [cea.org/teachingiscalling](http://cea.org/teachingiscalling).

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The Connecticut Education Association is Connecticut’s largest teachers’ union, representing active and retired educators across the state. For further information contact Nancy Andrews at 860-725-6317, [nancya@cea.org](mailto:nancya@cea.org). Visit [cea.org](http://cea.org) or follow us on Twitter @ceanews and on Facebook at CTedAssoc.