

Top row, from left: Cecily Myart-Cruz, Lucia Lemieux, Julie Zeman Brady, Melanie Bean, David Fisher, Ann Betz, Estella Owoimaha-Church. Seated, from left: Mary Levi, CTA Vice President Theresa Montaño, President Eric Heins, Secretary-Treasurer David Goldberg, Elizabeth Villanueva.

Photo credit: Ingie Williams



Champions for Change

CTA's 2018 Human Rights Award Winners

Many CTA members work tirelessly inside and outside the classroom to champion those without voice, whether individual students or marginalized communities. Each year, CTA's Human Rights Awards recognize several of these educators. The 2018 winners, announced at CTA's Equity and Human Rights conference in early March, possess a commitment to social justice that is fierce — and inspiring.

"We honor these educators' work and dedication," said CTA President Eric Heins. "Their passion and sense of justice is extraordinary. They make a difference in so many lives."

Sacramento City Teachers Association

CTA Chapter Human Rights Award

"We need to continue to advocate for those kids, teachers, parents that don't have a voice."



AT A TIME when undocumented students feel more uncertain and unsafe than ever before, SCTA took steps to ensure that students have resources and information to protect themselves from removal and deportation.

SCTA worked with the local school district to create a Safe Haven District. In response to hate speech and incidents against undocumented students, SCTA created policy for how to interact with ICE agents, developed a teacher resource and tool kit, and a website to educate students, families, school staff and the community about the issues. In addition, SCTA offered weekend legal training for members and is currently working on district-wide training for all staff and parents in the community.

SCTA President David Fisher and human rights chair Melanie Bean accepted the award. See them talk about SCTA's work at tinyurl.com/dfisher-mbean.





▶ **Mary Levi**

American Indian/
Alaska Native Human
Rights Award in Honor of Jim
Clark

“A goal for me was to let our Native community see that CTA is on their side.”

A MEMBER OF the Upland Teachers Association, Levi is an active voice for American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) education issues on the local, state and national levels. Her passion has always been in educating others on Native American culture and language, and society's effects on Native students.

As chair of CTA's AI/AN Caucus, she connected with the California Native community to support legislative efforts to secure credentials for tribal members to teach their language, and to introduce curriculum change regarding California Native history for all grades.

Levi has advised CTA State Council on topics of mascots, stereotyping and California history, including *Alice Piper v. Big Pine* and the Relocation Act of 1973. She serves on CTA's Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee, is chair of the NEA AI/AN caucus, and is also helping other state associations develop their own AI/AN caucuses.

See Levi talk about her work at tinyurl.com/mlevi.

▶ **Lucia Lemieux**

Leadership in Lesbian
and Gay Issues Human
Rights Award in Honor of Nancy
Bailey

“I'm just there for them. I listen, mostly, and make them feel comfortable.”

IT STARTED IN 2011 when Lemieux took the small group of students that made up the Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) club on campus (now called Genders & Sexualities Alliance) and expanded it into an outstanding organization that made Newbury Park High School a safe place for all students and faculty. A member of the Unified Association of Conejo Teachers, she established GSA clubs at all high schools and changed the culture at the Conejo Valley School District.

In spring 2012, Lemieux helped publicize the GSAs' first Day of Silence, then largely unknown. It became a huge success. She received a CTA Guy DeRosa scholarship and used it to help create the annual interdistrict Under the Rainbow dance, fund bus trips to the Models of Pride and Creating Safe Spaces conferences, and create a literary and art magazine featuring LGBTQ+ students and their allies.

Lemieux created a workshop for her high school explaining the differences between the LGBTQ+ labels. She presents at Models of Pride, and serves as UACT's GLBT issues chair, as well as human rights contact for her service center.

See Lemieux talk about her work at tinyurl.com/llemieux.



▶ **Julie Zeman Brady**

CTA Member Human
Rights Award

“I try to instill in them that every small act of kindness makes a big difference.”

ZEMAN BRADY, vice president of the Piner-Olivet Educators Association, has been a mentor for many years to high school students interested in becoming teachers. In fact, many of her former students are now working toward their teaching credentials.

She is also involved in developing community-focused activities such as food and coat drives, and Pennies for Patients. When wildfires broke out in California, she gathered donations throughout her district to support families in need. She even worked with a nonprofit group to give each primary grade student at the most devastated school a stuffed animal.

While doing all of these amazing things in her community, she manages to devote a significant amount of time to protecting the rights of educators.

See Zeman Brady talk about her work at tinyurl.com/jzeman-brady.



Ann Betz

Physically/Mentally Challenged Students'
Issues Human Rights Award

“We make sure they're able to access their education and take part in all of the activities.”

BETZ, A MEMBER of the Charter Oak Educators Association, ensures that special education students have the same access and opportunities as their general education peers. She works closely with her district's faculty and staff to help them understand the needs of students with physical and mental challenges. She teaches students to become



▶ **Estella Owoimaha-Church**

CTA Peace and Justice Human Rights Award

“The focus is always on [students’] community, being their best selves for themselves and the neighborhood.”

OWOIMAHA-CHURCH, a member of the Centinela Valley Secondary Teachers Association, designed and implemented human rights curriculum and social justice-centered projects in her classroom. She has brought in community groups that provide opportunities for her students to practice peace, justice and empathy.

Her work with students and partners has led to students taking action in several ways, such as building new organizations on campus that promote inclusion and tolerance, and creating art that promotes peace. A finalist last fall for the Global Teacher Prize, Owoimaha-Church has also helped lead students on several collaborative projects with students in more than 70 countries to reach sustainable development goals as outlined by the United Nations. She is a local ambassador and representative to several agencies working toward peace, justice and international understanding, including Creative Visions’ Rock Your World and Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights’ Speak Truth to Power.

See *Owoimaha-Church* talk about her work at

tinyurl.com/eowoimaha-church.

self-advocates, able to stand up for themselves and for others, too. Her students become more confident and hone their skills through experiences that build their self-esteem, including volunteering, part-time jobs, training for certifications, and involvement in school activities, athletics and clubs.

During the past four years, Charter Oak High School added two new classrooms of students with moderate



▶ **Cecily Myart-Cruz**

Human Rights Award in Honor of Lois Tinson

“Educational justice is racial and social justice.”

CECILY MYART-CRUZ, vice president of United Teachers Los Angeles/NEA, uses her powerful voice to advocate for students, parents, educators and their communities. She has worked tirelessly as a social justice warrior and has spearheaded racial justice work within her union at the local, state and national levels.

Myart-Cruz consistently stands up for black lives, whether it is bravely taking a knee during a school board meeting, speaking out against the privatization of public schools in brown and black communities at the NAACP forum, fighting for the ending of random searches that disproportionately hurt black youth, or calling out legislators to support fully funded community schools. She has mentored countless leaders of color and brought them further into union work.

Myart-Cruz has been an unwavering advocate for all students. She worked with schools, parents and the community to oust “lemon principals” and collaborated with school sites to protest the excessive testing of our students.

See *Myart-Cruz* talk about her work at

tinyurl.com/cmmyart-cruz.

to severe disabilities, including students with autism and behavioral problems. Betz is now working with her department to create a sensory room, a safe space for these students that provides personalized sensory input to help them with self-regulation in preparation for classroom instruction.

See *Betz* talk about her work at tinyurl.com/annbetz.



▶ **Elizabeth Villanueva**

Cesar Chavez “Sí Se Puede” Human Rights Award

“It’s important for me to see myself in my students – to have the empathy, compassion, sense of humanity.”

MOST STUDENTS call her Maestra Villanueva. Some call her “Young Dolores.” But she is best known as “Elizabeth the activist.” A member of the Sacramento City Teachers Association, Villanueva understands issues that touch immigrants. She teaches cultural heritage to her students, instilling in them a sense of pride. She created a successful Dreamers program at her high school for DACA students, Dreamers, AB 540 students (nonresident students exempt from paying nonresident supplemental tuition), and students with no legal documentation. She meets with them weekly, holds parent information meetings, and presents “Know Your Rights” workshops where guest speakers talk about community support, immigration law and college planning. She empowers students to take on senior projects where they work with elementary and middle school Dreamers, create a Dreamers webpage on the school website, and plan a bilingual graduation ceremony. Villanueva plans to grow the program next year by creating a Dreamers Resource Center, training more teachers and developing a mentorship program.

See *Villanueva* talk about her work at

tinyurl.com/evillanueva.