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An affiliate of the National Education Association

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Testimony of
Nancy Andrews
Connecticut Education Association
Before the Education Committee

Re: SB 390 An Act Concerning Minority Teacher Recruitment and Retention

March 9, 2020

Members of the Education Committee, my name is Nancy Andrews, and I am the Communications Director at the Connecticut Education Association. CEA is Connecticut's largest teachers' union, representing active, retired, and aspiring educators across the state.

Thank you for reading my testimony today regarding Raised Bill 390, AAC Minority Teacher Recruitment and Retention. CEA strongly supports this bill. On a number of different fronts, CEA is leading the call to diversify our teaching profession. Today I will share with you more background about our new ad campaign, called **Teaching Is Calling You**, that has been airing on Connecticut television.

Background

More than 40 percent of Connecticut students are minorities, but only eight percent of teachers are minorities. The lack of minorities in the teaching profession is a concern for urban, suburban, and rural school districts. At least 23 Connecticut school districts do not have any minority educators on staff, denying students the opportunity to engage with teachers of color. Minority teachers in some CEA districts often say that they are the only minority in the entire school, if not the entire district.

Approximately 2,500 students are enrolled in teacher preparation programs at colleges throughout Connecticut, but only four percent are black, and only eight percent are Hispanic. The vast majority—82 percent—are white.

The minority teacher shortage is not exclusive to Connecticut. States across the country are feeling the impact of this critical shortage of teachers. We know we must take actions to reverse this trend to ensure students have the skills to succeed in our multicultural workplace.

Numerous studies show that students of color do better in school when they have teachers of color at the front of their classrooms. Students taught by teachers of the same race or ethnicity report feeling more connected to their teachers, being happier in class, and being more engaged academically. Black elementary school students perform better on standardized tests when taught by a black teacher, and having a black teacher in elementary school reduces the high school dropout rate for disadvantaged black males by 39 percent.

CEA's Initiatives

CEA strongly believes that an essential path to improving educational outcomes is hiring teachers who reflect the faces and cultural experiences of all students. CEA has a number of initiatives currently underway 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.

But today, I am here to tell you how we have taken our efforts a step further to ensure all students have access to positive teaching and learning from diverse educators. We have amplified our 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.

The new campaign, called **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 educators. The public awareness campaign includes TV, radio, print and social media ads, and video vignettes, all in English and Spanish, that illustrate the positive influence teachers of color have on their students and school communities. Please see a sampling of campaign materials in the attached documents.

The ads target young people to let them know that they can make a profound, positive difference in their communities by entering the teaching profession. It's important to have minority teachers so that students can learn from teachers who look like them, share their cultures and family contexts, and serve as role models.

We based our campaign on research that highlights the main reasons teachers get into the profession, and they are the same for teachers of color. Reasons include wanting to give back to their community, making a difference in the lives of students, wanting to change the world, and paying it forward. Many teachers point to specific educators who changed their lives and wanting to be that teacher for other students.

The teachers in the ads are from school districts across the state, including many from Bridgeport, where we shot the ads. They all have important stories to hear. Many would have liked to attend this hearing to share their experiences with you and explain the importance of this bill. But they are in their classrooms today, teaching.

Fortunately, some were able to attend today and you will hear from a number of teachers:

One of the stars of our TV ad, 2020 Teacher of the Year finalist Marquis Johnson, is a science teacher in Windsor, where he was educated. He will discuss the importance of an inclusive curriculum for all students.

2019 Teacher of the Year and Bridgeport music teacher Sheena Graham will share her experiences and discuss how a teacher of color influenced her profoundly and is the reason she teaches today.

Faith Sweeney, a Westport teacher, will discuss why a diversity of perspectives is essential for all students. She will share her stories of often being the only minority in her school and sometimes her entire district, as well as how she helps to tackle a number of racial incidents happening in the wealthy suburban schools where she has taught.

So many other teachers in our campaign could not attend today to testify and tell their stories in support of this bill, including 2020 Connecticut Teacher of the Year Meghan Hatch-Geary, who teaches English at Woodland High School. Meghan says not only do students of color need to see themselves reflected in their teachers, but white students need to have the experience of being taught by teachers of color as well.

Omayra Rivera-Filardi, a visual arts teacher in Bridgeport who moved to the states from Puerto Rico, credits her own art teacher with saving her life and inspiring her to become an educator.

Tracey Lafayette, a third grade teacher in Manchester, saw a lack of diversity among future educators while a student at UConn and started a Leadership in Diversity program, which is still operating successfully today.

Nalleli Becerra-Garcia moved from Mexico to the U.S. at age 14, not knowing a word of English. She says it was hard, but she had a teacher who had also come to the states from Mexico and who helped her. Because of that teacher, Nalleli joined the profession so that she could help students.

We hope you have an opportunity to hear more of our teachers' stories and to view the TV ads and video vignettes at www.CEA.org/teachingiscalling.

The ads, produced by Pedro Bermudez, of Revisionist Films in Hartford, communicate the important message in a relevant and emotionally engaging way. The ads let young people know that they can make a profound, positive difference in their communities by entering the teaching profession. Pedro, a well-known member of Hartford's Latino community, has a personal connection to the ad. He moved to Connecticut from Puerto Rico. His parents have worked as educators in the Hartford Public school system, and he and his two sisters were part of the group of plaintiffs in the *Sheff vs. O'Neill* case, that pushed for desegregation of schools across Connecticut.

CEA will continue to advocate for students and teachers, and for improving educational outcomes by expanding diversity among the teaching force. We support SB 390 and its goal of diversity. We ask committee members to consider adding a CEA teacher to the task force created by this bill.

TEACHING IS CALLING YOU



CEA campaign highlights need for more teachers of color



CEA Advisor • February-March 2020

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TEACHING IS CALLING YOU
CEA campaign highlights need for more teachers of color

CEA offers to provide... [Text continues with details about the campaign's goals and the importance of teacher diversity.]

2019 Connecticut Teacher of the Year
Shana Graham, Ninth Grade Teacher, Madison High School, Bridgeport

Shana Graham, a ninth grade teacher at Madison High School in Bridgeport, Connecticut, was named the 2019 Connecticut Teacher of the Year. She is a Black woman who has dedicated her career to providing a high-quality education for all her students, with a particular focus on supporting students from diverse backgrounds.

Willam King, ESL Teacher, Bassett and Central High Schools, Bridgeport

Willam King, an ESL teacher at Bassett and Central High Schools in Bridgeport, Connecticut, was named the 2019 Connecticut Teacher of the Year. He is a Black man who has dedicated his career to providing a high-quality education for all his students, with a particular focus on supporting students from diverse backgrounds.

Tracy Lafayette, Third Grade Teacher, O'Neal STEM Academy, East Hartford

Tracy Lafayette, a third grade teacher at O'Neal STEM Academy in East Hartford, Connecticut, was named the 2019 Connecticut Teacher of the Year. She is a Black woman who has dedicated her career to providing a high-quality education for all her students, with a particular focus on supporting students from diverse backgrounds.

CEA ADVISOR FEBRUARY-MARCH 2020

DIVERSIFYING

Margie Johnson, Science Teacher, Sage Park Middle School, Windsor

Margie Johnson, a science teacher at Sage Park Middle School in Windsor, Connecticut, was named the 2019 Connecticut Teacher of the Year. She is a Black woman who has dedicated her career to providing a high-quality education for all her students, with a particular focus on supporting students from diverse backgrounds.

Jennifer Quinn, Biology Teacher, Central High School, Bridgeport

Jennifer Quinn, a biology teacher at Central High School in Bridgeport, Connecticut, was named the 2019 Connecticut Teacher of the Year. She is a Black woman who has dedicated her career to providing a high-quality education for all her students, with a particular focus on supporting students from diverse backgrounds.

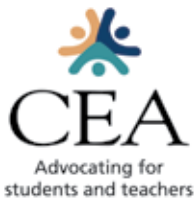
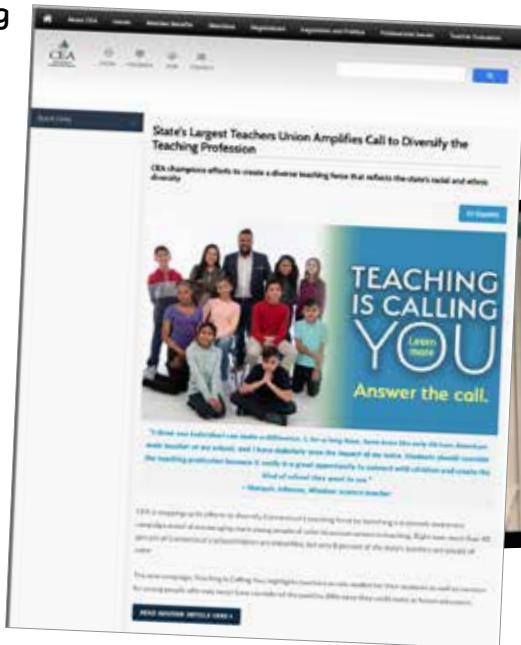
Omeyra Rivera-Farid, Visual Arts Teacher, Gennepine Johnson School, Bridgeport

Omeyra Rivera-Farid, a visual arts teacher at Gennepine Johnson School in Bridgeport, Connecticut, was named the 2019 Connecticut Teacher of the Year. She is a Black woman who has dedicated her career to providing a high-quality education for all her students, with a particular focus on supporting students from diverse backgrounds.

FUTURE EDUCATORS OF DIVERSITY

CEA is offering to provide... [Text continues with details about the campaign's goals and the importance of teacher diversity.]

cea.org/teachingiscalling



Online and print ads



TEACHING IS CALLING YOU
ANSWER THE CALL
CEA



HOW DO YOU MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THE LIFE OF A CHILD?
YOU TEACH.



HOW DO YOU CHANGE THE WORLD?
YOU TEACH.
FIND OUT MORE AT CEA.ORG.



LA VOCACIÓN DE MAESTRO TE LLAMA
Responde al llamado
CEA



HOW DO YOU CHANGE THE WORLD?
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Visita cea.org para aprender más.

WE NEED YOU.
TEACHING IS CALLING YOU.
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Para más información, visita cea.org.



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HELP MAKE OUR DREAMS COME TRUE.
BECOME A TEACHER.
Find out more.



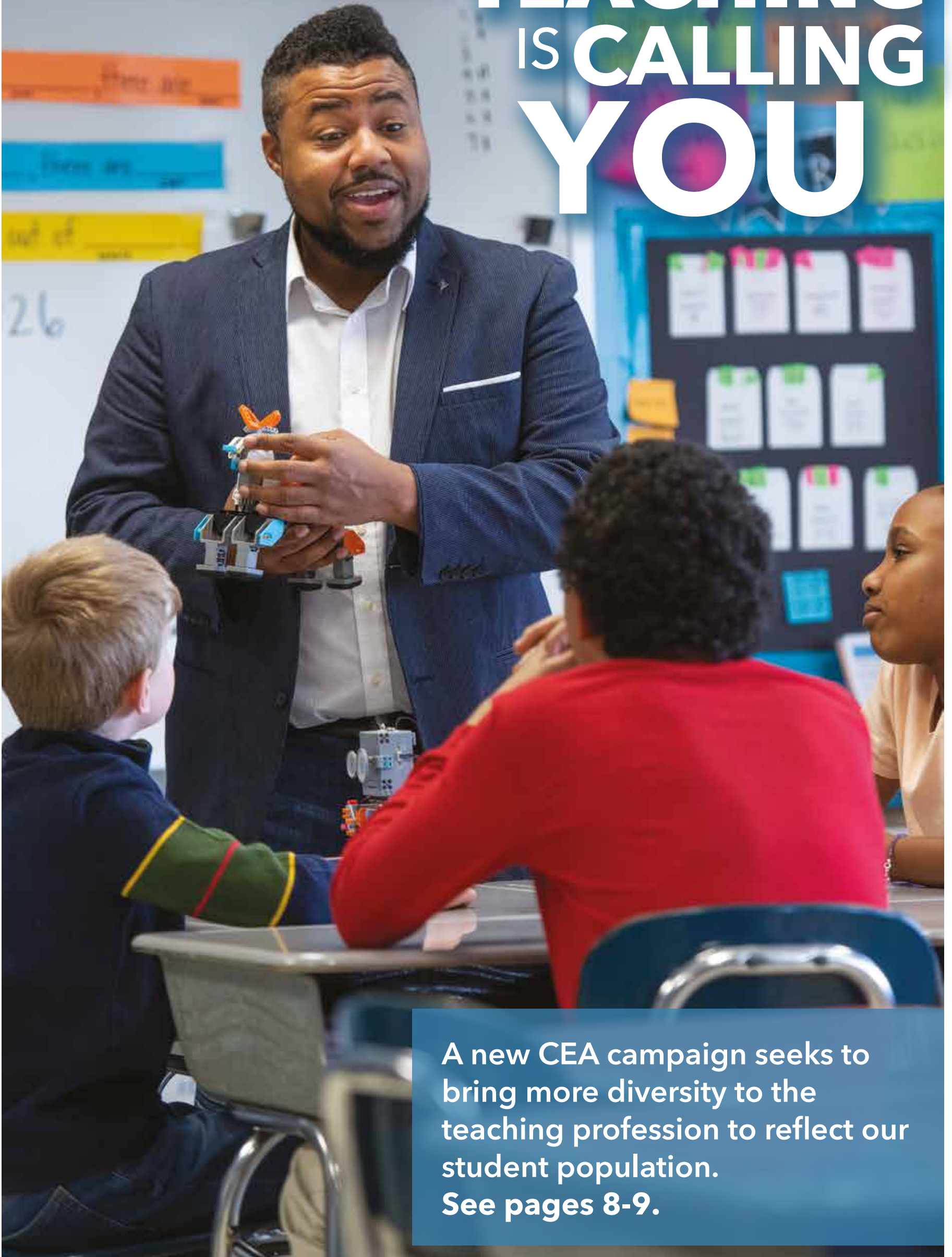
CEA

HELP MAKE OUR DREAMS COME TRUE.
BECOME A TEACHER.

CEA *Advisor*

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TEACHING IS CALLING YOU



A new CEA campaign seeks to bring more diversity to the teaching profession to reflect our student population.
See pages 8-9.

TEACHING IS CALLING YOU

CEA campaign highlights need for more teachers of color

CEA's efforts to diversify Connecticut's teaching force just got a tremendous boost thanks to a grant from the National Education Association.

"This grant allows us to redouble our efforts to bring more teachers of color into the profession," says CEA President Jeff Leake. "All students should have access to diverse educators, to see and hear and learn from teachers who look like them and reflect their cultural experiences."

As it stands, more than 40 percent of Connecticut's schoolchildren—but only eight percent of their teachers—are people of color, which is a concern because numerous studies show that students of color perform better in school, are more academically engaged, and feel more connected to their teachers when they have educators of color.

CEA's efforts to diversify the teaching profession include awarding scholarships to minority students pursuing teaching careers, building upon the Future Educators of Diversity pilot program (see box, next page) that encourages high school students to examine teaching as a profession, and creating public awareness TV, radio, print, and social media campaigns, with video vignettes that illustrate the positive influence teachers of color have on their students and school communities.

CEA's latest campaign, which will air in March, shines a spotlight on CEA member 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. CEA's Communications Department

interviewed, photographed, and filmed teachers, students, and parents at Geraldine Johnson School in Bridgeport and the surrounding community, and the campaign includes both English- and Spanish-language components.

"CEA has been doing a wonderful job of trying to recruit and retain more teachers of color," says bilingual talented and gifted teacher Ana Batista, of Bridgeport's Cesar Battalla School. "It's important for students to look up and see teachers who resemble them and set high expectations for them, to know that they can achieve more, and to realize, here is someone who has earned two or three degrees—and I can too. As a bilingual teacher, I am always reminding my students that that's how I became who I am—through education."

"I can't say enough how excited I am that this initiative is happening," says 2020 Connecticut Teacher of the Year Meghan Hatch-Geary, who teaches English at Regional District 16's Woodland High School. "Students can go through an entire K-12 education in America, and never have a teacher of color, and that's problematic. Teachers are vital to shaping, creating, and reinforcing a functioning and equitable democracy in our society, and if we don't have people who look like and represent that democracy and that society, that's extremely problematic. Not only do students of color need to see themselves reflected in their teachers, 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. If we're having



Aside from the teachers featured on these pages, also participating in CEA's Teaching Is Calling You campaign are (L-R) 2020 Connecticut Teacher of the Year Meghan Hatch-Geary (Region 16) and Bridgeport teachers Victor Alers, Nalleli Becerra-Garcia, Mike Brosnan, Annee Pham, Carla Lopes, and Wesley Daunis.

these conversations at the table, and we're only getting one perspective, if the people involved in the decision-making are all coming from similar backgrounds, then we're not solving the problems."

"Students need many, many role models," says Carla Lopes, a special education teacher at Johnson School. "I never had a teacher of color until I reached middle school. Someone who looks like me, someone who grew up in the same neighborhood—it's inspiring to see!"

"At age 14, I moved from Mexico to the United States," says Battalla School bilingual teacher Nalleli Becerra-Garcia. "It was hard, but I had a teacher who helped me, and I wanted to be that teacher for someone else."

Bridgeport parent

Shanteika Bartlett, whose daughter Gianna is featured in CEA's campaign, 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, who appears in the TV ad, adds, "Diversity among teachers is very important. We need to see those faces that match ours in the classroom. We need to be relatable. Children need to be able to look up and realize, I too can be a teacher and have an influence in my community."

Meet some of the teachers featured in our campaign and read their stories.

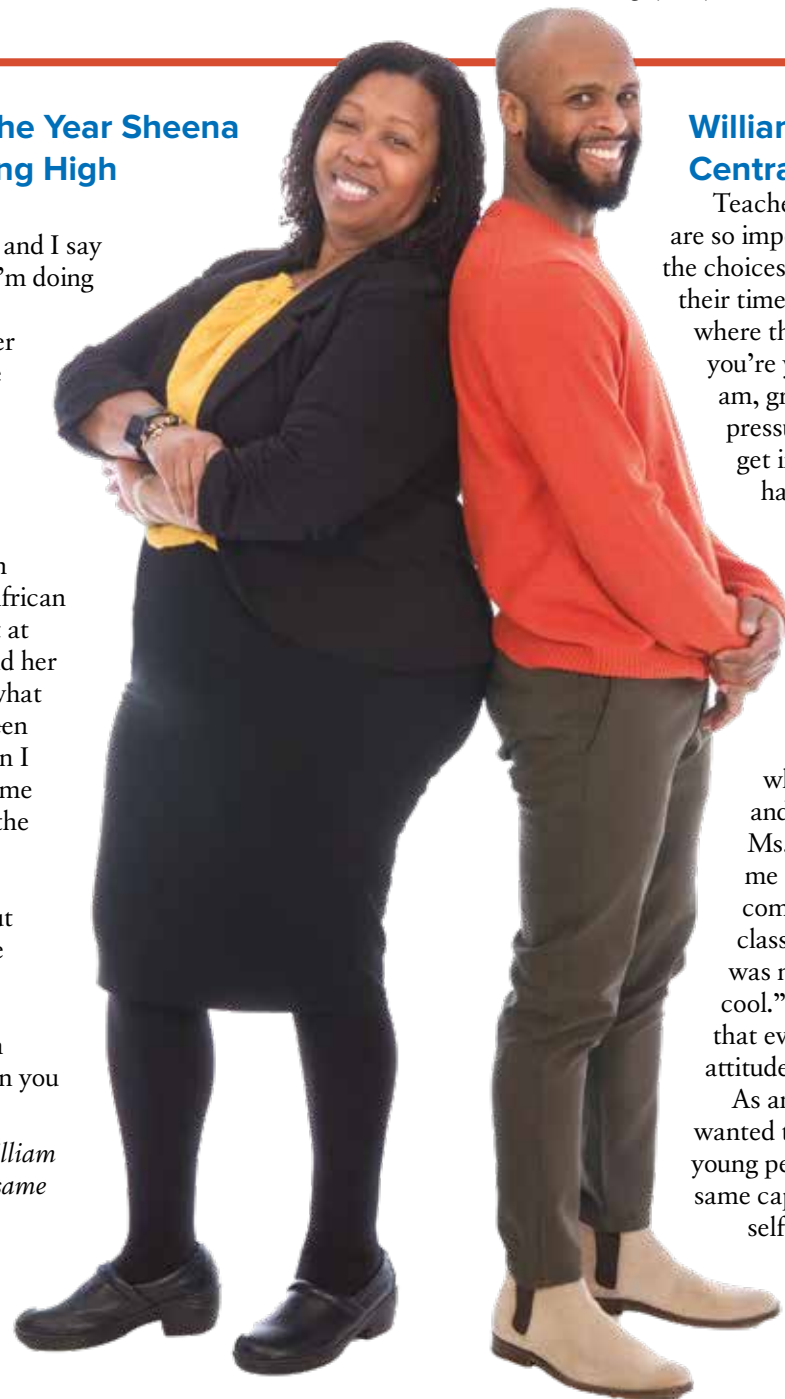
2019 Connecticut Teacher of the Year Sheena Graham, Music Teacher, Harding High School, Bridgeport

This is my 37th year as a music teacher, and I say that with a smile, because I'm still happy. I'm doing what I'm most passionate about, and I'm giving students an outlet that makes it easier for them to deal with what they have to do the rest of the day. Sometimes when they get to us, they're a little broken and a little stressed, and this gives them something to do that is new and exciting. To me, the arts are a healing factor.

I was the only minority in my senior high school English class, and my teacher was African American. She challenged me in a way that at first I thought she didn't like me—and I told her so! I said, "You're singling me out." Well, what Mrs. Christian noticed was that I hadn't been pushed as hard as she felt I should be. When I left and graduated from college, I had to come back and thank her, because I think being the only minority in a class, sometimes the expectations weren't as high for me. She zeroed in on that. She genuinely cared about everyone but wasn't accepting less than the best from anyone. Years later, she won the Milken Educator Award.

Having a teacher who looks like you can make you realize you can achieve more than you had set your eyes on.

A former student of Sheena Graham's, William King is now an educator too, teaching in the same district where he grew up.



William King, ESL Teacher, Bassick and Central High Schools, Bridgeport

Teachers who have grown up with a certain experience are so important. I grew up in Bridgeport, where some of the choices facing young people can be difficult, where their time and resources are allocated to survival, and where they might be pressured to grow up fast. When you're young and African American and Latino, as I am, growing up in an inner city, there's a level of pressure you may be faced with to commit crimes, to get involved with the wrong crowd, to skip school. I had to fight all of that, and it wasn't easy, while at the same time trying to perform well in school, which I didn't always do. As an educator now, part of my job is to not only teach curriculum but to teach young people about decision-making, because their biggest battles are not necessarily reading a book.

My inspiration to become a teacher came from the people who raised me—my mother, who was an educator and was my first teacher, and Ms. Sheena Graham, who taught me in school. Ms. Graham is like my second mother. She exposed me to a certain discipline you need to have—a command and respect for your craft. In her music class, for example, warmups were warmups. There was no, "I don't feel like doing this," or, "I'm too cool." *Everyone* did warmups, and that showed me that even in a space where you have competing attitudes, the teacher was your model.

As an educator, I wanted to be like Ms. Graham. I wanted to have that presence in a room. I encourage young people to go into teaching, where they have the same capacity to make change and to realize their own self-worth.

Marquis Johnson, Science Teacher, Sage Park Middle School, Windsor

I have always had a passion for science and an interest in working with young people from the time I was involved in youth activities in high school. In college, I studied molecular biology on a pre-med track but realized I wanted to make a difference in another way. I had been told I had a knack for teaching.

A lot of young people of color don't see themselves in the curriculum or in the profession. Growing up in Windsor, where I now teach, I had one black female teacher and one black male teacher. When I got to college and went to a historically black university, it was then that I could see myself as a teacher. My father used to say, "As long as there are children, we'll need teachers."

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.



2020 Connecticut Teacher of the Year finalist Marquis Johnson is part of CEA's Teaching Is Calling You campaign, aimed at encouraging more students—and particularly children of color—to consider teaching careers.

Tracey Lafayette, Third-Grade Teacher, O'Brien STEM Academy, East Hartford

This is my fourth year as a teacher, and this profession is a good place to be.

Not long ago, when I was pursuing an education degree at UConn, I found that I was the only black student in a cohort of 144 education students. There was one student who was Hispanic, and another who was Asian.

Seeing the lack of diversity among future educators, I started a Leadership in Diversity program. Now we have LID educators who gather regularly—which is good, especially for those who are solos in their schools—and they serve as mentors for young people coming into the profession.

Long-term planning is the solution. I see young kids interested in teaching, as early as the elementary level. We have lunch together, we have a Future Teachers Club, and they go into classrooms and observe and get involved.

The student population in my school is approximately 40 percent Hispanic and 30 percent black, but we have only four classroom teachers of color, which means not all children will have teachers of color.

There is more work to do.



FUTURE EDUCATORS OF DIVERSITY

Thanks to a grant from the National Education Association, CEA is working with teachers from around the state to establish and expand the number of high school student clubs promoting teaching as a profession for minority students. Future Educators of Diversity Clubs are established or are forming in Danbury, East Hartford, Manchester, West Hartford, and Stamford.

In Stamford, physical education teacher Dan Lauture runs a club whose many planned and ongoing activities include providing internships for seniors, having students give a video presentation at a Board of Education meeting, holding an end-of-year meeting with other Future Educators of Diversity Clubs, and participating in a poster contest illustrating why it's important to have teachers of color and encouraging their peers to examine careers in education.

Dr. Lara White, an AP psychology teacher at Hall High School, leads West Hartford's Future Educators of Diversity Club, which meets every Thursday

Jennifer Guime, Biology Teacher, Central High School, Bridgeport

I have been teaching science for six years at Central High School. I knew I wanted to do something important, something that allowed me to work with people, help them, and do some good. Teaching fit in with all of those goals.

I moved from New York to Bridgeport at the age of seven and spoke no English—only Spanish. That was hard, and it helped me later relate to students who are in the same situation today.

In high school I had a teacher who really stood out for me, because he held us to high standards but didn't expect perfection—he knew we could have "off" days.

For me, teaching is fun but also challenging, because the needs of students are all over the map academically and emotionally, more is put on teachers' plates as far as assessments, and there is a need for social-emotional learning, which has not been a part of teacher training.

Anytime we meet someone whose experiences are different from ours, that enriches us as people.



Omayra Rivera-Filardi, Visual Arts Teacher, Geraldine Johnson School, Bridgeport

The reason I went into teaching is that I had teachers who created a bridge for me. I'm Puerto Rican, and English is a second language for me. My older sister and brother both dropped out of high school.

When my family moved to the Bronx, I was not allowed to play outside, like I had been able to do in Puerto Rico. So I took up art at home. I spent hours every day indoors, drawing. But it wasn't until I got to middle school that I saw all this amazing student artwork displayed all over the place. It was framed, and it was there for everyone to see.

My middle school art teacher, Sheila Hecht, was a stoic, serious woman. Early on, she asked me if I could draw, and I didn't know how to answer. So she reached into her desk and pulled out four pages of drawing exercises for me to take home. I brought these completed pages to school the next day, and Ms. Hecht was surprised to get them back so quickly. I remember she looked them over, then looked me square in the eye and said, "Next time someone asks if you can draw, you say, 'Yes.'" She then asked me for my class schedule and had it changed the very next day so that it included art.

You knew she cared. She made time for you. I model my classroom after hers. Ms. Hecht created a bridge for me that my mother couldn't do culturally. My mother didn't know about applying to schools, the ins and outs.

Later, I had a high school art teacher who helped me get a scholarship to attend college. He told me, "You'll have a lot of labels put on you depending on the color of your skin or where you live. Don't let anyone dictate who you're going to be. Show them who you are."

Children of color are not used to seeing teachers of color, so it can be hard to imagine yourself in that role. But somewhere along the line, we have to help children ask themselves, "What if I could teach in a community like the one I grew up in? What if I could join a profession that allows me to inspire many generations?"

I am still the only Latina teacher in my building.



after school in her classroom.

Students from West Hartford's Hall and Conard high schools recently presented on their club's mission and activities at a board of education meeting and plan to present to eighth-grade students on a variety of topics examining race and discrimination at King Phillip Middle School's Diversity Day.

"It's an all-day event, and our students gain experience teaching, presenting, and providing instruction in front of a classroom," says White. "Other events the club has planned include reading at the elementary schools in March and going on college visits in April or May to UConn and Central Connecticut State University, where they will tour the campuses, have lunch, and learn about scholarship opportunities."