



## From Burnout to Activist Leader

*A Tennessee educator discovered her leadership and her voice through local activism*

Like many other educators, Sienna Holl did not initially see herself as a leader. For her first 14 years as an English teacher in Rutherford County, TN, Sienna's priority was to ensure her students felt cared for and loved. The rest of her time was dedicated to improving her instructional practice. For Sienna, this is what she believed was expected of her and what she was supposed to do.

"Whether or not these kids remember anything about literary devices, they're going to know that Ms. Holl loved them and was doing her best," says Holl.

Though she was passionate, Sienna says there was always a point during the school year when she would begin to feel overwhelmed, even questioning if she could make it to the end of the school year. Every year, little by little, she began to doubt if she could continue in a career she loved. Every year, those feelings of burnout would occur much earlier in the school year.

"You think it would be easier as you gain more experience, and yet, every year as a teacher gets harder," Holl says.

Part of Sienna's frustration was the lack of inclusion she felt in decisions about her students and her classroom. Sienna knew district officials were not including educators in conversations about what was best for Rutherford County's students and educators. She felt powerless. Sienna soon learned that she was not alone.

### The Local Association is Key to Leader Identification and Development

One day the president of the Rutherford County Education Association gave her a membership application. Sienna signed the form and went to her first union meeting. Holl says that when she attended the meeting, "It felt like coming home."

The local president immediately asked Holl to serve on the local's executive committee.

"Being in a room with like-minded professionals who were as passionate as I was and plugging into this group of people who were saying 'Yeah, the system is broken, and we are going to do something about it,'" says Holl.

That invitation gave Sienna the boost she needed. Soon after the meeting, Sienna was invited to attend "Civication." Civication is an organizing event the Tennessee Education Association (TEA) holds



Sienna Holl is a veteran educator in Rutherford County, TN.

each year when the state legislature convenes. Civication begins with a briefing on TEA's legislative priorities, followed immediately by a mobilization effort that asks members to meet at the capitol, attend hearings, and hold one-to-one conversations with lawmakers to advance the affiliate's legislative goals.

"It was so exciting to be there, to talk to legislators," says Holl. "You see all the work that TEA does for us, and you are like, 'Yes! I want to be a part of this! Yes, I want to help!' Most teachers don't have the time or the energy to keep up with this stuff, to fight for this stuff."

Even though Sienna had taught for years, she never saw her work as a classroom teacher as leadership.

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Civication, however, was the start of her Association leadership. It was her first experience with what labor organizer Michael Gecan describes as “... moving from private pain to public actor.” Civication allowed Sienna to channel her powerlessness and helped her understand the power of her voice.

Civication, like other union-led experiences, is critical because it provides opportunities for leaders to develop their awareness and begin to imagine a new way of leading.

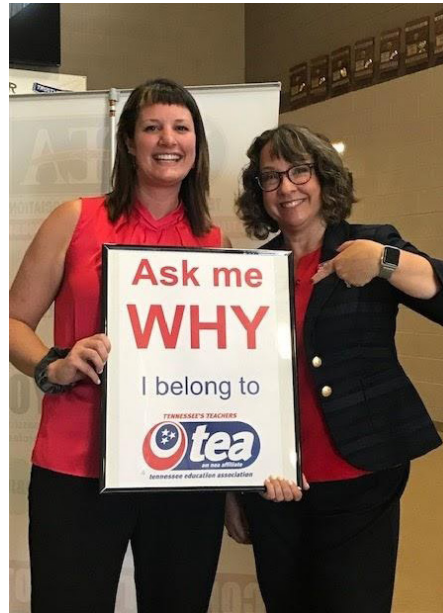
## Leadership is a Journey and Process

Sienna’s story is indicative of the leadership challenge for the NEA and its local and state affiliates: many educators are culturally competent, highly skilled professionals, who do meaningful work with students and communities every day, but they do not consider themselves leaders.

“I’m finding this strength and capability that’s always been there, but I never would’ve gone looking for it,” says Holl.

The NEA Leadership Competency Framework was designed to shift the paradigm and conversation so that educator views themselves as leaders. The framework explicitly defines leadership, not by title alone, but rather as a set of interconnected, research-based, and member-developed domains that lists the skills every educator should know, regardless of their role.

Another critical aspect of the leaders’ development process is access to opportunities to practice their skills and receive immediate feedback. In Sienna’s case,



Sienna Holl (left) pictured with a member of the Rutherford County Education Association.

Civication was an opportunity to witness the impact and influence she and hundreds of other educators had on lawmakers, even if they did not win on all the issues.

Leaders also need opportunities to lead. For Holl, she chose to assume a higher-level leadership role in her local. Still, for other educators, the opportunity to serve and lead means developing a plan to improve their instructional strategies or getting involved in local campaigns. In Sienna’s case, two years after Civication, she was elected vice president of her local association.

Leadership development also requires a commitment to ongoing learning. Sienna’s journey has led to her achieving her certification to teach yoga and training to run a 5K. At first glance, these things may not be connected to leadership. Despite her years in the classroom, Holl’s accomplishments demonstrate that she is committed to learning and growing. Moreover, Sienna’s commitment to self-care is a central

theme in the NEA Leadership Competency Framework, most notably in the social and emotional intelligence (SEI) domain. The leaders’ social, mental, and physical health is equally essential to their ability to organize others.

Holl’s story also highlights another significant component of the development journey for leaders: leadership development requires a community. Much research and literature on leadership define a leader as someone with influence. In the case of the NEA’s approach to leadership, leaders strengthen their leadership when they can work alongside other leaders and collectively use their skills to reimagine their organizations, build communities, and redesign systems.

## Leadership Development Creates Change

Sienna says that teaching remains a challenge. However, she has become more resilient and confident because of her investment in her development. She is growing in her leadership partly because she now identifies activists and leaders, much like the person who invited her to her first union meeting.

This year, Sienna became president of Rutherford County EA when the president accepted a job outside the district. She is using everything she has learned to help other educators and students develop their leadership skills, and these efforts have had an immediate impact.

Recently, educators in Rutherford County organized to secure enough

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votes from educators to create a team that will meet and collaborate with district administration using an interest-based approach to addressing student learning conditions and working conditions for educators.

the Moscone Convention Center, March 10-12. The theme was Joy, Justice, Excellence: The Strength of Educators. The Brilliance of Students. The Power of Community.

The purpose of the Summit is to

Donato-Sapp, a 13-year-old activist, artist, and self-declared Black Scholar; and Charles Best, founder of Donors Choose. The summit also featured two student poets from Kansas, Aleko Khundadze and Ben Jackson.

For many educators, the Summit is the only leadership training they receive. Even for veteran leaders and members, like Kentucky Education Association President Eddie Campbell, the Summit provides new ideas and new ways of thinking about how he supports other leaders in Kentucky.

“I plan to utilize [what I learned] from the Summit to grow strong locals back home,” said Campbell.

While the focus of the Summit was leadership development, the experience continued to offer opportunities to network and socialize. This is especially important as more than 60 percent of the members who attended have never attended an NEA event.



Summit participants give a standing ovation to Helena Donato-Sapp, one of three keynoters for this year's Summit.

## Joy, Justice, and Excellence (and Leadership!)

*Summit is helping to shift the conversation around the importance of leadership development*

SAN FRANCISCO, CA – Linda Matsumoto, an education support professional from Evanston, IL, says the Summit was one of the best conferences she has attended.

“The workshops I attended were beyond impactful and transformative experiences. They were a call to action!” said Matsumoto, who also served as a presenter at the Summit.

Matsumoto was among the more than 1,500 NEA members who attended the 2023 NEA National Leadership Summit at

develop activist leaders and prepare them with the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to lead relevant, thriving associations and to lead in their professions.

The Summit featured over 140 breakout sessions led and facilitated by NEA members and staff. Each session focused on expanding members’ awareness of the NEA Leadership Competency Framework. The framework includes seven member-developed and researched-based domains: advocacy, communication, governance and leadership, leading our professions, organizing, social and emotional intelligence, and strategy and fiscal health.

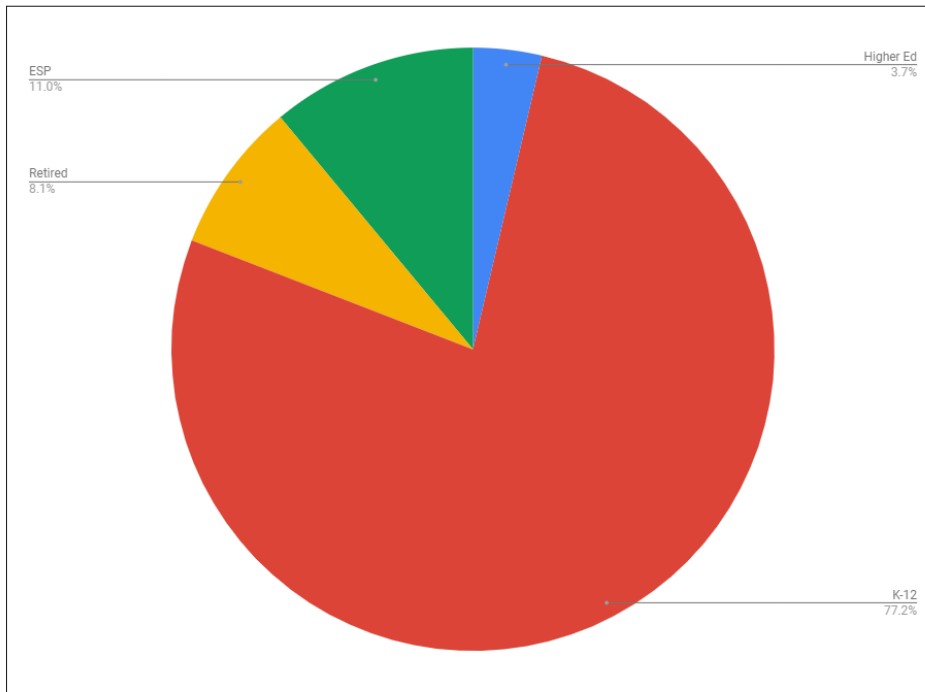
Other featured speakers included: Dr. Christopher Edmin, the Robert Naslund Endowed Chair in Curriculum and Teaching at the University of Southern California; Helena



NEA-Retired member leader Julie Horwin (AZ) was among the nearly 200 members who facilitated sessions during the 2023 Summit.

After 2.5 days, participants expressed satisfaction with the summit in the survey. Ninety-five percent of members said the summit fulfilled its purpose, and 90% would recommend it to other member leaders.

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The above graph shows a breakdown of the Summit presenters by membership category.

To view the plenary sessions, visit [NEA's YouTube channel](#).

Planning for the 2024 NEA National Leadership Summit is underway. The Summit is March 1-3 in Chicago, IL, at the Hyatt Regency. More information, including registration and opportunities to submit a request for proposal (RFP), will be posted at [www.nea.org/leadershipsummit](http://www.nea.org/leadershipsummit).

## When Leadership Finds You. A Kansas Educator answers the call to lead

By Yvonne White and Annlise Cohon, National Education Association

EUDORA, KS - Rebecca Killen is an elementary music teacher at Eudora Elementary School. She has served as a building representative,



Rebecca Killen, Eudora Elementary School music teacher and KNEA member

membership chair, local association president, and Kansas National

Education Association (KNEA) Leadership Development trainer in her local association.

Killen was elected president of her local in 2020. After the election, Rebecca was eager to expand her knowledge and find relevant resources to support her and other members. As an emerging leader in the Association, Rebecca felt she needed more training to manage and lead the Association. She wanted to effectively support members with workplace issues and help members better understand the value of KNEA membership.

Through social media, Rebecca learned about NEA National Leadership Summit. The Summit is a leadership training for NEA members to strengthen educators' skills in seven competency domains. These interconnected domains define the skills and knowledge every educator needs to lead in their career, profession, and union. Rebecca registered for the NEA National Leadership, which was virtual for the first time in NEA's history due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Immediately after the Summit, Rebecca could apply what she learned, which helped her motivate other members to get involved. Rebecca also began to hold meetings with members and felt better equipped to support members with workplace issues.

It wasn't long before KNEA staff recognized Rebecca's efforts and recruited her to participate in a newly developed leadership cohort.

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The purpose of the cohort is to assist member leaders in shifting the paradigm of what it means to be an education leader. The program is also designed to expand leaders' knowledge, skills, and abilities in the seven competency domains outlined in the NEA Leadership Competency Framework.

With support from NEA and KNEA staff, cohort members engage in virtual and in-person training and receive tools to help them identify, coach, and assist peers in understanding and using the framework. Using this train-the-trainer model, especially when it is member-to-member, is an effective approach to leadership development and has had success with other state affiliates. Over time, KNEA envisions creating a network of KNEA trainers who train other leaders, which builds KNEA's capacity to win on the issues most significant to Kansas educators.

Rebecca and other cohort members recently presented at the 2023 NEA National Leadership Summit. Their session provided the leaders a platform to share what they learned in developing their cohort program, hoping others can replicate it in their states.

In three years, Rebecca has grown from not knowing what to expect as a local leader to training peers to use the NEA Leadership Competency Framework to achieve their career and professional goals.

Rebecca's association has also grown. The leadership team is more cohesive, and members have become more involved in the community.

## NEA Leadership Competency Spotlight: Social and Emotional Intelligence

By Yvonne White

Like many other institutions, the coronavirus forever changes schools, including colleges and universities. Hundreds of thousands of lives were lost. There was, and remains, a collective grief. Routines and practices were changed. The pandemic closed schools and disrupted learning. Many students no longer had access to direct, in-person support and extracurricular activities. Educators suffered as well from the lack of routine. Many scrambled to find resources to protect their health while pivoting to learn new teaching methods to support students' academic and social, and emotional needs.

The pandemic spotlighted what many educators already knew – inequities were, and remain, pervasive in many schools. The pandemic also revealed that adults need support to strengthen their social and emotional intelligence to sustain themselves and support their peers and students.

In response to the needs of educators across the country, NEA redirected its resources to develop an array of supports, from webinars and toolkits to lobbying for federal dollars to ensure schools and communities could support students and their families. Part of the response included a review of the NEA Leadership Competency Framework.

It took a group of educators and NEA staff a short time to conclude that the framework needed an explicit focus on the social and emotional skills

every educator needs to be successful, regardless of the role they plan within or outside their worksites. These skills are helpful in professional spaces and equally beneficial for building resilience in adults and overall mental health and well-being. This was the impetus for creating the seventh domain for the framework: social and emotional intelligence.

The domain makes clear that every education leader should:

- understand their emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across many different contexts (self-awareness);
- be able to manage their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations and to work to achieve goals and aspirations even in times of chaos (self-management);
- understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures (social awareness);
- be able to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups and (relationship-building skills);
- be able to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations (responsible decision-making).

The social and emotional intelligence domain borrows heavily from the social and emotional (SEL) framework created by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). NEA partnered with CASEL in the redesign.

These skills are also beneficial to Association leaders and necessary for creating effective teams and organizations.

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Would you like to assess your social and emotional intelligence competency? Complete the social and emotional intelligence (SEI) self-assessment to determine your strengths and growth areas: [www.nea.org/pep](http://www.nea.org/pep).

Since 2020, NEA has continued to increase opportunities for members to learn and provide NEA members steeped in social and emotional intelligence a chance to share their knowledge and

skills with others. NEA received and accepted more SEI-focused proposals for the 2023 NEA National Leadership Summit than any other domain in the framework. The response to those sessions was positive and overwhelming.

NEA staff also created a cross-center team that continues to respond to members' needs. Many of the resources created by the group are available at <https://www.nea.org/professional-excellence/student-engagement/tools-tips/resources-social-emotional-learning-sel-and-student-and-educator-mental-health>

### Leading with SEL

In addition to dealing with book bans and censorship, many educators, parents, and

school districts are pushing back against disinformation and attacks on social and emotional learning.

NEA is proud to continue its partnership with the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) to support parents and district leaders to ensure that politics does not undermine the value of integrating SEL in classrooms and schools.

CASEL's toolkit, *Leading with SEL: Social and Emotional Learning Toolkit for Parent Champions*, is available for download. The toolkit includes language on why SEL matters, opportunities for productive dialogue, and ways to help your communities separate fact from fiction.



## Leadership Competencies

Need a copy of the NEA Leadership Competency Guide?

[Download](#) the guide and use it to make a plan for your leadership journey.



### Where to turn for Leadership Development Resources

[www.nea.org/leadership-development](http://www.nea.org/leadership-development)

Log on and find resources and programs through the leadership development resources site to access these and other resources to support you in your leadership journey.

**Leadership Competency Self-Assessment(s)** The NEA Leadership Competency Self-Assessments were designed to help NEA leaders identify their own areas of strength, as well as areas where they can improve. Individuals are strongly encouraged to engage the self-assessments as often as they like or need to identify the areas in which they want to grow. <http://www.nea.org/leadershipdevelopmentselfassessment>

**NEA National Leadership Summit** The National Leadership Summit is NEA's premier leadership experience. The Summit is designed to challenge your thinking about your method of doing business and deepen your understanding of enhancing your individual and organizational capacity. The goal is to create an experience that deepens your understanding of what the NEA believes are the knowledge, skills, and abilities every educator needs to lead with vision, purpose, and action. <https://www.nea.org/professional-excellence/leadership-development/national-summit>

**This guide is intended for members who are curious about their leadership and ready to start their journey toward becoming stronger Association activists and leaders (elected and non-elected) and stronger professionals.**  
<https://www.nea.org/professional-excellence/leadership-development/leadership-competencies>

## In Service of Climate Justice

By Yvonne White and Justin Thompson  
National Education Association

Beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, educators have continued to develop and learn new social and emotional intelligence skills to respond to and address systemic challenges, including climate justice.

Educators report negative psychological responses to climate change. Adults who live in places struck by climate change-related catastrophes worry about their future or present children or grandchildren. In addition, feelings of

helplessness are common. This includes roughly 1 in 4 survey respondents who report more intense feelings, such as students being very anxious, fearful, and angry.<sup>1</sup>

For many, these negative responses can lead to depression and stress-related health issues. The National Education Association recognizes the scientific consensus on the impact of global climate change and social and emotional intelligence on educators and children.

That is why NEA provides educators opportunities to strengthen their social and emotional intelligence skills. These skills equip educators to deal more effectively with the negative responses

they experience and their students' needs amid rapid climate change.

Given the significance and the impact climate change has on education, children, and communities, NEA President Becky Pringle hosted the Climate and Environmental Justice Salon with Sierra Club President Ramon Cruz, former EPA Administrator Christine Todd Whitman, current EPA senior director Marianne Engelman-Lado, and Leah Thomas, founder of Intersectional Environmentalist, to discuss the intersection of climate change and education. "We've successfully scared people so much so that GenZers more than any other generation are experiencing something called climate

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fatalism, so they believe – beyond pessimism – that there is no hope, and that is not creating a will to act,” said Thomas. But if we swing the pendulum over to some of the solutions and the people in your neighborhood creating these solutions and making sure that educators form beautiful relationships with local grassroots organizations, we can swing that pendulum a little closer to hope and let students know our world and community is worth saving.”

The salon was an invaluable opportunity for discussion and collaboration on how to create an equitable and sustainable future. The panel included ways to use education to create systemic change, including a commitment to developing educators’ and students’ social and emotional skills to empower them to make a difference. The NEA - in partnership with the Aspen Institute and Subject to Climate - developed a stack of six micro-credentials related to climate change and environmental justice. These will be available early this summer and can be found in the [NEA Micro-Credential Library](#).

Many local and state affiliate leaders, like the New Jersey Education Association, recognize this work’s value. New Jersey is the country’s first state to introduce standards requiring climate change to be taught across subjects. New Jersey Education Association members have been developing lesson plans for teachers across their state to teach students about climate change in innovative and exciting ways. The lesson plan will help students develop environmental awareness and include resources to help make the learning process engaging and interactive.

At Stillwater Township Elementary School in New Jersey, students spend part of

their day in the outdoor garden. Elaine Makarevich, a K-12 ELA and Spanish teacher, agrees that it isn’t just about teaching climate change; it is about empowering students of all ages to take action.

“They like to learn about how they can help, so if you connect with that, you will have students leave the classroom knowing they can make a difference, even if it starts in the smallest of ways in your building,” she says.

To learn how to incorporate climate change education into your classroom and access resources and professional development opportunities, visit: <https://www.thisisplaneted.org/blog/educator-advocacy-toolkit>.



With the right tools and resources, educators can help their students understand their role in mitigating climate change and strengthen their social and emotional skills.

## Leading on Climate Justice: Aaron Phillips

**Name:** Aaron Phillips

**Pronouns:** he/him/his

**Where do you live?** Amarillo, Texas

**Where do you work?** Hamlet Elementary School - 5th Grade Science

**What is your why?** To help build community within my sphere of influence and use that community to make the world a better place for all of us.

**Career/Profession:** Elementary Classroom Teacher

**Years in the Profession:** 15 years



Aaron Phillips (courtesy of Aaron Phillips)

### What led you to become interested in climate and environmental justice?

Like so many, I’d long been interested in green initiatives but fell for the marketing trap that change comes from individual actions. It was actually a racial justice training from NEA from 2017 to 2019 that helped me understand systemic and institutional injustices as well as the intersectionality of so many issues. Through that lens, I understood we needed to organize institutional change to address climate and environmental injustices.

### Why should educators care about climate and environmental justice?

Climate and environmental justice issues directly affect our students’ health and cognitive abilities. Kids cannot learn,

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and educators cannot teach when schools shutter for extreme cold and disastrous storm systems or classrooms bake in sweltering heat. Educational outcomes suffer when communities do not have access to clean water, and in too many cases where water and air contamination are overlooked. We have a responsibility to create sustainable futures for every child

### **As an education leader, what do you believe every educator can do to increase awareness and engagement on this issue, especially with other educators?**

The critical thing is for educators to continue to organize [and build] union power at the local, state, and national levels. When we make capacity within our organization, we can tackle the many intersections of societal injustices. Whether the issue is at a single worksite or happening across the nation, organizing members and community coalitions to take action is crucial for change. Find like-minded people committed to the same goals and work together.

### **What experiences provided you with opportunities to develop the skills to address climate and environmental justice?**

I credit NEA leadership development training for helping me build the skills needed for this work. I attended the Emerging Leaders training in Texas in 2015, which catapulted me into the world of union leadership. In my district, we've been able to address mold in classrooms, air filter quality, replacement of lead pipes, and air conditioning, and we've been able to keep student safety (as an impact of climate and environment) at the forefront of district decisions. Through continued development, I've connected with and learned from other union members. I hope these connections build sustainable leadership pipelines for organizing this work collectively, now and in the future.

### **Considering the NEA Leadership Competency Framework, which leadership domains are you utilizing most frequently to address climate and environmental injustices?**

This work allows for broad and fluid use of all the competencies, but I'm mainly using the organizing, governance, and leadership domains. I've connected with the new Climate and Ecology Caucus at the national level, and the Progressive Caucus at the state level, and both groups are focused on building union capacity on climate and environment issues and creating leadership pipelines and capacity to do the necessary work. The goal is to develop sustainable union programs and practices our members can use, lead by example, and bring individuals passionate about these issues into collective work.

### **What resources have you used that could be useful to other educators?**

I'm excited about the new Educator Advocacy Toolkit for climate action from NEA, AFT, and the Aspen Institute and how it can help educators start organizing their districts. NEA also has several health and safety tools that members can use to organize around clean water and air issues. I also encourage passionate members to consider joining the Climate and Ecology Caucus to help us organize and build capacity for change within our union. The Educators Climate Action Network (ECAN) is a newly formed coalition of NEA and AFT members working to make broader connections that will allow us to create institutional change. ECAN has been great for connecting to work already in motion, making the changes I'd like to contribute more accessible.

Aaron currently serves on the NEA Board of Directors.

## **Transformative Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) as a Catalyst for Leadership on Climate Action**

By Meena Srinivasan

*This article is reprinted with the permission of Meena Srinivasan and was adapted from an in-depth essay published in the Autumn 2021 issue of Kosmos Journal for Global Transformation.*

In recognizing that important issues like school health and climate justice require collective action, NEA is partnering with



*Meena Srinivasan (courtesy of Meena Srinivasan)*

organizations like the Transformative Educational Leadership (TEL) to support leaders engaged in transformational change. In this newsletter, we are including an essay from TEL's

I spent five years living under the shadow of the Chevron Oil Refinery on the unceded land of the Ohlone people

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known as Richmond, California. In 2012, a toxic explosion sent 15,000 to the hospital, primarily people of color. Like many refinery town residents, our family moved to Richmond because it was more affordable. Experiencing oil spills and constant flaring firsthand was a pressing reminder of how systemic racism, exploitative practices, and our dominant capitalist culture are inextricably linked with our climate crisis.

There's a saying in the climate movement that to change everything will take everyone. In my work as an educational leader of color dedicated to transforming school communities through Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), I believe it's imperative that schools ultimately position SEL in service of a shift in the collective consciousness—a shift where we truly care for each other and our planet as we work collectively and compassionately to address racial injustice and our climate crisis.

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) traditionally refers to the essential skills and competencies we all need for life success. These include self-awareness, goal setting, managing strong emotions, cultivating empathy, social awareness, relationship skills, problem-solving, and making healthy decisions. For years, SEL programming was thought to be race and culture neutral, but we know that nothing is race and culture neutral.

Over the last decade, mindfulness has been increasingly incorporated into SEL programming. The organization I lead, Transformative Educational Leadership (TEL), defines mindfulness as “both a practice and a way of being with which we compassionately attend to the unfolding reality of the present moment within and without.

When we add transformative to this definition, we open our attention to

include the systems—educational, social, ecological, and economic—that we are nested within. With transformative mindfulness, we strive to expand our awareness of interbeing. Interbeing is a term coined by Nobel Peace Prize Nominee, Thich Nhat Hanh, meaning to inter-dependently co-exist. Interbeing honors the interdependence of every person with all other persons, beings, and elements of nature. From such a perspective, we are better able to bear witness to suffering in its many forms and act to create a more compassionate and just world through healing-centered engagement.

### **The Root Cause of Racial Injustice and Our Climate Crisis: A Lack of Inter-being Consciousness**

Transformative SEL invites us to examine “root causes of inequity” (CASEL, 2020). For me, the root cause of inequity is not valuing all life equally, a lack of “inter-being consciousness.” Colonization, slavery, capitalism, economic exploitation, and continual extraction of the earth's resources are built on the belief that all lives are not equal.

Until inter-being becomes a foundation for how we bring SEL into education, these approaches will still ultimately reinforce a transactional, anthropocentric way of being in the world.

Over the last year, there have been several conversations about “Decolonizing SEL.” There is no real synonym for decolonization. You can't substitute human rights or social justice for it, and for me, it involves the crafting of a path forward that is rooted in the heart of indigenous cultures: kinship. Kinship involves living from a

place where one is established in their relationship to each other, the universe, the land, and nature—all of life is part of one's family and relations are not just blood relatives. As we engage in conversations about “decolonizing SEL,” those of us who have the capacity and the will can also bring the climate dimension into these discussions so we can see our justice work as interrelated and mutually reinforcing. For me, decolonizing SEL also involves safeguarding our planet. It's a both/and, and we need all our passion and engagement to build a diverse and powerful movement strong enough to create the world we all need and deserve

### **The Role of Schools as Part of the Solution**

One out of every six Americans is enrolled in public education and the way schools consume energy, food, and engage in transportation can play a critical role in protecting our planet, especially if we think about the impact schools could have globally if every school engaged in climate action. Right now, across the board, schools are not models of sustainability. Annual energy costs for US educational institutions have been estimated at \$8 billion annually—the second highest cost for schools after salaries (US Department of Energy, 2016). School buses drive 5.7 billion miles annually (Doug Shinkle, 2021). Schools serve over 7 billion meals each year and produce an estimated 530,000 tons of food waste annually (World Wildlife Fund, 2019). Sadly, only twenty-nine states and the District of Columbia bring climate change into their science standards, and only five states include climate change in social studies standards (K12 Climate Action, 2020).

If we prioritize advancing a more sustainable world, the schools which

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<sup>1</sup> Clayton, Susan D, Pihkala, Panu, Wray, Britt, and Marks, Elizabeth. Psychological and Emotional Responses to Climate Change among Young People Worldwide: Differences Associated with Gender, Age, and Country, 15(4), 3540.

serve more than 50 million young people can be a critical force in addressing climate change (NCES, 2021). We can have tremendous impact in building a greener economy by providing more career and technical education programs that support clean energy jobs. Schools can also lead the way in building more sustainable operations. The “development of collaborative solutions” (CASEL, 2020) that SEL calls for are an opportunity to support students in engaging in climate action. Schools are part of the problem, and they also have an opportunity to be part of the solution. There’s great possibility through fusing Transformative SEL with Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) which “empowers people to change the way they think and work towards a sustainable future” (UNESCO).

## Beloved Community Extending to the Earth

Dr. Martin Luther King popularized the term “Beloved Community” and infused it with deep meaning. For me, Beloved Community must also extend to the Earth. Here is some initial thinking on Transformative SEL as a Catalyst for Climate Action rooted in Education for Sustainable Development Principles, CASEL’s Five Core SEL competencies, and their Equity Focal constructs.

In the world of education, we often focus on “essential questions.” The essential question I hold deep in my heart is from Dr. Larry Ward: “What kind of ancestor do I want to be?” Just as the Seventh Generation Principle from Iroquois philosophy asks us to hold the long view of every decision and action we take, and reflect on the impact seven generations from now, this question can be a great anchor in driving how we show up daily and how we go about teaching SEL in schools. You can implement an SEL

curriculum but if you are not asking yourself in each moment, “What kind of ancestor do I want to be?” your SEL won’t necessarily be transformative. As a lifelong educator, I see schools as the unit of change. Let’s all seize this moment to tap into our circles of influence and bring an interbeing consciousness to the prioritization of SEL so we can evolve together and create the conditions for the paradigm shift needed by our planet and all of its inhabitants.

**SHORT BIO:** *Meena Srinivasan*  
is the *Founding Executive Director of Transformative Educational Leadership (TEL)*.  
*TEL cultivates the inner transformation of educational leaders who create outer transformative change in the field of education.*

## Maui Wildfires

The tragic wildfires in the historic town of Lahaina wreaked havoc on families, schools, homes, and businesses. In this time of adversity, the leadership, staff, and members of the Hawaii State Teachers Association (HSTA) stand united, rallying to provide unwavering support to members and their families who have been directly impacted by the catastrophe. For those who wish to extend their assistance, HSTA is accepting non-tax-deductible donations to provide director aid to affected members: <https://www.hsta.org>.

## Melissa Brown, NEA Center for Governance Leadership Development Fellow



Melissa Brown, inaugural NEA Leadership Development Fellow.

Melissa Brown, a member leader from Louisiana, was selected as the inaugural Leadership Development Fellow for the 2022-2023 school year.

Melissa is a veteran educator, and long-time NEA member, who serves as a special education teacher at Pinecrest Support and Service Center in Alexandria, LA. Prior to the being selected, Melissa served as president of the Rapides Association of Educators and was a first-time delegate at the 2022 NEA Representative Assembly.

Melissa is a wife and mother of two kids, who enjoys traveling, shopping, meeting new people, and volunteering in her community.

Melissa’s goal during the fellowship is to advance her leadership skills and learn how to identify and retain diverse educators in her local association as well as partner with the Louisiana Association of Educators (LAE) in their leadership development efforts.

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(Left to Right: Annelise Cohon, Keturah Raabe, Melissa Brown, Louisa Haney, Cory Wofford, Yvonne White, Kisha Davis-Caldwell, and Lucy Griswold)

## Meet the NEA Center for Governance Leadership Development Team

The vision of the NEA Center for Governance Leadership Development

Team is to create a shared understanding and prioritization of leadership development throughout the enterprise that includes a commitment to shifting the paradigm of leadership to be inclusive of all educators, with respect to, but does not privilege association titles. We view the development of education leaders as a major strategy for enhancing

NEA's capacity. To contact the team, email [leadersdevelop@nea.org](mailto:leadersdevelop@nea.org)

For a complete listing of leadership development resources, including online courses and self-assessments, visit [www.nea.org/leadershipdevelopment](http://www.nea.org/leadershipdevelopment).

### National Education Association

The National Education Association (NEA), the nation's largest professional employee organization, is committed to advancing the cause of public education. NEA's 3 million members work at every level of education — from pre-school to university graduate programs. NEA has affiliate organizations in every state and in more than 14,000 communities across the United States.

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 Karen White, *Deputy Executive Director*

### National Education Association Center for Governance

Sabrina Tines-Morris, *Senior Director*  
 Cory Wofford, *Associate Director*  
 Annelise Cohon, *Senior Program/Policy Specialist*  
 Kisha Davis-Caldwell, *Senior Program/Policy Specialist*  
 Lucy Griswold, *Senior Program/Policy Specialist*  
 Keturah Raabe, *Senior Program/Policy Specialist*  
 Louisa Haney, *Senior Program and Financial Assistant*  
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