



76th Annual Business Convention

May 6, 2023

The Fox Tower @ Foxwoods
Ledyard, CT

AWARDS

2023

Awards Program

George C. Springer Scholarship

Sharon M. Palmer Scholarship

AFT Connecticut Staff Recognition

Local Anniversary Citations

Testifiers/Submitted Testimony

CT Teacher & Paraeducator of the Year
Member Recognition

Unionist of the Year

Joseph H. Soifer Award

President's Award

Special Recognition Awards



Scholarship Awards

AFT Connecticut awards two different scholarships each year, one for our members (**George C. Springer Scholarship**), and one for spouses/domestic partners, and children of members (**Sharon M. Palmer Scholarship**). Candidates are selected based on academic promise and financial need, among other criteria. The member applicant, or the AFT Connecticut member upon whom the applicant bases their eligibility, must be a member of an AFT Connecticut local in good standing.

George C. Springer Scholarship



EMILY BENSON has been a member of the Meriden Federation of Teachers, Local 1478 for the past 9 years, a union representative for the past 4 years, and an AFT delegate for 3 years. Emily was named the Roger Sherman Teacher of the Year for the 2022-2023 School Year, and also received the 2022 Meriden Public Schools Top Performance Award for SBA math. In the school year of 2020-2021, Emily was selected to teach completely virtually for the entire year, as she states in her essay, "Through this experience, I learned that it is not the four walls that make a classroom, it is the teacher and students who make a classroom." Emily's year of virtual teaching is what peaked her interest in the Technology Integration Sixth Year Program at Dominican University of California. She

feels this program will aid her in using technology in the physical classroom to help her meet the needs of her students and help her become more comfortable with technology to better support the diversity in her classroom each year. When questioned how being in a union benefited workers and herself during her time as a member, Emily states in her essay, "The COVID-19 Pandemic is a great example of how my union fought to keep me safe. When our district went home to learn in March of 2020, our union fought for strict cleaning policies in classrooms, PPE for employees, testing kits for families and employees, and proper COVID-19 testing. As a teacher with an autoimmune disorder, I was also able to teach completely online for the 2020-2021 school year. My union fought hard to keep the most vulnerable of its employees safe."

Sharon M. Palmer Scholarship

JAIDA TAVERAS is the daughter of Iris Calderon, a member of the New Britain Federation of Teachers, Local 871. Jaida is currently a student at Washington University in St. Louis, working towards a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Philosophy Law and Policy. Jaida has many accomplishments, some of which include, CT's first ever youth poet laureate, a tutor for middle and high school, president of the black student union, member of the teacher equity alliance, and the state winner for the ed rising lecture competition. She is also a member of the top 20% of academics for her senior class. Jaida states in her essay: "Everyday I wake up and think, how can I be a better leader, student, community member, and daughter? I am always trying to be a better version of myself."

When asked how being in a union benefits workers, Jaida wrote: "The impacts of unions can be felt on both a personal and institutional level. In the macro sense, labor unions created laws that prevent individuals from working overtime without extra pay or working over 8 hours with no break. Labor unions also created safety regulations for workplaces by preventing injuries. In a macro sense, personally, the existence of labor unions have allowed my family to keep food on the table while experiencing medial hardships."

JENNA KENT is the daughter of Sharon Kent, a member of the Middletown Federation of Teachers, Local 1381. Jenna is currently a student at Sheehan High School in Wallingford. Jenna has been a member of the varsity swim team the past 4 years in which she is currently the swim and dive team captain. Jenna is the class of 2023 Vice President. Some of the clubs Jenna is a member are SAAD (students against destructive decisions), Mock Trail, and CREW. Outside of work, Jenna works as a lifeguard at a local country club. She has also earned a class rank of 4 in a competitive class. Based on her leadership and academic promise, she was the recipient of the Clarkson Achievement Award. One of Jenna's Counselors wrote: "What I respect about Jenna is that she is level headed, works hard and commits herself to everything she takes on."

When asked how being in a union benefits workers, Jenna wrote: "The union has been a vital resource for my mom and other teachers in her district, providing them with protections from those who would violate their rights. Having my mom part of a union has affected my life as well as my family's life because my mom has been able to financially support the family due to the union fighting for better wages, healthcare, and overall great work environments."

***Congratulations, and best wishes to
all of our scholarship winners!***



AFT Connecticut Staff Recognition

Jane Benoit, Financial Assistant35 years

Mike Ozga, Field Rep20 years

Matt O'Connor, Communications Coordinator.....10 years





Local Anniversary Citations

Ansonia Federation of Teachers.....	75 years
Hartford Federation of Teachers	75 years
Bristol Federation of Teachers	60 years
Meriden Federation of Teachers	60 years
West Haven Federation of Teachers.....	60 years
Windham Federation of Teachers	60 years
Salem Federation of Teachers.....	55 years
New Britain Federation of Paraprofessionals.....	50 years
West Hartford Federation of Education Personnel.....	45 years
University Health Professionals.....	45 years
North Branford Federation of Teachers.....	45 years
West Hartford Federation of Education Secretaries.....	40 years
Vernon Federation of Paraprofessionals	30 years
Administrative & Residual Retiree Council.....	30 years
Natchaug Hospital Federation of Educational Employees	15 years

2023 AFT CT Members: Testified or Submitted Testimony

A&R Employees Union Retirees, Local 4200R
Win Heimer

Assoc. of CT Asst. Attorneys General, Local 6574
Joan Andrews
Raul Rodriguez
Robin Schwartz

Backus Federation of Nurses Local 5149
Sherri Dayton
Jessica Harris
Mellissa Moreau
Shanon Pereira
David Pfau

Danbury Nurses Union – Unit #47, Local 5047
Najah Almonte
Jannis Callisen
Mary Consoli – retired member
Rita Crimi
Sarah Hayes
Kathleen Nix
Karen Oliveira
Elizabeth Ryder
Chris Schilling
Janice Stauffer
Tyrne Wade-Thomas

East Hartford Fed. of Paraeducators, Local 4257
Lisa Murzin
Mary Symkowicz

Hartford Fed. of Paraeducators, Local 2221
Julissa Cassilla
Shellye Davis
Abigaël Dilaire
Doug Maine
Dorothy Wilkinson



Hartford Federation of Teachers, Local 1018
Carol Gale

L&M Fed. of Technologists, Local 5051
Mary Ellen Masciale

L&M Registered Prof Nurses, Local 5049
Dale Cunningham
Jeanne Wehling

Manchester Hospital Nurses, Local 5055
Anne Marie Cerra

Manchester Fed. of Paraeducators, Local 3175
Daihiana Font Perlaza

New Haven Fed. of Teachers, Local 933
Leslie Blatteau

Norwalk Fed. of Edu. Personnel, Local 3793
Nikka Turner

Norwalk Fed. of Teachers, Local 1723
Mary Yordon

State Vocational Fed. of Teachers, Local 4200A
Paul Angelucci

University Health Professionals, Local 3837
Bill Garrity
Jean Morningstar

Waterford Classroom Teachers, Local 2038
Jason Adler

Windham Federation of Nurses, Local 5041
Karla Beckert
Andrea Riley

2023 Connecticut Teacher of the Year



CAROLYN KIELMA is a member of the Bristol Federation of Teachers, Local 1464. Since 2002, Carolyn has taught the love of science to public high school students in Connecticut. For the last 15 years she has taught Biology, Biotechnology & Forensics, Environmental Science, Biotechnical Engineering, Anatomy & Physiology, and the AVID elective class at Bristol Eastern High School. Since earning her Bachelor of Science degree in Biology from Susquehanna University, PA and her Master of Science in Secondary Education from the University of New Haven, CT, Kielma has found that her greatest rewards in teaching come from the successes of her students - not just in the field of science, but in life.

Kielma believes teaching is not only about curriculum or content but also about helping youth become better humans. She strives to be the type of teacher that she needed in her adolescent years - the trusted adult that students can come to when they need help, whether inside or outside the classroom. Her goal is to provide an inclusive environment where all students feel they are valued, accepted, and treated with equity. She strives to provide high expectations and rigorous coursework to all students, regardless of labels, levels, or standardized scores. Kielma starts with the lens that all of her students are gifted AND all of her students have special needs. It is her job as an educator to unleash those gifts and work to meet those needs. She believes all students must feel they belong to be successful in the classroom. She is continuously amazed at how students can perform when given all the right opportunities. She hopes to instill in them the idea that they can accomplish something difficult if they have determination, ambition, and drive. Kielma believes that learning is not about knowing the right answer; it is a process of discovery.

As a first-generation college student herself, Kielma also feels fulfilled in her role as AVID site coordinator at her school. AVID's mission is to close the achievement gap by preparing all students for college readiness and success in a global society. Kielma helps implement AVID strategies and leads various professional development opportunities across the Bristol Public School district with a team of highly educated, motivated, and courageous professionals who understand the power of lifelong learning. She also travels nationally in the summer to lead digital teaching and learning courses as an AVID National Staff Developer.

Kielma's students have participated in several community service projects including volunteering at a local retirement home, collecting clothing and items to donate to a local shelter, participating in Relay for Life, volunteering at the local Boys and Girls Club, and more. Her students founded the STEM Club at her school to provide enrichment activities and to build relationships between high school and elementary school students. The club's mission is to foster an early love for science, technology, engineering, and math careers in the Bristol community. Among her other accolades, Kielma was awarded a fellowship grant via Fund for Teachers to document wildlife and conservation efforts at the Grizzly & Wolf Discovery Center and Yellowstone National Park this past summer. This expedition focused on the reintroduction of the wolves to the national park as a keystone species. She hopes to use her research to enrich the lessons within her district in order to connect students with local community and conservation initiatives. When she is not working to improve her lessons, classroom culture, or racial consciousness, Kielma loves being a mother and wife who enjoys golf, volleyball, bowling, boxing, powerlifting, singing, and supporting the Buffalo Bills.

Kielma believes educators are masters of adaptation and evolution. She hopes to strengthen and improve her profession by focusing on ensuring the representation of all voices within her lessons while evolving and creating measurements of intelligence that reflect all of Connecticut's scholars. Kielma feels educator collaboration is essential to build and develop strategies to promote a culture of equity and inclusion and provide opportunities for all students across the state.



2023 Connecticut Paraprofessional of the Year



DON ASKEW is a member of the Meriden Federation of Paraprofessionals, Local 1478P. Don began his career in education when he sought out the opportunity to participate in the AmeriCorps program in 1998. Mr. Askew worked in an after-school program at The Boys and Girls Club of Meriden and then transitioned to a tutor position at Israel Putnam Elementary School. Since 2002, Don has been a paraprofessional at Maloney High School. Initially, Don worked with small groups of students who benefited from additional math instruction and has since helped many programs throughout the building. For several years, Don supported medically fragile students. He currently works with

students in a Life Skills program. In his role, Don makes positive connections with students while supporting their academic, social, and emotional needs. He helps students develop a strong sense of belonging, value, and purpose. Don possesses a unique set of skills that assists students as they transfer their learning in the Life Skills program to the general education classroom.

Don is being applauded for his use of the whole child approach to education. His innovative approaches have proven to reduce the stressors and barriers to learning that many students' struggle with daily, including providing extra snacks for students who may come to school hungry so they can better focus on their schoolwork or providing students access to washers and dryers to do laundry.

In addition to his responsibilities as a paraprofessional, Don has coached various sports, including boys' soccer, girls' basketball, and indoor and outdoor track. Coach Askew's outstanding accomplishments have led to the first undefeated season for Maloney girls' track and field, a conference championship, and two nationally ranked athletes.



Congrats!

Unionist of the Year Award

Stuart Beckford—Hartford Federation of Teachers #1018

A veteran educator and unionist, Stuart Beckford has been a union member for over 20 years; he served as Building Rep for 12 years, a member of the Union School Committee for 8 years, and the Second Vice President of Hartford Federation of Teachers for 3 years. A strong advocate in the labor movement, Stuart also serves as a Vice Delegate to the Greater Hartford Labor Coalition (GHLC), a trustee of the Eastern Connecticut Area Labor Federation (ECALF), founder and chair of the AFT CT Black Caucus, and Vice President on the AFT CT Executive Council. He is an active member with AFT CT representing his local in meetings, with active participation with the PreK-12 Council, the Social Justice Committee and LPAC and attending numerous labor and community events.

Stuart's involvement in the community is extensive. He has participated at Hospital Strikes, at AFL-CIO Political breakfasts, solidarity days with Starbucks workers, and many other AFT and AFL-CIO events including conventions and trainings. Stuart goes beyond advocacy to actively organizing. As an art teacher, he has organized art programs to benefit the students of Hartford. As an HFT leader, he organized rallies for our members' concerns (such as contract negotiations) and for broader community concerns (such as the Black Lives Matter movement and protests after the killing of George Floyd). This year he was instrumental in advocating for the HPS district to extend its recruitment efforts beyond Puerto Rico and to encompass all the Caribbean islands. He also organized a First Book event in December with another event coming up next week. At each First Book event, thousands of books are given away to students and families such that reading opens the world.

Having grown up in a union family, Stuart embodies and promotes the importance of unionism, seeking out ways to further the labor movement's vital work. After attending the AFT National Convention last summer, he realized Connecticut could benefit from having a Black Caucus to address issues of diversity, equity and inclusion. Never one to accept the status quo, he set about remedying the lack of such a caucus by creating the Connecticut Black Caucus. The Black Caucus held its first meeting in October and now has over 40 members.

For these reasons and many others, we are happy to award Stuart the 2023 Unionist of the Year Award.

Nomination for this award is open to those who contribute heavily to their local, the AFT Connecticut, the AFT, and the labor movement in general, with emphasis placed on service to AFT Connecticut.

Congrats!

Joseph H. Soifer Award

Chad Cardillo—Meriden Federation of Teachers #1478

Chad has been a union member for 12 years and has served in the following roles: Vice President for Secondary Schools, Building Rep for the Meriden Federation of Teachers, Executive Board Member of MFT, Meriden City Council-At Large Seat, Meriden Board for Girls Inc. As a member of the Local's Executive Board, Chad has been responsible for updating the AFT Connect System, union outreach to new members, and responsive to their 925 members when they contact leadership.

Chad has helped with MANY labor walks for AFT CT endorsed candidates. He has also texted through the Hustle app, done all political walks and whatever AFT CT has asked.

Chad has participated in the AFT National Convention and AFT Teach and he reports all info to executive board members that he feels are important, using AFT information to advance the union.

It is for these reasons and others that we are happy to award Chad the 2023 Joseph H Soifer Award.

Nomination for this award is open to those who contribute heavily to their local, the AFT Connecticut, the AFT, and the labor movement in general, with the emphasis placed on service to the local.

Congrats!

President's Award

Leslie Blatteau—New Haven Federation of Teachers #933

The 2023 President's Award goes to Leslie Blatteau for her leadership and service to her local, the community of New Haven, the social justice movement, her political advocacy, and her leadership in State and National AFT endeavors, serving on the AFT Program and Policy Committee, and soon she will chair the AFT CT PreK-12 Council.

In her role as Local President of the New Haven Federation of Teachers, she has advocated for both member and community engagement within the NHFT, including hosting an open house with a community blood drive. Her upbeat, can-do nature and her energy seem boundless. She is an advocate not only for teachers, but for the entire school community, as well as all the members of AFT, regardless of division, and for the communities in which we live.

In short, AFT CT is better for having Leslie as a member and a leader and we are happy to award her the 2023 President's Award.

Congrats!

Special Recognition Award

Mary Yordon—Norwalk Federation of Teachers #1723

Mary was thrust into a leadership role of the Norwalk Federation of Teachers, literally overnight, upon the passing of their longtime President, Bruce Mellon. In 2019, Mary took over as the Divisional Vice President of PreK-12 and quickly became an internal part of our “Covid Response Team” that met weekly with the Governor’s Office. Her advocacy, guidance, calm reasoning and explaining to the Governor’s office is a large part of why they looked to us for solutions. We often call ourselves a “solution driven union,” but Mary embodies it. Mary asked Leslie Blatteau if she would run in her place as Divisional VP and Mary will become an At-Large Vice President and continue as a vital member of the PreK-12 Council and a trusted confidant to leadership.

Special Recognition Award

David Hayes—Bristol Federation of Teachers #1464

David has served as AFT CT’s Secretary/Treasurer since 2019. Working closely with our Chief Financial Officer, David has provided oversight and guidance during a time when we were unsure of the outcomes from our Supreme Court decisions and how they might affect us financially. As he leaves his post as Secretary/Treasurer, he does not leave the union, continuing to provide instruction to the children of Bristol.

***Congratulations and best wishes
to our awards recipients!***

