

Linda Matsumoto, First AAPI Educator to win prestigious 2023 IEA Reg Weaver Human & Civil Rights Award

Evanston/Skokie School District educator recognized for her social justice and equity work gets top public service honor from the Illinois Education Association

EVANSTON/SKOKIE, ILLINOIS, UNITED STATES, March 20, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Linda Matsumoto, a former journalist with the Chicago Tribune, and a former spokesperson for the Chicago Public Schools, who has taught in the Evanston/Skokie School District since 2013, has made local history as the first Asian American educator to be named the recipient of the prestigious Illinois Education Association Reg Weaver Human and Civil Rights Award. The IEA has 135,000 active members across Illinois.

Linda is also the first educator from her Evanston School District to win this top recognition for advancing social justice and equity in public schools in Illinois. "It's an important collective win for the entire AAPI community of educators throughout the State who have been historically overlooked for their hard work and dedication to students in public education," says Ms. Matsumoto.

"The mainstream media focused a spotlight on AAPI representation when Michelle Yeoh won her historic Best Actress Oscar recently. This is the equivalent local honor in education for the Asian American community, who are often marginalized and rendered invisible. I am deeply grateful to blaze a trail for BIPOC leaders, and to carry the torch for Reg Weaver, who remains a pillar in educational communities as a past IEA and NEA president."

During the height of the Coronavirus Pandemic, Linda recognized that our society was at an inflection point and to mitigate the rising tide of anti-Asian hate in our country since the Pandemic began in 2020, she joined the growing movement to support inclusive history



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mandates. She created the IEA's first diversity and cultural competency workshop for Illinois educators at the 2021 Summer Leadership Academy that focused on AAPI history and culture, and explained the historical antecedents of systemic bias that are pervasive throughout our educational communities. She told her story from an authentic voice and shared her lived experiences to make AAPI history more relatable, exposing the "Missing Pages from U.S. History."

Her educational mission is to help people discover the intersectionality of our collective histories, and how those interwoven experiences can affirm, uplift and unite us.

She has steadily increased the visibility for the AAPI educational community by presenting Professional Development workshops about AAPI History for teachers throughout the State of Illinois and at National Education Association conferences. "Countering, debunking and finally dismantling Asian American "Perpetual Foreigner" stereotypes, especially the "Myth of the Model Minority" that perpetuates implicit bias in the classrooms across the U.S. are the touchpoints of my workshops.

Linda was also selected for the inaugural Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) TEAACH Leaders cohort to help public school districts throughout Illinois implement the Teaching Equitable Asian Community History (TEAACH) Act passed in July, 2021 that mandates a unit of AAPI history be taught in all public K-12 schools in Illinois to offset the alarming rise in anti-Asian hate crimes since the Pandemic began.

"DEI efforts tend to focus only on black/brown issues," Linda points out. "But Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging encompasses more than that binary approach." She endeavors to help the AAPI community to "break through the proverbial Bamboo Ceiling" and make sure that "Asian American voices are not silenced, but heard in the public discourse of race in America," she says. "It's important for all perspectives from other marginalized groups to be represented in matters that impact educational policy and decisions." She cites her educational activism to "Celebrate our cultural diversity, while embracing our commonalities," helps unite teacher union members (IEA/and NEA which has three million members) to work collectively towards shared goals."

Her identical twin sons graduated summa cum laude from Princeton University in 2020. Although Linda denounces AAPI stereotypes that are divisive, she ironically calls herself a proud "Tiger Mom" since Tigers are the Princeton mascot!

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