

# 2019 CONNECTICUT TEACHER OF THE YEAR

## SHEENA GRAHAM BRIDGEPORT PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Sheena Graham is proud to say that she is currently in her 36th year of teaching! She has worked with students across grade levels throughout her career and continues to be energized by her students and colleagues.

At the elementary level, Sheena has worked with children in both Ansonia and Bridgeport. She taught general music, chorus, keyboard classes, boys' choir, parent/teacher/student choir, and gospel choir. She wrote, produced, and directed original musicals based on school themes and created teaching tools to help other teachers reach their students. In the 80's, Sheena was writing raps in Latin, based on the vocabulary words students needed to learn each week! Her after-school commitments included coaching a drill team, leading a dance troupe, being assistant softball coach, coaching cheerleading, running a poetry club, and teaching free piano and drama classes at The Hall Academy of Music and Fine Arts housed at Hall Neighborhood House in Bridgeport.

At Harding High School and Central High School in Bridgeport, Sheena's classes included teaching choir, a black history chorale, peer leadership, theatre, piano, and performing arts. Under her leadership, the Harding Cheerleaders brought home the Fairfield County "Spirit Stick" two years in a row, the Peer Leaders produced a CD to raise money for the homeless, and the Harding and Central School Choirs won a total of nine 'Overall' trophies, 31 first-place trophies, 3 second-place team trophies, 24 individual trophies, and after missing out on being Grand Champions by .04 points one year, the choir brought that title home the following year.

In her teacher leadership role Sheena has presented workshops such as: *Music Lessons That Work*, Parts 1 & 2, *Incorporating Other Subjects Into Music Lessons*, *The Parent Teacher Connection*, *African American History in Your Classroom*, *Why We Sing*, (the purpose of music in ministry), and *Do You Read Me?* She has volunteered as an accompanist for choirs in Bridgeport, Ansonia, and Danbury, where she directed Western Connecticut State University's Gospel Choir for four years. In addition to her school choirs she is currently the director of a children's choir, Sisters of Praise, and a senior choir at the First Baptist Church of Stratford,



under the leadership of Dr. William B. Sutton III, her pastor.

Sheena's recording and writing experiences are extensive and wide-reaching. Some of her more recent songs include *We've Not Forgotten You*, for those affected by the L'Ambiance Plaza collapse; *Reaching Isn't Always Easy* and *My Destiny*, both performed at the White House for Mrs. Obama, Dr. Biden, and the Governors' wives in February 2014; *A Witness*, for the Witness Breast Cancer Project; *Somebody Might Be You*, for child abuse victims; *A Flame That Never Dies*, written in response to the Newtown tragedy and other senseless deaths that occur all too often; *It's Not How You Start*, performed by Tisdale students for Mrs. Obama at the 2016 White House Talent Show; and *We Can If We Believe*, performed at the Kennedy Center in March of 2018. Her current projects include, *Maybe's Won't Save Me* for bully/teen suicide prevention, and *It's Time For Change*, a call to action for America in response to the senseless shootings involving police and of police. Her future projects include fully implementing *V.O.I.C.E. Change*, a course she is developing to encourage students to find what they are passionate about and use an artistic medium of their choice to encourage change by publishing original poetry, journals, greeting cards, and children's stories under her trademark, "'JesusAids,' for the wounds within."

Sheena has received numerous awards and honors throughout her career as an educator. She was featured in the book *Notable Valley African Americans*. She received the Beard Excellence in Teaching Award, the National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women's-Teacher of the Year Award, the NAACP-Teacher of the Year Award, and the Choral Director of Distinction Award to name a few. However, Sheena says, "to be recognized as still being relevant and selected as Bridgeport's Teacher of the Year and Connecticut's Teacher of the Year after thirty-five years in education, is the highest honor above all!" Sheena's advice to others is, "Do not let your image be designed by your inactivity."

Sheena received her bachelor's degree in Music Education from Western Connecticut State University, and her master's degree from St. Joseph University and Southern Connecticut State University.