#MEA40 #MILKENAWARD

MILKEN EDUCATOR AWARDS

40 YEARS *of* ELEVATING EDUCATORS

A MESSAGE FROM LOWELL MILKEN

Education is at the heart of nearly everything we value as individuals, as citizens and as productive human beings. This philosophy has been the cornerstone of my work in K-12 education for more than four decades. Essential to this pursuit is the development and support of a respected and effective teaching profession.

Teachers and principals have the most important job in our country: to produce students and graduates who are not only literate, numerate, and conversant in the humanities and sciences, but also creative, motivated, and confident. As a society, we aim to nurture young people who are willing to think independently, act with integrity, and lead with compassion. We know from research and personal experience that the quality of the teacher in the classroom is the *number one* in-school factor that determines student learning. We also know that talented educators can have a profound, sustained impact on students as they advance to the next stage of learning and life.

Yet while the education profession prepares all other professions, outstanding educators rarely receive due recognition. If we are to make education the answer for every young person in our nation, we need to celebrate, elevate and activate the profession entrusted with this crucial responsibility. That was my goal when I created the Milken Educator Awards 40 years ago. I wanted to generate—on a large, public scale—the same level of appreciation I had for the teachers who nurtured my curiosity, independence, and potential for making the most of life's opportunities. And, in so doing, I sought to motivate young, capable people to join the adventure of teaching and create bright futures for all of America's students. This is a message that the public needs to hear. It is also a message that educators need to hear as they strive to maintain high expectations, provide quality instruction, and offer support regardless of the many challenges in America's K-12 educational system today.

As we reflect on celebrating "40 Years of Elevating Educators," we acknowledge recognition as both a powerful validator and motivator. Each recipient who joins our national Milken Educator Network, now more than 3,000-strong, is inspired to reach new heights of commitment and expectation. And over three million students have witnessed a surprise Milken Educator Award notification, multiplying the possibilities for more capable people to consider teaching as a career.

With every new class of Milken Educators, we are reminded that the power and promise of education must be replenished from generation to generation. In an ever-evolving world, the watchwords of the Milken Educator Awards set in place four decades ago still ring true: ***The future belongs to the educated!***

Lowell Milken
Founder, Milken Educator Awards
Chairman and Co-Founder, Milken Family Foundation
Founder, National Institute for Excellence in Teaching

"Success for myself is giving 100 percent to my students. I want them to be well-rounded and lifelong learners. I want them to stay curious, keep asking questions, and finding answers. Success is knowing what you want to do and doing it because it makes you happy."

ELAINE HILL
2022 Connecticut Milken Educator

THE MILKEN EDUCATOR AWARDS
TOUCHING MINDS AND HEARTS

Since 1987, more than three million students have experienced that special day when an educator is surprised with a $25,000 Award, hailed as a celebrity, and showered with attention from their school and community.

The Milken Educator Awards have no formal nominations or applications. Candidates are sourced through a confidential selection process and then reviewed by blue ribbon panels appointed by state departments of education. Those most exceptional are recommended for the Award, with final approval by the Milken Family Foundation.

The surprise announcements are made before cheering students, respected colleagues, distinguished officials, the media—and a stunned new Milken Educator. In a moment's time, these unsung heroes gain a significant, unrestricted financial prize of $25,000 and experience the unfamiliar but well-deserved acclaim and acknowledgment.

Media magnifies the message of the pivotal role that talented educators play in student achievement. Stories across news and social media herald the inspiration and contributions of these newly discovered role models in education. These stories catch the attention of communities young and old, voters and policymakers alike.

"At schools across Indiana and our nation, teachers are changing lives … whether they're teaching our youngest students foundational literacy and math skills or helping older students blaze a seamless pathway to their future goals and dreams. It is an honor to work alongside the Milken Family Foundation to celebrate these incredible educators and positively impact their lives, as they do for students."

DR. KATIE JENNER
Indiana Secretary of Education

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>
> LOWELL MILKEN
> Founder, Milken Educator Awards
> Chairman and Co-Founder, Milken Family Foundation

Lowell Milken with Brad LeDuc, 2013 Kansas Milken Educator, 2014 Lowell Milken Center Fellow, and ARTEFFECT Instructor

HELPING TEACHERS AND STUDENTS REACH THEIR POTENTIAL

"Milken Educators point to their Award as a pivotal professional milestone. After traveling the country almost 30 years and visiting every state with the honor to meet with Milken Educators in network meetings where we share professional updates since the Award, the most frequent start to the discussion is, 'It all started with Milken.'

The validation and confidence that accompanies the Award truly unleashes educator leadership. The ongoing connection to additional resources and networks opens an ever-expanding window to opportunities, support, and a path in education to improve professional practices and grow as a leader at and beyond the school level.

As a 1994 recipient from Indiana, I know firsthand that any gathering of Milken Educators is guaranteed to be overflowing with positivity, professional excellence and camaraderie, and solutions. This unique energy and laser focus on students never fails to remind us of the essential value and importance of our work and why we chose to be educators: to be the catalyst and guide that helps all students reach their potential."

DR. JANE FOLEY
1994 Indiana Milken Educator
Senior Vice President
Milken Educator Awards

> **When I help my students who come from other parts of the world to make a better life and learn the language, I am reminded of my grandparents and everyone in my family who came before me. It means a lot to me to be able to be a part of their journey towards the pursuit of the American Dream."**

CALEB FLORES
2023 Colorado Milken Educator
Assistant Principal
Franklin Middle School
Greeley-Evans School District 6
Greeley, Colorado

GOALS

Outstanding educators who continue to learn are essential to the fostering of student growth, the improvement of schools and the enhancement of the education profession. Hence, the goals of the Milken Educator Awards are to:

- Honor and reward outstanding K-12 educators who represent the top 1% of the teaching profession for the quality of their teaching, their professional leadership, their engagement with families and the community and their potential for even greater contributions to the personal and academic development of children. Thus, the Award provides a lifetime incentive for the individuals to stay in the profession.
- Focus public attention on the good news and results in education.
- By spotlighting the importance of exceptional educators, encourage talented people to enter the teaching profession.

CRITERIA

The criteria for the selection of outstanding elementary and secondary teachers, principals and specialists as Milken Educators include all of the following:

- Exceptional educational talent as evidenced by effective and innovative instructional practices and student learning results in the classroom and school.
- Exemplary educational accomplishments and leadership beyond the classroom that provide models of excellence for the profession.
- Individuals whose contributions to education are largely unheralded yet worthy of the spotlight.
- Early- to mid-career educators who offer strong, long-range potential for professional leadership.
- Engaging and inspiring presence that motivates and impacts students, colleagues and the community.

"I just started my seventh year of teaching when I received this awesome, unexpected and life-changing Award. My first response was, 'They must think I'm doing something really great, so I'd better get started.' I used the Award money to earn my master's degree, which launched my career into administration. Many doors opened because of my association with the Milken Family Foundation, and I have had an amazing journey."

DR. ANGIE BESENDORFER
1996 Missouri Milken Educator
Chief Learning Experience and Success Officer
University of Maryland Global Campus

MILKEN EDUCATOR AWARDS FORUM

A professional highlight of receiving the Milken Educator Award is joining forces to bring the mission of "Celebrate, Elevate, Activate" into action. The newest class meets and becomes inspired by fellow Award recipients as well as veteran Milken Educators whose accomplishments continue to impress. Recipients share experiences, techniques and accomplishments while developing bonds that last a lifetime.

Milken Educators learn how to cultivate their impact beyond the classroom and to advance educational excellence at state and national levels. Most importantly, the Forum helps Milken Educators articulate their passions and develop their voice into roles that lead to real change.

MILKEN EDUCATOR NETWORK

CULTIVATING EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP AND EDUCATION REFORM

The Milken Educator Award's visibility and reputation result in unlimited opportunities for educators to improve education from local to international levels. New recipients join the Milken Educator Network, a group of more than 3,000 distinguished professionals whose expertise serves as a valuable resource to fellow educators, legislators, school boards and others shaping the future of education.

The Milken Educator Network fosters effective leadership and education reform through its state and national engagement. Network meetings, discussion forums, state and national gatherings and other experiences promote collegiality and enhance communication among education stakeholders. This Network serves as an invaluable link as Milken Educators across America come together for professional development and moral support with dozens of inspirational virtual meetings as well as one-on-one mentoring. The robust MEA Connections online magazine features stories, strategies and discussions both professional and personal that reinforce Solutions and Hope for Milken Educators as they implement opportunities for the future.

"This country was founded on the principle of the American Dream. No one's promised it or guaranteed it—you get it by working hard. And effective teachers teach much more than what is in their curriculum. They teach a work ethic and what it means to be an American, what it means to be a member of the world."

DR. AMANDA MAYEAUX
2003 Louisiana Milken Educator
Interim Director, School of Kinesiology
Associate Professor, Educational Foundations and Leadership
University of Louisiana at Lafayette
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

"To receive the Award in the presence of my students and staff was doubly rewarding because they are an integral part of my development as an educator. I hope to inspire some of those students to become educators in the future."

OMAR DURON
2019 Arizona Milken Educator
Superintendent, Somerton School District #11

STATE NETWORKS

ACROSS THE COUNTRY, MILKEN EDUCATORS ...

CELEBRATE

HAWAII MILKEN EDUCATORS

Aloha State Award recipients from years past travel from the neighboring islands to take part in the surprise notifications. Their collective support sheds light on the professional possibilities awaiting the newest members of the Milken Educator family. A special highlight is an annual event to honor the new recipient and present mini-grants to early-career teachers.

Founded in 1992, the Hawaii Network is a vital force in the state, fully invested in celebrating educational excellence while elevating the teaching profession. The organization has coordinated fundraising activities to establish scholarships for teachers and administrators to further their professional development and career goals. It also has been instrumental in advocating for policies that support teachers, students and schools, as well as offering assistance to state and district superintendents in areas such as science fairs, speech contests, leadership training, and more. In every endeavor, the Milken Educators of the Aloha State are committed to their founding principles: recognizing excellence, fostering collaboration and creating a brighter future for education.

ELEVATE

TEACHERS OF PROMISE FOUNDATION, VIRGINIA

The Teachers of Promise (TOP) Foundation was established by Wade Whitehead (VA '00) to celebrate, elevate and activate the best future teachers across America. The Foundation's flagship initiative is the Teachers of Promise Institute, which was launched in 2004 by the Virginia Milken Educator Network. The Institute (www.teachersofpromise.com) honors future teachers from college and university schools of education through a two-day experience that celebrates the decision to teach, elevates the teaching profession, and activates a network of excellence in classrooms and schools. Wade Whitehead (VA '00), Stephanie Bishop (VA '01) and Laura Marshall (VA '08) serve as co-directors.

The TOP Foundation's other programs include the Smoky Mountain Teachers of Promise Summit—which honors attendees from Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina and Tennessee—and the Maryland Teachers of Promise Institute.

To date, more than 4,500 Teachers of Promise have been identified and recognized. These alumni include State Teachers of the Year, National Board Certified Teachers, and Milken Educator Ryan Sykes (VA '19). More than 125 expert educators from across the nation, including over 75 Milken Educators, have served as mentors and presenters.

"Amazing classroom teachers are our last, best hope for navigating the true potential waiting in our schools. That's why we are finding and honoring the next generation of great teachers so that we can imagine and advance a new understanding of what it takes to reach every learner, in every classroom, every day."

WADE WHITEHEAD
2000 Virginia Milken Educator
Founder and Executive Director
Teachers of Promise Foundation

ACTIVATE

MILKEN FRIENDS FOREVER (MFF)

Milken Educators know instantly that the Award is an honor. It is also a responsibility with opportunities and expectations to grow as a leader in the profession. Recipients are role models who use their example, voice and influence in schools and diverse settings far beyond their campus. But they are not left on their own to meet these expectations.

The Milken Friends Forever (MFF) Program pairs new Milken Educators with experienced veteran Milken Educators to build meaningful professional relationships that support reflection, leadership growth, and continued engagement in the Milken Educator Network. Through intentional conversations, veteran Milken Educators serve as trusted partners who help new recipients: reflect on the impact of the Milken Educator Award; navigate opportunities to Elevate and Activate as leaders; and explore ways to strengthen their own professional practices (Elevate) while influencing the professional practices of others (Activate). The program is designed to strengthen the Milken Educator community by fostering authentic relationships, encouragement, and leadership development.

MFFs become thought partners with common qualities of passion, excellence and drive. They connect through monthly calls and virtual meetings to determine priorities, set goals, outline strategies and set timelines. Deep professional relationships provide an atmosphere of trust to discuss professional activities, offer feedback, share areas of expertise, and build bridges among their nationally recognized colleagues within the vast Milken Educator Network.

What has transpired is that Milken Educators are growing and leading at an exponential rate. By impacting teachers and students across our nation, they strengthen the legacy of our motto: "***The future belongs to the educated.***"

EXPANDING MFF RESOURCE AND EXPLORER PROGRAM

Whether early or seasoned in their careers, Milken Educators are lifelong learners. The Expanding MFF Resource and Explorer Program hones in on a specific topic to "Elevate" their practices or assume leadership roles to "Activate" practice and policy more broadly.

The program connects an "Explorer MFF" who is looking for guidance in an area of interest to a "Resource MFF" who has deep experience in that area. Currently 142 Milken Educators of diverse backgrounds, geographical areas, school settings and disciplines volunteer their time as Resource MFFs. Some connections enhance technical skills, such as in STEM/STEAM, English Language Learner instruction, education technology and grant application. Others offer practical advice on advancing in the profession, including becoming an administrator, instructional coach or district leader; serving in professional organizations; or obtaining an advanced degree.

The program is flexible and customized to educators' needs, which evolve over time. Some matches are short-term while others may extend longer to allow for deeper discussions and action plans. All share a common purpose of strengthening the impact of Milken Educators on students, colleagues and communities.

"Instead of the typical mentor-mentee model that assumes the mentor is the sage, Milken Friends Forever recognizes the rewards the veteran Milken Educator receives from being paired with a new Milken Educator. It is such a gift to have relationships with other incredible educators across the country … especially when we have opportunities to reimagine education together."

DR. DILHANI USWATTE
2009 Alabama Milken Educator
National Distinguished Principal
Chief Academic Officer, i3Academy
Birmingham, Alabama

ACTIVATING MILKEN EDUCATORS (AME)

Individually, Milken Educators are exemplary. Activating Milken Educators (AME) capitalizes on the force of what Milken Educators can accomplish together.

AME, led by Stephanie Bishop (VA '01), promotes collaboration among Milken Educators to target topics intended to attract, retain, motivate and develop teacher effectiveness in their states by designing programs and solutions aligned to "Celebrate, Elevate, Activate."

As of fall 2026, 21 Milken Educator Networks—Alabama, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Delaware, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, Michigan, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, West Virginia, and Wyoming—have created and sustained initiatives to tackle the teacher shortage and promote teacher leadership. Network planning meetings focus on developing a strong purpose for projects shaped to the needs of states. Projects have relevance to Milken Educators and the Milken Educator Network as a whole. MEA consistently advances AME to Milken Educators across America.

"When Milken Educators unite, the power of the pin is magnified. AME provides the structure for newer and veteran Milken Educators to collectively strategize and plan initiatives to elevate education in their states."

STEPHANIE BISHOP
2001 Virginia Milken Educator
Vice President
Milken Educator Awards

MILKEN EDUCATOR COLLECTIVE

The idea for the Milken Educator Collective emerged from a conversation among Dr. Shasta Looper (SC '12), Collin Binko (WY '24) and Stephanie Bishop (VA '01) about the extraordinary strength of the Milken Educator Network and how it could be leveraged to foster content- and role-specific professional learning across the nation. The vision was simple yet powerful: to create opportunities for Milken Educators to learn with and from one another in ways that are relevant, collaborative, and immediately applicable to their work.

Today, the Milken Educator Collective, led by Jennifer Fuller (TX '17), brings that vision to life through virtual communities of practice where Milken Educators with shared content areas, grade levels, or professional roles connect throughout the year. While each Collective is uniquely designed to meet the needs of its members, all share a common purpose: to strengthen professional practice, foster meaningful connections, and inspire continued growth through the Milken Educator Network.

Each Collective is planned and facilitated by Milken Educators who design virtual learning experiences for their peers. Sessions are shaped by the interests and needs of participants and may include the sharing of instructional strategies, collaborative problem-solving, classroom innovations, and leadership practices. The Milken Educator Collective cultivates a nationwide community of educators who challenge, encourage and inspire one another while advancing excellence in education.

MILKEN MEETUP

Inspired by the unexpected gift of attending the same professional learning opportunity, Milken Award recipients Jennifer Fuller (TX '17), Dr. Nader Twal (CA '03) and Aubrey Flowers (OK '21) considered the potential of an organized and intentional "Milken MeetUp" to forge new relationships and connections with Milken Educator peers. A Milken MeetUp offers Milken Educators the invaluable opportunity to connect with Milken Educators from across the country to reflect, debrief, and process the information gained while attending a professional learning conference. It also leverages the potential of networking with fellow Milken Award recipients to consider and apply innovative practices. Milken Educators post pictures on social media of Milken MeetUps across the nation to celebrate the personal and professional connections.

> Milken Educators embody extraordinary beacons of hope in education. Every time I stand among these champions of learning, I am uplifted, ignited, and deeply inspired to serve teachers and students with greater purpose and passion."

JENNIFER FULLER
2017 Texas Milken Educator
Vice President
Milken Educator Awards

"The Milken Educator Awards Forum challenged me to think beyond the impact I have within my own classroom. Being 10% bolder means saying yes to opportunities that allow me to serve others, share my experiences, and continue growing as a leader."

SHANE HENDERSON
2025 North Carolina Milken Educator

MILKEN EDUCATORS AS LEADERS

THE MILKEN EDUCATOR AWARD IS AN ONGOING RELATIONSHIP THAT PROVIDES RECIPIENTS WITH ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND OPENS UP A WORLD OF OPPORTUNITIES

"I vividly remember Lowell Milken at my notification telling me that he expected great things from me. I recall him saying that this Award was being given for what I was going to do to make a positive difference in education. I took that to heart! I will remember that day forever because I suddenly had an entire 'family' who believed that I had the ability to make a difference. That is extremely powerful."

SHANNON GARRISON
2008 California Milken Educator
5th Grade Teacher
National Assessment Governing Board, 2010–2018

While continuing in her role as a classroom teacher, Shannon was one of three educators on the National Assessment Governing Board, which sets policy for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as "the Nation's Report Card." She was reappointed for a second term in 2014 and chaired the Assessment Development Committee for six of her eight years on the Board.

Throughout the years, Milken Educators frequently pursue new opportunities and assume expanded responsibilities of leadership. The achievements listed below are but a sampling of the thousands of leadership roles undertaken to strengthen education at state and national levels.

STATE CHIEF SCHOOL OFFICERS

Pender Makin, 2001 Maine Milken Educator; Commissioner, Maine Department of Education

STATE LEGISLATORS

Dr. Carrie Buck, 2008 Nevada Milken Educator; Nevada State Senator

STATE DEPARTMENTS OF EDUCATION: MILKEN EDUCATORS IN KEY ROLES

Dr. Amara Alexander, 2016 Alabama Milken Educator; K-5 Science Administrator, Alabama Department of Education

Valerie Bayard de Volo, 2007 Nevada Milken Educator; Executive Assistant to the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Nevada Department of Education

Megan Brown, 2022 Arizona Milken Educator; Federal School Improvement Specialist, Arizona Department of Education

Amy Denty, 1999 Georgia Milken Educator; Director of Literacy, Georgia Department of Education

Dr. Erika Klose, 2017 West Virginia Milken Educator; Director of the Office of PK-12 Academic Support, West Virginia Department of Education

Angela Mansfield, 2002 Minnesota Milken Educator; Assistant Commissioner at the Office of Educational Opportunity, Minnesota Department of Education

Dr. Vaughn G. Rhudy, 2003 West Virginia Milken Educator; Director of Assessment, West Virginia Department of Education

Michelle Ryan, 2015 Massachusetts Milken Educator; Associate Commissioner at the Kaleidoscope Collective for Learning, Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Maria Santonastaso, 2024 Rhode Island Milken Educator; Literacy Fellow, Rhode Island Department of Education

Nathan Tedjeske, 2023 Wyoming Milken Educator; Chief Innovation Officer, Wyoming Department of Education

STATE BOARDS OF EDUCATION

Bruce DuPlanty, 1999 Arizona Milken Educator; Deputy Director, Arizona State Board of Education

Dr. Steven T. Isoye, 1997 Illinois Milken Educator; Chair, Illinois State Board of Education

Dr. Gary Stark, 2001 Arkansas Milken Educator; Member, Arkansas State Board of Education

STATES HONOR NEW MILKEN EDUCATORS

An important feature of the Milken Educator Award is state-level recognition during which the Chief State School Officer presents the signature Award obelisk. These special ceremonies take place at state board meetings, governor's mansions, legislative sessions, conferences and awards banquets.

Sarah Watkins (LA '25) with Louisiana State Supt. of Education Dr. Cade Brumley, Louisiana Department of Education Talent Project Director Joni Lacy, Jay Weisman (LA '21) and Kelly Ryan (LA '23).

Dave Mason (CT '25) with Connecticut Commissioner of Education Charlene M. Russel-Tucker, State Board of Education Vice Chair Erin D. Benham and Colchester School District Supt. Daniel P. Sullivan.

Christian Stanley (AL '25) with Alabama State Supt. of Education Eric G. Mackey, state board leaders and members, and family members.

Dr. Jaclyn Lennox (IL '25) with Illinois State Board of Education Chair Dr. Steven Isoye (IL '97) and State Supt. of Education Dr. Tony Sanders.

Jill Ridder (IA '25) with Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds, Department of Education Director McKenzie Snow, officials, and family members.

Jeanette Capritti (NJ '25) with New Jersey Commissioner of Education Dr. Lily Laux and staff, state board of education leaders and members, and county, district and school leaders.

Elizabeth Metts (MA '25) with Massachusetts Secretary of Education Dr. Stephen Zrike Jr. and Elementary and Secondary Education Commissioner Pedro Martinez.

Sydney Newton (KY '25) with Kentucky Commissioner of Education Robbie Fletcher and Board of Education Vice Chair Lu Young.

AFFILIATED INITIATIVES IN EDUCATION

MILKEN CENTER for ADVANCING the AMERICAN DREAM

The Milken Center for Advancing the American Dream (MCAAD) is a cultural institution dedicated to illuminating pathways to opportunity for all.

Situated in the heart of Washington, D.C., MCAAD invites visitors to explore bold ideas and engage in meaningful dialogue through impactful personal stories, cutting-edge technology, and immersive installations.

www.mcaad.org

Milken Educators, leaders and staff gather in the Hall of Generations, a stunning first impression of the American Dream Experience exhibition. The three-story-tall Tree of Generations allows visitors to upload photos that represent what the American Dream means to them.

"The American Dream, and the free-enterprise system upon which it is based, reflect enduring values of individual liberty, economic freedom, entrepreneurial creativity, and the pursuit of happiness. Our mission at MCAAD is to educate, inspire, and illuminate pathways for those seeking their own American Dream."

MIKE MILKEN
Founder, Milken Center for Advancing the American Dream

MCAAD HIGHLIGHTS MILKEN EDUCATORS FOR THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS TO REALIZING HUMAN POTENTIAL

EDUCATION AND THE EDUCATOR

MCAAD's programming for schools, educators, and community groups offers guided tours, hands-on workshops, and a flexible toolkit of resources—all thoughtfully designed to spark curiosity, foster real-world learning, and inspire purpose in learners of all backgrounds.

Filled with a 44-foot-long data wall, commissioned artwork, and quotes about the American Dream, the Hall of Dreams is the perfect place to seek inspiration and knowledge. Visitors can submit their own word that defines their own aspirations to the Word Cloud and watch it appear in real time.

An exciting feature at MCAAD, in the Education and the Educator space on the fifth floor, is the Roadmap to Achieving Your American Dream. The Roadmap has two common threads: first, in every endeavor, people—human capital—make the difference. Second, education in many forms is the foundation toward reaching our goals. The exhibit includes over 50 display panels organized into six interconnected themes. These themes explore the powerful relationship between human potential and education through compelling stories, examples of successful education initiatives, videos, photos, quotes, activities and data. Visitors are challenged to reflect as they experience the Roadmap and think about actions they can take to change the world around them.

Lowell Milken Center FOR *Unsung Heroes*

Discover Create Change

UNSUNG HERO (NOUN):

An individual, largely unrecognized by society, who took extraordinary actions to improve the lives of others, and made a profound and positive impact on the course of history.

The Lowell Milken Center for Unsung Heroes (LMC) transforms classrooms and communities through student-driven projects that discover Unsung Heroes from history—individuals who changed the world through their courage and compassion, yet are not found in history books. Established in 2007 as a partnership between Lowell Milken and 1992 Kansas Milken Educator and history teacher Norm Conard, LMC's unique project-based learning approach integrates research, critical thinking and creativity for students and educators across diverse cultures and academic disciplines.

LMC has reached over three million students worldwide via its online projects, educator resources and student competitions. The Fort Scott, Kansas, headquarters has welcomed visitors from all 50 states and from countries around the world. The Hall of Unsung Heroes museum was added in 2016, featuring an inspirational, high-tech space with interactive exhibits and expanded research opportunities. In 2022, LMC celebrated the grand opening of its Unsung Heroes Park, a vibrant community gathering space for programs and activities.

LMC is an initiative of the Lowell Milken Family Foundation.

www.LowellMilkenCenter.org

"Real heroes tower and guide. They are the North Star that today's youth can look up to. But their stories need to be discovered and heard. And when we do, we have the opportunity to motivate new generations to aspire to values that are essential during the challenging times we face individually, as a nation and as a world community. That is the purpose of the Center for Unsung Heroes."

LOWELL MILKEN
Founder

Unsung Hero Harry Hue and his family study his exhibit in the Hall of Unsung Heroes.

LOWELL MILKEN CENTER FELLOWS

The LMC Fellowship attracts top educators from the U.S. and around the world to the headquarters in historic Fort Scott. This prestigious, merit-based professional development program focuses on a distinctive discovery process rooted in project-based learning. Since its inception in 2008, the fellowship has welcomed 94 Milken Educators.

The Lowell Milken Center Fellowship invigorated my commitment to telling inspiring stories through my work as a teacher. Sharing our experiences and future plans in education through the inspiration of LMC has left me with a sense of duty to allow my students that same opportunity to explore and highlight individuals that inspire them."

BEN NGUYEN
2019 Nevada Milken Educator
2022 Lowell Milken Center Fellow

Discovering Unsung Heroes helps students see beyond the small number of people they learn about in school. They are able to see that everyday people can do things that are heroic and that helps with their own character development. The opportunity to engage personally with the individual and story gives students a new passion for learning."

LESLIE SULLIVAN
2019 South Carolina Milken Educator
2021 Lowell Milken Center Fellow
2023-24 ARTEFFECT Ambassador

STUDENT COMPETITIONS

ILLUSTRATING ITS MOTTO TO "DISCOVER–CREATE–CHANGE," LMC HOLDS TWO ANNUAL COMPETITIONS OFFERING STUDENTS THOUSANDS IN CASH PRIZES.

DISCOVERY AWARD

Uncovering and then sharing the impact of an Unsung Hero takes resourcefulness, determination and passion on the part of students. In the process, young people learn invaluable research, communication and life skills. LMC's Discovery Award offers thousands in financial prizes to students in grades 4-12 who produce compelling Unsung Hero Projects. Entries can take the form of a documentary film, performance or website, and must include a process paper.

> **"If I could sum up my experience into one word, it would be: inspiring. But even that does not begin to cover how inspiring this journey has been. It made me realize there are so many people in the world who have done amazing work, but we never hear about them. That is what makes these projects so special. It takes a person out of the shadows and into the sunlight. It's an incredible feeling when you know you brought their story to the lives of others."**

MADISON GLIDDEN
2023 Outstanding High School Project
11th Grade, Loup County, Nebraska

www.LowellMilkenCenter.org

Lowell Milken Center for Unsung Heroes

ARTEFFECT

DISCOVER THE POWER TO **CREATE** POSITIVE **CHANGE** THROUGH ART.

ARTEFFECT is a visual arts education initiative that invites educators and students to explore the inspiring and diverse stories of the LMC Unsung Heroes and their invaluable lessons as role models through the visual arts. ARTEFFECT offers student art competitions, professional development and exhibitions. These offerings aim to amplify the voices of students, engage educators, and inspire others through the LMC Unsung Heroes—guided by Founder Lowell Milken's vision that "one individual has the power to make a positive and profound difference in the lives of others."

ARTEFFECT runs two competition cycles: an annual competition from fall through spring and a summer competition. Since Lowell Milken founded ARTEFFECT in 2016, the competitions have engaged thousands of students. Young artists in grades 6-12 consider, interpret and create original artworks and write reflective impact statements that champion the stories of LMC Unsung Heroes. Various 2D and 3D mediums are eligible. These young artists explore the power of their own artmaking by showcasing their completed projects in classroom and community settings to stimulate positive social impact. The juried competitions award over $70,000 annually in financial prizes across multiple categories, with exhibition opportunities for award-winning artworks.

ARTEFFECT Competition

2026 GRAND PRIZE
The Hands of Reconstruction, Frances Perkins, 2026
Acrylic on canvas board, 24 x 18 in.
Steve Han, Grade 10
Irvine, California, United States

> **Frances Perkins gave meaning to the sacrifices workers make through her voice, pen, and policy. In this sense, I think of her as a builder who rebuilt society through leadership and reform, not just through physical construction."**
>
> STEVE HAN

ARTEFFECT AMBASSADORS PROGRAM

Launched in 2023, the ARTEFFECT Ambassadors Program brings together an annual cohort of outstanding middle and high school educators for an online fellowship to foster teaching and learning through the visual arts. Educators learn alongside other high-level practitioners through visual-arts-focused, project-based activities and hone their instructional practices. Throughout the school year, Ambassadors engage in online modules with visual art lesson plans focused on the LMC Unsung Heroes. The fellowship provides a stipend and materials fee, official recognition, and a certificate. The fellowship culminates with learner-centered capstone projects that Ambassadors develop and implement to engage their classrooms and communities.

This Ambassadors fellowship has been a journey of discovery, growth, and collaboration. From the remarkable modules to the final presentations and community exhibition, each aspect of this experience has contributed to my professional development and strengthened my commitment to fostering meaningful connections between education and the broader community."

MELISSA SYLVESTER
2005 Maine Milken Educator
2015 Lowell Milken Center Fellow
2023-24 ARTEFFECT Ambassador

ARTEFFECT is an initiative of the ARTEFFECTlmc Foundation.

www.ARTEFFECTLMC.org

ARTEFFECT EXHIBITION AT MCAAD

ARTEFFECT Founder Lowell Milken, Executive Director Dr. Toni Guglielmo and Project Manager Connor Walden at the ARTEFFECT at MCAAD gallery—a permanent space dedicated to showcasing award-winning ARTEFFECT visual arts projects by young artists that celebrate the extraordinary impact of Unsung Heroes on the world.

ARTEFFECT presents Visualizing Impact, its inaugural exhibition on view at the Milken Center for Advancing the American Dream in Washington, D.C. This 3,000-square-foot permanent gallery showcases award-winning ARTEFFECT projects created by young and emerging artists from around the globe.

In this gallery, visual artworks and short films explore Unsung Heroes—role models, largely unrecognized by society, who demonstrated extraordinary, heroic traits and actions in service to others and made a positive and profound impact on the course of history. Their inspiring stories span centuries and diverse disciplines including civil rights, education, innovation, healthcare, STEAM, and wartime history.

Students celebrate Unsung Heroes in projects that illuminate connections between the past, present, and future. These young artists convey the historical significance of their subjects through an array of artistic expressions and reflections. As they investigate Unsung Heroes as role models, students awaken to their own potential and the power of artmaking to stimulate positive change.

The ARTEFFECT exhibition invites visitors to experience the transformative power of visual arts education and to embark on a journey through time through an engaging and interactive experience.

Explore the exhibition online at ARTEFFECTLMC.org.

VOTE FOR WOMEN

Lowell Milken Center for Unsung Heroes
ARTEFFECT
ARTEFFECT
ARTEFFECT
Visualizing Impact

MILKEN SCHOLARS

Lifelong Leaders for a Better World

The Milken Scholars Program was founded in 1989 by Lori and Michael Milken to honor exceptional young individuals based on scholarship, leadership, service, character and triumphs over obstacles. Scholars are graduating high school seniors from New York, Washington, D.C., and Los Angeles County who go through a rigorous nomination and interview process.

Each receives a $10,000 scholarship, but what makes the program unique is the access to a lifetime of resources, including mentorship throughout their college careers and beyond. The three-day Summit with presentations by outstanding leaders from diverse fields allows Scholars to form and renew friendships as they exchange ideas and aspirations.

Milken Scholars is a joint initiative of the Milken Family Foundation and the Milken Institute.

www.MilkenScholars.org

"The Milken Scholars Program is more than a scholarship program—it is a family that has supported me and helped me grow intellectually and professionally since I was a 17-year-old high school senior. As the first person in my family to go to an Ivy League college, it made all the difference to be able to lean on my Milken mentor and fellow Milken Scholars at Harvard for support. The $10,000 scholarship itself was only the beginning of a lifelong relationship that I cannot imagine my life without."

DENNIS OJOGHO
2012 Milken Scholar
A.B. Harvard, Government
J.D. Harvard, Law

> "Whether they become doctors, research scientists, educators, entrepreneurs or diplomats, the common denominator of Milken Scholars is a genuine sense of service."
>
> MIKE MILKEN
> Founder, Milken Scholars

MILKEN FAMILY FOUNDATION

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MILKEN EDUCATOR AWARDS
40 YEARS of
ELEVATING EDUCATORS

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Front cover photos: Lowell Milken and Dr. Rubylinda Zickafoose (FL '98), Emily Langley Stanford (LA '01), Dr. Joel Robins (VA '10), and Ashley Davis (LA '24). Each photo represents a decade of the program's 40-year history.
Front and back inside covers: Photos feature Award recipients from every year, celebrating 40 years of honorees from 1987-2025.
Back cover photo: Elizabeth Metts (MA '25).

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