



# MILKEN EDUCATOR AWARDS

Celebrating  
3,000 Educators

#MilkenAward  
#MEA3K





“With each new class of Milken Educators, we are reminded that the power and promise of education must be replenished from generation to generation.”

**LOWELL MILKEN**

Founder, Milken Educator Awards  
Chairman and Co-Founder, Milken Family Foundation

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

# 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 and its implementation have been the driving force in my work in K-12 education since 1982. Essential to this pursuit is the development and support of an effective and respected teaching profession.

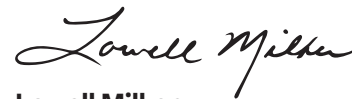
As a nation, we depend on our teachers and principals to produce students and graduates who are not only literate, numerate, and conversant in the humanities and sciences, but who are also creative, motivated, and confident. As a society, we seek to nurture young people who are able and willing to think independently and act with integrity, confidence, and compassion. The outstanding educator is the sure and steady guide who advances young people securely and ably in learning and life.

Education's role as the most important of all professions 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 emotional support regardless of the challenges.

For whether a school is urban, suburban, or rural—whether it represents the most affluent or those most in need—within the course of a school day, research confirms that nothing has more impact on student learning than the effectiveness of the teacher in the classroom.

In creating the Milken Educator Awards, my goal was to bring to the fore talented educators who go about their work every day to advance students and fellow educators. Individuals who epitomize achievement in their career to date and have the potential to make even more profound contributions moving forward. Since presenting our first Awards to one dozen exemplary California educators in 1987, we have seen how focusing the spotlight of recognition and celebration for such excellence inspires not only educators, but also students and entire communities to new heights of commitment and expectation.

This 2024-25 season, we celebrate a Milken Educator Network of 3,000 dedicated and deserving professionals who are shaping the future of education. With each new class of Milken Educators, we are reminded that the power and promise of education must be replenished from generation to generation. In a complex and changing 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*

*Chairman and 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 Award honors the unwavering dedication of our educators. It highlights the significant impact that exceptional teachers have on our students and school communities. We are incredibly proud to have such outstanding educators in Virginia, and this recognition elevates the profession.”

**DR. LISA COONS**

Virginia Superintendent of Public Instruction



## THE MILKEN EDUCATOR AWARDS

### TOUCHING MINDS AND HEARTS

Since 1987, more than two 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 nomination or application process. 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

“ Nothing assures the success of a nation more than education. And nothing assures the quality of education more than dedicated classroom teachers instilling a love of learning and a sense of wonder in their students.”

**MICHAEL MILKEN**

President and Co-Founder  
Milken Family Foundation



# HELPING TEACHERS AND STUDENTS REACH THEIR POTENTIAL

“Milken Educators point to their Award as a pivotal professional milestone. After traveling the country for over 25 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.’

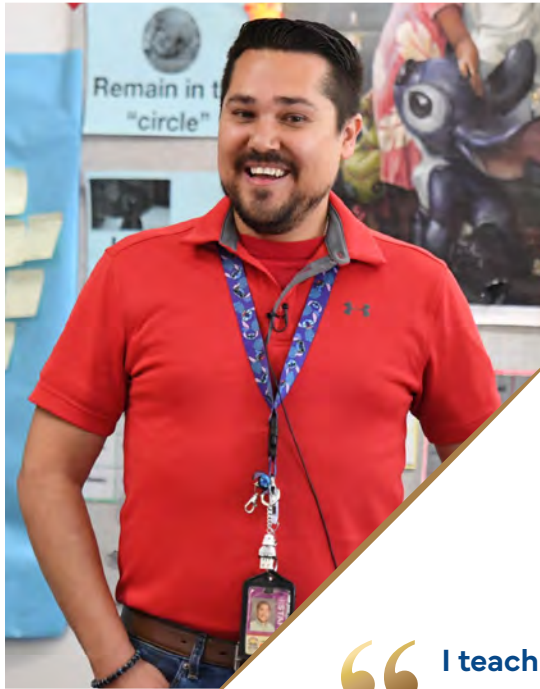
The validation and confidence that accompanies the Award truly unleashes educator leadership. The ongoing connection to additional resources and networks opens an ever-expanding window to opportunities, support, and a path in education to improve professional practices and grow as a leader at and beyond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



# 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 healthy 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.

“ I teach because I love it. Educators are the foundation for the future of our country. We’re the backbone, and we’re ready to help these kids grow up and become great citizens.”

**CHRISTOPHER NUNEZ**  
2022 New Mexico Milken Educator  
4th Grade Teacher  
Sonoma Elementary School  
Las Cruces, New Mexico



# 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 and policy 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 BEENDORFER**  
1996 Missouri Milken Educator  
Chief Impact Officer, AstrumU



## 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.

During sessions with leaders in education, 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 2,900 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, national gatherings, webinars 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 Zoominars 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  
Visiting Assistant 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



# STATE NETWORKS

ACROSS THE COUNTRY, MILKEN EDUCATORS ...



## ELEVATE

### Teachers of Promise Institute, Virginia

Inspired by the Milken Educator Awards, the Teachers of Promise Institute was launched in 2004 by the Virginia Milken Educator Network. The Institute ([www.teachersofpromise.com](http://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) serves as executive director, with Stephanie Bishop (VA '01) and Laura Marshall (VA '08) serving as co-directors.

To date, the Institute has identified and recognized almost 4,000 Teachers of Promise. These alumni include State Teachers of the Year, National Board Certified Teachers, and Milken Educator Ryan Sykes (VA '19). More than 100 master educators from across the nation, including over 50 Milken Educators, have served as mentors and presenters. The Institute is funded by the Teachers of Promise Foundation, a 501(c)(3) established by Wade in 2010. The Foundation has raised more than \$1,000,000 to support the Institute.

## 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. The Hawaii Network is fully invested in celebrating educational excellence in the Aloha State while elevating the teaching profession.

“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  
President, 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 challenged to be teacher leaders—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.

Both new and veteran Milken Educators are invited to participate in a one-of-a-kind partnership between the two called Milken Friends Forever (MFF). Through focused communication, along with personalized support and coaching, veteran Milken Educators assist their MFFs in determining how, when and where they will “Elevate” to improve their own instructional and/or professional practices and “Activate” to explore, prepare and serve in leadership roles that influence practice and policy of others.

MFFs become thought partners with common qualities of passion, excellence and drive. They connect through monthly calls and Zoom 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.”



“ 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  
Chief Academic Officer, i3Academy  
Birmingham, Alabama  
National Distinguished Principal



## 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.

Open to Milken Educators in their second year and beyond, 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 112 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.

## 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 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 2024, 21 Milken Educator Networks—Alabama, Arizona, California, Colorado, Delaware, Idaho, Indiana, Louisiana, Maine, Michigan, Missouri, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, 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 work together, the power of the pin is magnified. AME provides the structure for newer and veteran Milken Educators to collectively strategize and plan initiatives to impact education in their states.”

**STEPHANIE BISHOP**  
2001 Virginia Milken Educator  
Vice President  
Milken Educator Awards



## 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 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 their MeetUp from across the nation where smiles abound through the personal and professional connections.





## 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.



**DR. DILHANI  
USWATTE**  
AL '09



**LIZ  
BARNUM**  
NV '22



**DR. JANE  
FOLEY**  
IN '94



**DR. NADER  
IMAD TWAL**  
CA '03



**DION T.  
JONES**  
MD '22



**DR. ANGIE  
BESENDORFER**  
MO '96



**SHANE  
BAKER**  
KY '23



**STEPHANIE E.  
BISHOP**  
VA '01

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

### NATIONAL ASSESSMENT GOVERNING BOARD

**Nardi Routten**, 2014 Florida Milken Educator; Board Member

**Dr. Dilhani Uswatte**, 2009 Alabama Milken Educator; Board Member

### STATE DEPARTMENTS OF EDUCATION: MILKEN EDUCATORS IN KEY ROLES

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

**Bruce DuPlanty**, 1999 Arizona Milken Educator; Deputy Associate Superintendent of Educator Preparation and Certification, Arizona Department of Education

**Amy Denty**, 1999 Georgia Milken Educator; Instructional Specialist at the Office of Rural Education and Innovation, Georgia Department of Education

**Dewey Gottlieb**, 2003 Hawaii Milken Educator; Educational Specialist for Mathematics Innovation, Hawaii Department of Education

**Deborah Grinnage-Pulley**, 2003 Maryland Milken Educator; Executive Director, Maryland Department of Education

**Dixie Grupe**, 1996 Missouri Milken Educator; Director of Social Studies, Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

**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

**Rich Meserve**, 2009 Maine Milken Educator; Director of School and Student Supports, Maine 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

**Dr. Jacquelyn Sampsell**, 1999 Mississippi Milken Educator; State Assessment Director, Mississippi Department of Education

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

**Mark Wagner**, 1992 North Dakota Milken Educator; Assistant State Director, North Dakota Career and Technical Education

### STATE BOARDS OF EDUCATION

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

**Dr. David O'Shields**, 2003 South Carolina Milken Educator; Chair, South Carolina 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.



Jade Pham (HI '23) with Dr. Jane Foley (IN '94) and Hawaii Superintendent of Education Keith Hayashi.



Andrew Harrison (AR '23) with Arkansas Department of Education Secretary Jacob Oliva, state board members, and district, school and teacher leaders.



Ainsley VanBuskirk (NC '23) with North Carolina Superintendent of Public Instruction Catherine Truitt, state board members, and district and school leaders.



Ashley Wilkins (WV '23) and Janna Hamrick (WV '23) with West Virginia State Superintendent Michele L. Blatt and state board members.



Korri Cunningham (AL '23) and her family with Superintendent Dr. Eric G. Mackey, state board of education members and school leaders.

# AFFILIATED INITIATIVES IN EDUCATION



MILKEN CENTER  
for ADVANCING the  
AMERICAN DREAM

DEPARTMENT OF  
THE TREASURY

EXECUTIVE OFFICE  
BUILDING

THE WHITE HOUSE

PENNSYLVANIA  
AVENUE

FREEDMAN'S  
BANK

MILKEN INSTITUTE  
OFFICES



The Milken Center for Advancing the American Dream (MCAAD) celebrates the ideal of the American Dream and showcases how access to a good education, health, finance, and an entrepreneurial mindset fuels people to pursue their dreams.

The highly anticipated 2025 grand opening of the visitor center on Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D.C., will feature immersive exhibits, moving stories, contests and more aimed to inspire people to pursue their dreams.



MCAAD’s ‘Hall of Generations’ is the first space visitors will walk into a soaring welcome, featuring stories of how the American Dream is shaped by generations past, present and future. *Rendering by Rockwell Group.*

[www.mcaad.org](http://www.mcaad.org)



“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.”

**MICHAEL MILKEN**  
Founder  
Milken Center for Advancing the American Dream

## AFFILIATED INITIATIVES IN EDUCATION

# MCAAD HIGHLIGHTS MILKEN EDUCATORS FOR THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS TO REALIZING HUMAN POTENTIAL

## EDUCATION AND THE EDUCATOR

MCAAD is built on four pillars—Education and the Educator, Health and Medical Research, Access to Finance and Financial Empowerment, and Entrepreneurship and Innovation—the strength of which propels realization of the American Dream for individuals, communities, and nations. The pillar Education and the Educator is epitomized by Milken Educators, indeed every educator who inspires and instills the knowledge, skills, talents and perseverance to overcome challenges and become productive citizens. Universal access to high-quality, relevant education may be the most fundamental element of keeping the American Dream alive for millions across the world.

MCAAD's K-12 programming focuses on keys to securing the American Dream: financial literacy and access to capital, health, and building an entrepreneurial spirit. MCAAD's K-12 programming will include an "American Dream toolkit" of resources, teaching materials, and guidelines designed to instill curiosity and nurture purpose for learners everywhere.

“The American Dream is complex and ever evolving. It is so exciting to have the opportunity to create a space that uplifts, inspires, educates and challenges around this important and driving set of ideals.”

**RACHEL GOSLINS**  
Executive Director  
Milken Center for Advancing the American Dream



In MCAAD's 'Hall of Dreams,' definitions of the American Dream come to life. Visitors will explore how notable figures define the dream and be invited to offer their own definitions through an interactive Word Cloud sculpture.  
*Rendering by Rockwell Group.*



## Lowell Milken Center FOR *Unsung Heroes*



### **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](http://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





**WARLOCKS OF THE HEART**


...of the heart...

**UNSUNG HEROES**

...of the heart...

# STEADFAST LEADER FOR LIBERTY

The Harry Hue Project



Lieutenant Colonel Tran Ngoc "Harry" Hue of the 1st Infantry Division Army of the Republic of Vietnam fought alongside U.S. Army and the U.S. Marines during the Vietnam War saving numerous South Vietnamese and American lives.

Born in 1942 into a family of military leaders, Harry witnessed brutal injustices for the sake of his people's fight for self-determination. A leader in the Army of the Republic of Vietnam, the peak of Harry's military career came during the pivotal 1968 Tet Offensive, during which his unit took the lead in a month-long battle to prevent the capture of the strategically key city of Hue.

In 1971, while searching for enemy supplies, Harry was taken prisoner by enemy forces. In his 3.5 years as a prisoner of war, the North Vietnamese tried relentlessly to break Harry down, but he refused to give in despite being forced to live under horrific conditions.

*"My physical body became weaker and weaker every day, but my spirit was strong because when I judged myself I knew I did the right thing to protect my people and keep my country out of the arms of the invaders."*

—Tran Ngoc "Harry" Hue on his time as a POW



After being liberated, Harry was brought to America through the efforts of one of the U.S. Army advisors who had fought alongside him. As an immigrant, he has shown unwavering loyalty to his adopted country, advising the U.S. military on how to conduct relationships with foreign allies and collaborate against terrorist activities. For his courageous actions as a leader in the Vietnam War, Harry is the only foreign soldier to have received the Silver Star Medal, the highest award for heroism on the battlefield that the American military can grant an allied soldier.

### The Storytellers

In 2015, two juniors in LMC Fellow Susan Sittler's AP U.S. history class at Seaman High School in Kansas, came across an article about Harry Hue. Students Hailey Reed and Andrea Soderstrom contacted Harry and, through extensive research and oral history interviews, created a documentary to celebrate his legacy. LMC's 2015 Discovery Award. The award is a cherished, lifelong friendship between an Unsung Hero and the exceptional students who brought his largely unknown story to light.





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.



“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](http://www.LowellMilkenCenter.org)

## AFFILIATED INITIATIVES IN EDUCATION

Lowell Milken Center for Unsung Heroes

# ARTEFFECT



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

ARTEFFECT is an expanding initiative that invites educators and their 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 an annual student art competition, professional development and exhibitions. These offerings aim to amplify the voice 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.”

Since 2016, thousands of students from around the world have participated in the **ARTEFFECT annual student art competition**. Students in grades 6-12 consider, interpret, and create original artworks with written impact statements that champion the LMC Unsung Heroes as role models. Various 2D and 3D mediums are eligible. These young artists explore the power of their own artmaking by showcasing their completed projects beyond the classroom walls to stimulate positive community impact and social action. The juried competition offers a \$6,000 Grand Prize, with additional prize categories and **exhibition opportunities** for award-winning artworks.



### ARTEFFECT Competition

2024 GRAND PRIZE

*Visions of Light*

Pastel, charcoal, pencil on paper, 12 x 16 in.

**Rachel Han**, 11th Grade,

Bellevue, Washington

**Unsung Hero: Karl Ernst von Baer**

## 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 art-focused, project-based learning 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 design and develop 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.

I learned so much throughout this school year by attending the modules; I was able to enhance my processes, exercises, and activities to ultimately increase student engagement. All of the lesson plans were broken down into meaningful exercises that could be used for many different visual art classes.

Completing this Ambassadors fellowship has been a transformative journey, rich with invaluable lessons that have profoundly impacted my professional growth. The series of modules I participated in throughout this program were truly exceptional in their depth and scope.”

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

[LowellMilkenCenter.org/arteffect](https://LowellMilkenCenter.org/arteffect)



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.

“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



[www.MilkenScholars.org](http://www.MilkenScholars.org)



“ Whether they become doctors, research scientists, educators, entrepreneurs or diplomats, the common denominator of Milken Scholars is a genuine sense of service.”

**MICHAEL MILKEN**  
Founder, Milken Scholars

MILKEN  
SCHOLARS  
ANNUAL SUMMIT  
NAVIGATING A WORLD  
OF OPPORTUNITY



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**Richard Sandler**

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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“The Milken Educator Awards are not only given to celebrate what we have accomplished so far, but what we will achieve by being “10% bolder.” I am so inspired and empowered by everyone at the Forum! The Forum just validated my ‘why’! Let’s celebrate, elevate, and activate!”

**MAGGIE ARNOLD**  
2023 Maryland Milken Educator



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