



South Carolina
Department of Education

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Charleston teacher wins prestigious national honor – and a \$25,000 prize

COLUMBIA – A Charleston English teacher got the surprise of her professional life today with the news that she had won the prestigious Milken Family Foundation National Educator Award and its accompanying financial prize of \$25,000.

State Superintendent of Education Jim Rex made the surprise announcement during a student assembly at West Ashley High School. English language arts teacher Katherine Henderson had no idea that she was being considered for the honor.

Dubbed the “Oscars of Teaching” by Teacher Magazine, the Milken National Educator Awards were created in 1985 to reward, retain and attract top professionals to the nation’s schools. More than 50 unsuspecting educators across the country are being surprised this month with the news of their \$25,000 awards, which can be used any way they choose. The announcements are being made during emotional school-wide assemblies attended by state and local officials, students, peers and community leaders.

“To see the stunned reaction of this outstanding teacher when we surprised her this morning – well, it’s something that I will always remember,” Rex said. “Teachers who excel rarely get the recognition they deserve, and when that does happen, it’s truly wonderful to see.”

The Milken National Educator Awards, created by Chairman Lowell Milken, are the nation’s largest teacher recognition program. Since the program’s inception, more than 2,400 educators have been recognized with more than \$60 million in cash awards.

In South Carolina's 12 years in the program, there have been 49 National Educator Award recipients from the Palmetto State whose cash awards have totaled more than \$1 million.

“Highly effective educators are the human capital that will equip America’s youth in this increasingly competitive global economy,” Milken said. “By shining a national spotlight on these exceptional people, the Milken Educator Awards send a powerful message of the critical role that talented teachers play in preparing young people for a bright future.”

Katherine Henderson is an English teacher and department chair who has spent 12 years teaching, researching and practicing the most effective instructional techniques. She is

considered a “change agent” at West Ashley High who recruits students from diverse backgrounds into her challenging Advanced Placement classes.

Since she arrived on campus, enrollment in her AP English classes has soared from 10 to 69. In addition to her AP classes, Henderson also teaches Tech Prep classes designed to address the needs of students whose post-secondary path is the workplace or a two-year associate degree.

Although students may start off the year resistant to her high expectations, she builds their trust. Soon they realize that they are becoming better writers, better thinkers and better citizens. Henderson is also attentive to first-year teachers, observing and coaching to provide stability and confidence through constructive feedback, direction and inspiration.

She is certified in both English and Gifted and Talented and has attained a master’s degree in English from the University of Florida and an MAT in secondary English from the University of South Carolina. She has earned National Board Certification in adolescent and young adult ELA.

Next spring, Henderson and other recipients from around the country will travel to Los Angeles to attend the Milken Family Foundation National Education Conference – three days of workshops, discussion sessions and presentations by nationally recognized scholars and practitioners in the field of education. The Milken Education Conference will culminate in a ceremony at which the recipients will be honored and presented their \$25,000 awards.

Recipients also join the Milken Educator Network, a coalition of top educators who have access to a variety of expert resources to help cultivate and expand innovative programs in their classrooms, schools and districts.

Educators are recommended for this prestigious honor without their knowledge by a blue-ribbon panel appointed by each state’s department of education. Recipients of the Milken Educator Awards are selected on the basis of numerous criteria, including:

- Exceptional educational talent as evidenced by outstanding instructional practices in the classroom, school and profession.
- Outstanding accomplishments and strong long-range potential for professional and policy leadership.
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- Engaging and inspiring presence that motivates and impacts students, colleagues and the community at-large.

The Milken Family Foundation was established in 1982 as a private philanthropic institution dedicated to discovering and advancing inventive ways to build human resources. The Foundation, which creates and operates its own programs as well as providing financial support to other non-profit organizations, is involved primarily in three areas: education, medical research and health care, and community and human welfare. For more information, visit the foundation’s web site (www.mff.org).