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## **Three Texas teachers flabbergasted at \$25,000 national award in surprise ceremonies**

AUSTIN—Typically, school assemblies are fairly predictable: students join together in mass to hear a speech, see a presentation, and be enlightened. But this week's school assembly was highly unusual when Candice Lear, a high school Algebra teacher in the Arlington Independent School district was awarded \$25,000 and named the recipient of the Milken Family Foundation's National Educator Award.

Lear, along with Christopher Ormiston, a physics and chemistry teacher at Boerne High School in the Boerne Independent School District, and Mapuana Jones, a 7<sup>th</sup> grade English Language Arts teacher at Martin Middle School in the Corpus Christi Independent School District were honored with the Milken National Educator Award.

Nationally, 100 educators will be surprised with the news of their \$25,000 awards—which can be used any way they choose—during school-wide assemblies attended by state and local officials, students, peers and community leaders. This marks the sixth year that Texas has participated in the program.

Shirley J. Neeley, commissioner of education, and Lewis Solmon, board member of the Milken Family Foundation, surprised each teacher with the news of the award during a student assembly at their respective campuses. Gov. Perry joined in for the announcement in Corpus Christi.

"We commend each of these teachers for the compassion and enthusiasm they bring to their classrooms. Their dedicated service has made a marked difference in the lives of all the children they've touched," said Neeley.

Although Lear has only been in the teaching profession for five years, she has established a reputation as a visionary, creating unique and engaging lesson plans for her Algebra students at James Martin High School. Her "Algebra Cookbook" that contains recipes to achieve math literacy, and her life-sized graphs using students as the coordinates of points give students innovative ways to learn often complex and confusing mathematics concepts. Lear's impact goes beyond the classroom. She has developed new curriculum for the campus, has made staff development presentations, serves as a mentor to new teachers, and serves as the co-sponsor for Key Club, a student service organization. Lear exemplifies all of the qualities of an outstanding educator.

Ormiston is considered a top-notch educator in the field of science, and his passion for the subject directly impacts his students and Boerne ISD. Besides writing the science

curriculum, he has also developed a district-wide capital improvement budget that led to significant upgrades in the district, such as new science labs in every elementary campus, and laptop computers equipped with interfaces and probes to collect data at the middle and high school levels. Ormiston's dedication to the field of science spills over to his students. Many of his students have given up a portion of their summer to participate in special classes that he developed called Environmental System and Aquatic Science. His summer school program consists of field-experience courses that include three full days of classroom instruction, followed by 15 days in the field traveling through Arizona, Utah and Colorado, comparing and contrasting different biomes of the West. The Aquatic Science class heads east through Louisiana, Mississippi and concludes in the Florida Everglades where they study freshwater and marine ecosystems.

Jones, who is considered a passionate advocate for her students and treats them like her own children, teaches 7<sup>th</sup> grade English Language Arts at Martin Middle School. Jones emphasizes the link between reading and writing and constantly immerses her students in the world of literacy. Jones works with teachers and staff across grade levels and content areas to help strengthen all students' writing skills. In addition, she tutors students before school, after school and on Saturdays. She serves as the Writing Chairperson for Martin Middle School and serves as Vice President of the Corpus Christi International Reading Association. Jones continues to set an example of the importance of being a life-long learner by working to earn her master's degree in Reading.

California businessman Lowell Milken, chairman and co-founder of the Milken Family Foundation, created the awards to celebrate the efforts of some of our nation's most outstanding teachers, principals and specialists in K-12 education. Under his leadership, the Milken National Educator Awards has become the largest teacher recognition program in the United States. By year's end, 2,100 exceptional educators from 48 states and the District of Columbia will have been recognized, totaling more than \$54 million in awards from the Foundation since the program's inception.

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 by the foundation 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; and
- Engaging and inspiring presence that motivates and impacts students, colleagues and the community at-large.

Recipients are presented with their \$25,000 awards at the annual Milken Family Foundation National Education Conference, an all-expenses-paid professional development conference held in Washington, D.C. in May.

They also join the Milken Educator Network, a coalition of more than 2,100 extraordinary educators who serve both as expert resources and collaborators to network members as they help cultivate and expand innovative programs in their classrooms, schools and districts. Through such opportunities, these practitioners of high quality education become powerful advocates for it as well.

For more information about the Milken National Educator Awards, contact the Milken Family Foundation at (310) 570-4775 or visit the web at [www.mff.org](http://www.mff.org).

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