



## NEWS RELEASE

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NOVEMBER 21, 2023

# Elementary Educator First in Syracuse-Dunbar-Avoca District to Receive \$25,000 Milken Educator Award

BIO, PHOTOS AND VIDEO:

<https://www.milkeneducatorawards.org/educators/view/leslie-mcintosh>

Syracuse-Dunbar-Avoca (SDA) Middle School reading and English Language Arts (ELA) teacher Leslie McIntosh has spent nearly her entire life in this community, and today, her commitment to her classroom and students earned her the very first [Milken Educator Award](#) in SDA Public Schools. The Award comes with a \$25,000 cash prize that McIntosh can use however she wishes. With 12 years of teaching experience, McIntosh is recognized as a prominent teacher leader, driving student and school achievement through intentional, data-driven strategies aimed at enhancing instructional culture and fostering student growth.

Milken Educator Awards Vice President Stephanie Bishop and Nebraska Commissioner of Education Dr. Brian Maher surprised McIntosh with the prestigious honor before enthusiastic students, colleagues, dignitaries and media. Bestowed by the [Milken Family Foundation](#), the Award recognizes outstanding K-12 educators for their excellence and leadership in the profession.

“Leslie McIntosh stands as a shining example of a teacher who not only empowers her students but also uplifts her entire community through her dedication to educational improvement, targeted strategies, and a genuine passion for nurturing the potential within every child she encounters,” said Bishop, who is also a 2001 Milken Educator from Virginia. “Her journey is a testament to the transformative power of education and the enduring legacy of an educator who goes above and beyond to inspire and lead.”

Hailed as the “Oscars of Teaching,” the Awards will honor up to 75 recipients across the country in 2023-24 as part of the Milken Family Foundation’s Journey to the 3,000<sup>th</sup> Milken Educator. 2023-24 will reach \$75 million in individual financial prizes spanning the length of the initiative and more than \$144 million invested in the Milken Educator Award national network overall, empowering recipients to “Celebrate, Elevate, and Activate” the K-12 profession and inspiring young, capable people to pursue teaching as a career.

“Leslie McIntosh has a passion for teaching and learning,” said Nebraska Commissioner of Education Dr. Brian Maher. “By creating a professional learning community for her colleagues, she shows the importance of continuous improvement, not just in her students, but in herself and her fellow teachers. The success of her students shows the impact she is making every day. We are thrilled to celebrate her work and are excited to see what she does in the future.”

The Milken Educator Award is not a lifetime achievement honor. Recipients are sought out while early to mid-career for what

they have achieved – and for the promise of what they will accomplish given the resources and opportunities afforded by the Award.

McIntosh is the second and final recipient on the Milken Educator Awards tour in Nebraska this 2023-24 season. Jacob Eitzen, a mathematics teacher at Bellevue West High School in Bellevue, received the Award on November 16.

### **More About Leslie McIntosh**

**Hometown Hero:** You could say teaching is in McIntosh's genes. As a fifth grade reading and English Language Arts (ELA) teacher at Syracuse-Dunbar-Avoca Middle School, her roots run deep in the Syracuse community. She grew up on a farm outside of Syracuse and graduated from Syracuse-Dunbar-Avoca High School. Her mother, a seasoned educator, continues to inspire young minds within the same district, setting the stage for her daughter to follow in her vocational footsteps.

**Data-Driven Teaching Strategies:** McIntosh uses data to inspire her educational strategies. When research indicated a decline in student scores in ELA from 2020 to 2021, she took it upon herself to develop a comprehensive school improvement plan, present it to the school board, and implement the recommended tactics in her classroom and across the entire fifth grade. Her dedication paid off: Last year, when 46 percent of students statewide demonstrated proficiency in ELA, 59 percent of the school's fifth graders exhibited proficiency in the subject under the guidance of Mrs. McIntosh.

**Deep Roots in Community:** Her commitment to educational excellence extends beyond her classroom walls. McIntosh has helped establish a thriving teacher professional learning community, where positive feedback has led to increased attendance and engagement within the network of educators. She volunteers at her church and community events and spearheads the annual weeklong summer school program known as "Summer Blast," during which students participate in engaging, diverse activities like science lab, computer coding, sewing, furniture making, and fine arts. Proceeds from the summer camp go to the school; last year, they raised more than \$10,000.

**Education:** McIntosh received a Bachelor of Arts in elementary education from the University of Nebraska – Lincoln in 2011. She attended Doane University for her postgraduate education, earning two Master of Education degrees: curriculum and instruction in 2018 and educational leadership in 2022.

### **More about the Milken Educator Award Journey: "The Future Belongs to the Educated"**

- The honorees attend an all-expenses-paid Milken Educator Awards Forum in Los Angeles in June 2024, where they will network with their new colleagues as well as veteran Milken Educators and other education leaders about how to broaden their impact on K-12 education.
- Honorees receive powerful mentorship opportunities for expanded leadership roles that strengthen education practice and policy. Milken Friends Forever (MFF) pairs a new recipient with a veteran Milken Educator mentor; the Expanding MFF Resource and Explorer Program fosters individual veteran Milken Educator partnerships around a specific topic area; and Activating Milken Educators (AME) promotes group collaboration in and across states to tackle pressing educational needs.
- Veteran Milken Educators demonstrate a wide range of leadership roles at state, national and international levels.
- The \$25,000 cash Award is unrestricted. Recipients have used the money in diverse ways. Some recipients have spent the funds on their children's or their own continuing education, financing dream field trips, establishing scholarships, and even adopting children.

Follow the Milken Educator Awards tour and use the **#MEA3K** and **#MilkenAward** hashtags on: [Facebook](#) (MilkenEducatorAwards)| [X](#) (Milken)| [YouTube](#) (MilkenAward)| [Instagram](#) (MilkenFamilyFdn)| [LinkedIn](#) (MilkenFamilyFdn)| [TikTok](#) (MilkenAward).

Visit [MilkenEducatorAwards.org](https://MilkenEducatorAwards.org) or call the Milken Family Foundation at [\(310\) 570-4772](tel:3105704772) for more information.

### **About the Milken Educator Awards**

The first Milken Educator Awards were presented by the Milken Family Foundation in 1987. Created by Lowell Milken, the Awards provide public recognition and individual financial rewards of \$25,000 to elementary and secondary school teachers, principals, and specialists from around the country who are furthering excellence in education. Recipients are heralded in

early to mid-career for what they have achieved and for the promise of what they will accomplish. The Milken Family Foundation celebrates more than 40 years of elevating education in America and around the world. Learn more at [MFF.org](http://MFF.org).

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