



NEWS RELEASE

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MATH, SCIENCE AND CHOCOLATE MILK PERSUASION HELPS POWER TEACHER BECKY STREFF TO A \$25,000 MILKEN EDUCATOR AWARD



Nebraska educator boosts student reading scores and STEM savvy at North Bend Central Elementary

Got Chocolate Milk? For fifth-graders in Becky Streff's class at North Bend Central Elementary, that was the burning question in their new persuasive writing unit. Students researched and argued the pro and cons of chocolate milk in schools, eventually presenting their arguments to parents, the community and media. Streff smartly engaged students through their sweet tooth to tackle a real life question with practical implications, making them active agents in the world while enhancing their skills in reading, math, science and public speaking. By painlessly integrating nutrition, civics, rhetoric and STEM into a project-based task, and deftly tying it all in with the school's overall curriculum, Streff lifts her class's performance. Her brand of creative thinking and educational innovation is a big reason why Streff's students consistently exceed grade level averages in math, reading and science.

Yet it was Streff who was surpassing expectations today at a surprise school assembly where she was presented with a Milken Educator Award by Milken Family Foundation Program Director Greg Gallagher and Nebraska Commissioner of Education Dr. Matthew L. Blomstedt. A surprised Streff was named a 2018-19 recipient of the national recognition, which comes with an unrestricted \$25,000 cash prize. She is the only Milken Educator Award winner from Nebraska this year, and is among the 33 honorees.

The Milken Educator Awards, hailed by *Teacher* magazine as the "Oscars of Teaching," has been opening minds and shaping futures for over 30 years. Research shows teacher quality is the driving in-school factor behind student growth and

achievement. The initiative not only aims to reward great teachers, but to celebrate, elevate and activate those innovators in the classroom who are guiding America's next generation of leaders. Milken Educators believe, "*The future belongs to the educated.*"

Streff prepares her students for that future every day with a smorgasbord of options and learning opportunities. An eager learner herself who thrives on collaborating with peers, Streff mentors first-year teachers, promotes professional development in her building and has upgraded the school's STEM curriculum. She is a strong proponent of project-based learning, technology integration and savvy data deployment, using data and technology to improve student outcomes wherever possible. She employs apps to increase parent involvement and also promotes social cohesion through old-school analog activities like coaching school teams and leading field trips.

"Becky Streff is a passionate teacher who fuels creative thinking and active engagement in her student's lives. At the same time, she makes a real difference in the lives of her colleagues through constant collaboration," said Gallagher. "We proudly welcome Streff into the Milken educator family."

"Becky is a great example of what it means to be an outstanding teacher," said Blomstedt. "She always engages her students and her fellow teachers to be the best they can be both inside and outside of the classroom."

"Mrs. Streff provides sound instructional practices, exhibits a strong knowledge of the subject matter, and displays passion for the teaching and learning process," said North Bend Central Superintendent Dan Endorf. "Mrs. Streff is confident in her abilities. An example of her self-confidence is the development of a classroom project for the district entitled Writer's Café, in which adults visited school to hear the personal writings of her students. Mrs. Streff continually develops grant proposals, introduced a 5th grade graduation ceremony, and presents student achievement data to her colleagues on her own volition."

About Milken Educator Becky Streff

When Becky Streff set out to create a persuasive writing unit for her fifth-graders at North Bend Central Elementary, she picked a topic sure to pique students' interest: chocolate milk. As part of the district's new K-5 writing program, Streff asked students to craft arguments for or against offering chocolate milk in schools. Nutritionists visited her classroom to talk about added sugar in common beverages, and the children performed additional research on their own. Students presented their arguments to multiple panels, including parents, community members and media. Because Streff planned the unit collaboratively with the school's fourth- and sixth-grade teachers to ensure vertical alignment of standards and skills within the new curriculum, the writing unit crossed over effectively to enhance the students' reading, science, math and speaking skills. Streff's students consistently exceed average math, reading and science scores on state assessments, and a majority exceed grade-level standards in all areas.

North Bend Elementary is a Blue Ribbon School, due in part to Streff's commitment to continuous improvement and innovative instruction. She pores over data from her pre-assessments, developed for each unit to identify students who need either an extra challenge or extra help. Streff slips daily assessments unobtrusively into her lessons and provides students meaningful feedback. She communicates learning goals clearly, both verbally and in writing, and helps students understand the context for what they are learning. Streff develops grant proposals each year for field trips and enrichment activities, including visits to a science center and planetarium, viewing the 2017 solar eclipse in Haymarket Park, and marching across the stage in a new fifth-grade graduation ceremony.

Streff is a lifelong learner who constantly seeks out opportunities to collaborate with colleagues in her building, district and state. She mentors first-year teachers, works with Nebraska's ESU2 (Educational Service Unit) to develop professional development for North Bend Elementary teachers, and has attended STEM workshops and conferences to upgrade the school's science curriculum. Streff coaches the Future Problem Solvers team, a small group of high-achieving students, as well as junior high track and volleyball. She is co-leader of the school's PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports) team and the school improvement committee. Streff uses Google Classroom to prepare students for the systems they will encounter in the high school building and updates parents via the Remind and Bloomz apps.

Streff earned a bachelor's degree in elementary education in 2004 and a master's of teaching, learning and teacher education 2008 from the University of Nebraska, plus a master's in educational leadership in 2013 from Doane University.

More information about Streff, plus links to photos and a video from today's assembly, can be found on the Milken Educator Awards website at <http://www.milkeneducatorawards.org/educators/view/Becky-Streff>.

Milken Educators are selected in early to mid-career for what they have achieved and for the promise of what they will accomplish. In addition to the \$25,000 prize and public recognition, the honor includes membership in the National Milken Educator Network, a group of more than 2,700 top teachers, principals and specialists dedicated to strengthening education.

In addition to participation in the Milken Educator Network, 2018-19 recipients will attend a Milken Educator Forum in New Orleans from March 21-24, 2019. Educators will have the opportunity to network with their new colleagues and hear from state and federal officials about maximizing their leadership roles to advance educator effectiveness.

More than \$138 million in funding, including \$68 million in individual \$25,000 awards, has been devoted to the overall Awards initiative, which includes powerful professional learning opportunities throughout recipients' careers. Many have gone on to earn advanced degrees and be placed in prominent posts and on state and national education committees.

The Awards alternate yearly between elementary and secondary educators. Unlike most teacher recognition programs, the Milken Educator Award is completely unique: Educators cannot apply for this recognition and do not even know they are under consideration. Candidates are sourced through a confidential selection process and then are 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.

Past recipients have used their Awards to fund their children's education or their own continuing education. Others have financed dream field trips, established scholarships and even funded the adoption of children.

To get regular updates on the surprise Milken Educator Award events, follow and use the #MilkenAward hashtag on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. The Milken Educator Awards tour is on social media at www.facebook.com/milkeneducatorawards, www.twitter.com/milken, www.youtube.com/milkenaward, and <http://instagram.com/milkenfamilyfdn>.

For more information, visit www.MilkenEducatorAwards.org or call MFF at (310) 570-4772.

About the Milken Educator Awards

The very first Milken Educator Awards were presented by the Milken Family Foundation 31 years ago in 1987. 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.

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