



## NEWS RELEASE

For additional information, please contact David Jespersen by phone (402-471-4537) or email ([david.jespersen@nebraska.gov](mailto:david.jespersen@nebraska.gov))

JANUARY 11, 2018

### **INTERACTIVE LEARNING LIFTS STUDENTS, EARNS TEACHER JON PICKINPAUGH \$25,000 MILKEN EDUCATOR AWARD**



#### ***Nebraska science teacher's experiments spell progress at South Sioux City Middle School***

The sky's the limit when expectations are high, so that's where Jon Pickinpaugh keeps them. The Nebraska science teacher at South Sioux City Middle School provides a highly efficient individualized interactive framework for his students to monitor their own goals and progress, with clear instruction and concrete daily learning targets. He tricks out his classes with all the bells and whistles to spur student engagement including bell ringers, hands-on lessons and multimedia. Pickinpaugh's students consistently make solid academic gains thanks to his strategic and creative dedication to boosting STEM education.

But it was Pickinpaugh who got a big boost this morning at a surprise school assembly, where he was presented with a prestigious Milken Educator Award by Milken Family Foundation Senior Program Administrator Greg Gallagher. Pickinpaugh was named a 2017-18 recipient of the national recognition, which comes with an unrestricted \$25,000 cash prize. He is the only Milken Educator Award winner from Nebraska this year, and is among the 44 honorees for 2017-18.

Milken Educator Awards, hailed by *Teacher* magazine as the "Oscars of Teaching," has been opening minds and shaping futures for 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.*"

Pickinpaugh has developed a multifaceted approach to enhancing science proficiency, promoting structure *and* flexibility, while employing both self-directed and targeted learning. In his five years at South Sioux City, Pickinpaugh has helped prioritize learning standards and built proficiency scales to ramp up academic and behavioral improvements. He has also worked with at-risk students in the high-poverty school through his after-school role as football and wrestling coach, where he's been known to spend quality time discussing life with students after practice.

"Jon Pickinpaugh is a superlative educator who aims to engage every student. His drive to make science education interesting and attainable to all is the type of leadership we see in Milken Educators," said Greg Gallagher. "And by developing learning systems that empower students and push them to push themselves, he's giving students of all backgrounds and ability levels something they may not have even known that they had: A bright future."

"Jon is a leader both inside the classroom and within the community," said Dr. Matthew L. Blomstedt, Commissioner of Education. "His dedication to improving his students academically and more importantly, as good citizens, is an inspiration."

"Mr. Pickinpaugh is one of the rare educators that has been able to masterfully blend content knowledge with the art of teaching," said Todd Strom, Superintendent of South Sioux City Community Schools." He is able to teach science standards and also ignite the fire within students so they can continue inquiring on their own. My own child was a benefactor of his teaching style, "demanding yet not demeaning" positively pushing each student to reach their potential."

### **About Milken Educator Jon Pickinpaugh**

Jon Pickinpaugh holds high expectations for his students and provides both the structure and the tools to help them succeed. An eighth-grade science teacher at Nebraska's South Sioux City Middle School, Pickinpaugh provides clear instruction and information, posting targets, agendas and descriptions of proficiency levels through his scaffolded lessons. He has implemented a highly efficient means of tracking student progress—his young scientists set their own learning goals and monitor them via interactive notebooks and binders. The district requires daily learning targets, which Pickinpaugh references throughout each lesson so students know what they are expected to learn, and why.

Pickinpaugh has led the school's development and implementation of Nebraska Science State standards and uses a variety of instructional strategies in his classroom, including bell ringers, videos, direct instruction, gradual release of responsibility and hands-on lessons. The South Sioux City district is moving toward standards-referenced grading, and Pickinpaugh supports giving students multiple opportunities to demonstrate their learning. His students consistently make solid gains on Northwest Evaluation Association's MAP (Measures of Academic Progress) assessments.

For more than five years, Pickinpaugh has been part of his building's professional learning

community, which has worked through standards prioritization, articulation, building of proficiency scales and creation of standards-based assessments. He has served on building and district committees addressing continuous school improvement, accreditation, standards-referenced grading and positive behavioral interventions. Pickinpaugh presented his work on science standards at a national conference in Florida and mentors new teachers.

He coaches wrestling and football and believes that character education is a vital part of coaching. Athletes set self-improvement goals for competition and wear dress shirts and ties on game days. After school, Pickinpaugh teaches students about healthy living and weight training, mentoring students and athletes alike.

Pickinpaugh earned bachelor's degrees in business administration (2005) and education (2010) from Wayne State College.

More information about Pickinpaugh, plus links to photos and a video from the assembly, can be found on the Milken Educator Awards website at

<http://www.milkeneducatorawards.org/educators/view/Jon-Pickinpaugh>.

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, Pickinpaugh's 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, 2017-18 recipients will attend a Milken Educator Forum in Washington, D.C., March 20-23, 2018. 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](http://www.facebook.com/milkeneducatorawards), [www.twitter.com/milken](http://www.twitter.com/milken), [www.youtube.com/milkenaward](http://www.youtube.com/milkenaward), and <http://instagram.com/milkenfamilyfdn>.

For more information about the Milken Educator Awards, visit [www.MilkenEducatorAwards.org](http://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 30 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.

For additional information, please contact Lynne Russo by phone (818-903-6079) or email ([lynneerusso@gmail.com](mailto:lynneerusso@gmail.com))

####

*David Jespersen*  
*Public Information Officer, Nebraska Department of Education*  
*402-471-4537*  
*david.jespersen@nebraska.gov*  
*@NDE\_News*