



NEWS RELEASE

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KEARNEY TEACHER SURPRISED WITH \$25,000 MILKEN EDUCATOR AWARD

Bryant Elementary's Michelle Fouts among more than 60 recipients nationwide with two in Nebraska

For full bio, photos and video, visit:

<https://www.milkeneducatorawards.org/educators/view/michelle-fouts>

In a surprise assembly, second grade teacher Michelle Fouts of Kearney's Bryant Elementary received the surprise of a lifetime in front of cheering students, colleagues, state and local officials and media—a \$25,000 Milken Educator Award presented by the Milken Family Foundation. The Award is bestowed annually upon outstanding educators across the country with two recipients in Nebraska this season. Fouts was recognized for her commitment to excellence in literacy, creativity in the classroom, and efforts to foster a safe, nurturing environment to excel.

"Michelle Fouts' dedication to student literacy and innovative approach to learning are inspiring and qualities that make her a Milken Educator," said Stephanie Bishop, vice president of the Milken Educator Awards and a 2001 Milken Educator from Virginia. "We are proud to celebrate Michelle and highlight the impact she is making every day at Bryant Elementary. We are thrilled to welcome her into the national Milken Educator Network."

Hailed as the "Oscars of Teaching," the Milken Educator Awards celebrate, elevate and activate the American teaching profession and inspire young, capable people to join it. The Milken Educator Award is not a lifetime achievement honor. Recipients are heralded while early to mid-career for what they have achieved — and for the promise of what they will accomplish given the resources and opportunities inherent in the Award.

"Every educator knows the importance of early education in a child's life," says Nebraska Commissioner of Education Matthew Blomstedt. "Michelle Fouts takes that understanding to another level by not just focusing on teaching her second graders, but by taking a personal interest in who they are to make sure they are successful not only in the classroom but in life. Her dedication to her students is outstanding and we are thankful to have her leading the next generation."

Oprah, a longtime education advocate, shared her congratulations to this year's winners [in a video message shared earlier this year](#) thanking "the most incredible educators around the country" and acknowledging her deep appreciation for the "tireless work" they do.

More About Michelle Fouts

Innovation: Fouts has a talent for finding imaginative, fun ways to promote excellence in literacy and encourage a lifelong love for language and reading in her students. These include Bryant's Tournament of Books, family Reading Rallies, and "Books and Braids," where students come to school early to read while getting their hair combed or braided. She incorporates best practices, including the Balanced Literacy Approach and Reading and Writing workshops, into her daily lessons and eagerly shares them with colleagues.

Leadership: Fouts has presented at a Nebraska state conference about the importance of literacy in the early grades, brought a renowned literacy expert to Bryant to work with teachers, and co-founded Hooked on Books ABC, a consulting firm focused on sharing early literacy strategies with other educators. As a resource for students and colleagues alike, Fouts is a grade-level and content coordinator for the district, serves on the curriculum council, leads the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports team and directs the district's special education summer school. Prior to the start of school each year, Fouts teaches Burst into First Grade, an on-ramp program for at-risk students making sure children know their classroom family is a safe place. Fouts helped create Bryant's STEM program for students in kindergarten through second grade, and oversees STEM learning for all students through fifth grade. She also piloted the Write Now Right Now program, a well-respected elementary writing program that used throughout the school.

Education: Fouts earned a bachelor's in elementary, early childhood and special education in 2009 and a master's in curriculum and instruction in 2012 from the University of Nebraska at Kearney.

More About the Milken Educator Awards: *"The future belongs to the educated."*

Along with the \$25,000 financial prize, recipients join the national Milken Educator Network, a group of more than 2,800 top teachers, principals and specialists. The network serves as a rich resource for fellow educators, legislators, school boards and others dedicated to excellence in education.

- In June, the honorees will attend an all-expenses-paid Milken Educator Awards Forum in Los Angeles, where they will network with their new colleagues as well as veteran Milken Educators and other education leaders about how to increase their impact on K-12 education. In addition, they will learn about how to become involved in the Milken Friends Forever (MFFs) mentoring program, in which freshman Milken Educators receive personalized coaching and support from a Milken Educator veteran on ways to elevate their instructional practice and take an active role in educational leadership, policy and practice.
- Over the years, more than \$140 million in funding, including \$70 million for the individual cash awards, has been devoted to the overall Milken Awards initiative, which includes powerful professional development opportunities throughout recipients' careers.
- Veteran Milken Educators frequently go on to serve in leadership roles at state, national and international levels.
- "We find you. You don't find us!" Unlike most teacher recognition programs, the Milken Educator Awards initiative has no formal nomination or application process. Candidates are sourced through a confidential selection process and then reviewed by blue ribbon panels in each state. The most exceptional candidates are recommended for the award, with final selection made by the Milken Family Foundation.
- The \$25,000 cash award is unrestricted. Recipients have used the money in diverse ways. For instance, some have spent the funds on their children's or their own continuing education, financing dream field trips, establishing scholarships, and even adopting children.

To get regular updates on the surprise Milken Educator Award events or to watch the award events unfold, follow and use the #MilkenAward hashtag on [Facebook](#) (@MilkenEducatorAwards), [Twitter](#) (@Milken), [YouTube](#) (/MilkenAward), [Instagram](#) (MilkenFamilyFdn), and [TikTok](#) (@MilkenAward).

For more information, visit [MilkenEducatorAwards.org](https://www.milkeneducatorawards.org) or call the Milken Family Foundation at (310) 570-4772.

About the Milken Educator Awards

The first Milken Educator Awards were presented by the Milken Family Foundation 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. The initiative was created by the Milken Family Foundation, which celebrates 40 years of elevating education in America and around the world. Learn more at [MFF.org](https://www.milkeneducatorawards.org)

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