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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**DOVER ELEMENTARY TEACHER SURPRISED WITH NATIONAL ACCOLADE: A  
\$25,000 MILKEN EDUCATOR AWARD**

**NORTH, S.C.** – It was a full house at Orangeburg County School District's Dover Elementary School this morning, as students and faculty gathered to welcome South Carolina Superintendent of Education Ellen Weaver. But the school quickly learned that there was a surprise in store from none other than the Milken Family Foundation! Another round of cheers erupted as Superintendent Weaver joined the Foundation to present first grade teacher [Amanda Fair-Coles](#) with the prestigious Milken Educator Award – and a check for \$25,000!

In addition to the cash prize that Fair-Coles can use however she chooses, she joins the Milken Educator Network as a lifelong member. The network will give her the opportunity to collaborate with fellow recipients who are working together to broaden their impact on K-12 education. Fair-Coles received the Award from Dr. Joshua Barnett, representing the Milken Family Foundation as CEO of the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching.

"Amanda Fair-Coles' leadership at Dover Elementary School shines brightly," said Dr. Barnett. "Her unique, hands-on approach to teaching creates a warm, welcoming classroom for her early learners, and Amanda's passion for education has established her as a teacher leader at the school and in the state. Congratulations, Amanda!"

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.

"We are extremely proud of Amanda Fair-Coles for receiving the Milken Educator Award, a testament to her dedication and innovative approach to teaching. Her ability to create an environment where students not only learn but thrive, exemplifies the highest standards of educational excellence. This award not only recognizes Amanda's outstanding contributions to Dover Elementary School but also highlights the caliber of educators we are fortunate to have within our district," said Dr. Shawn D. Foster, OCSD Superintendent.

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. Fair-Coles is the second and final Milken Award recipient in South Carolina for the 2023-24 season. Sarah Vicini, a social studies teacher and instructional coach at Coastal High School in Myrtle Beach, received the Award yesterday, January 25.

## **More About Amanda Fair-Coles**

**Commitment to Excellence Yields Results:** Fair-Coles' story is one of profound impact and relentless commitment to her students and colleagues. She began her teaching career as an instructional assistant and, when she realized her calling to enter the field of teaching, went back to school to complete her education degree. At Dover Elementary, Fair-Coles has a "looped" classroom, in which her kindergarten students last year continued with her in first grade. Fair-Coles meticulously plans lessons from the student lens, employs engaging personalized learning strategies, fosters cooperative learning and conducts frequent assessments – all while utilizing student data to ensure optimal learning experiences. The academic results with her students speak volumes, as they meet student learning objectives and on the whole score proficient or higher on the school's iReady diagnostic assessments.

**Creativity Inspires Growth for Students:** From the outset of her students' learning trajectory, Fair-Coles makes sure that everyone is seen, heard and valued. She understands the importance of going beyond engagement to empower students to take charge of their learning. Whether creating original songs for her students to grasp math and phonics skills, integrating technology, or encouraging higher-order thinking through academic questioning, Fair-Coles has fostered a nurturing environment that celebrates growth at every turn. Keeping students front and center, she guides students to reach higher and values student-to-student feedback. These principles are at play as students hone comprehension skills by building upon prior knowledge, asking challenging questions, communicating effectively and reading with one another. Fair-Coles brings her talents to the school's Saturday Academy and summer school classes, programs designed to eliminate learning gaps. Her commitment to equitable learning opportunities earns

high regard from parents. She highlights student achievements and provides parents with valuable strategies for modeling good behavior and life skills at home.

**Leader Dedicated to Improving the Profession:** Also a catalyst for teacher advancement and growth, Fair-Coles serves on the Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) instructional leadership team and is certified on the South Carolina Teaching Standards 4.0 rubric to support and evaluate teachers. She has spearheaded professional development on creating "Success Criteria" for teachers and integrating High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM). Her work as a certified mentor for new teachers has inspired colleagues to earn their full teaching certifications. Beyond the school, Fair-Coles serves on the district teacher forum and recently assumed the role of a teacher leader for state meetings, solidifying her position as a driving force in South Carolina's education community.

**Education:** Fair-Coles earned a Bachelor of Arts in sociology from Claflin University in 2009 and a Master of Arts in teaching from South Carolina State University in 2018.

### **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 this June, 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.

### **Orangeburg County School District**

The mission of Orangeburg County School District, the catalyst of innovation and excellence, is to ensure all students discover and develop their person, purpose, and platform through high-quality educational experiences distinguished by a culture of collaboration, equity, and inclusion; a creative learning environment with inspiring opportunities; a commitment to nurture the academic, physical, social and emotional well-being of all. Visit us online at [ocsdsc.org](http://ocsdsc.org)

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