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**Building Skilled Learners Lands Kamisha Burlingame a \$25,000
Milken Educator Award**

Bentonville teacher fosters student engagement and success at Thomas Jefferson Elementary

For full bio, photos and video,

visit <https://www.milkeneducatorawards.org/educators/view/kamisha-burlingame>

Santa Monica, Calif., (April 27, 2022) — At Thomas Jefferson Elementary in Bentonville, Arkansas, Kamisha Burlingame’s fourth graders are already well on their way to being skilled problem-solvers and creative thinkers. Whether turning her classroom into an airplane, sitting down to a “book tasting” on picnic blankets, or sharing presentations dressed as their subject during a unit on biographies, her students are always exploring new ways to engage with learning material. Today at an all-school assembly, Burlingame was surprised with a national Milken Educator Award for her classroom innovation. The recognition includes a \$25,000 cash prize that she can use however she chooses.

Arkansas Department of Education’s Division of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) Deputy Commissioner Stacy Smith joined Milken Educator Awards Senior Program Director Greg Gallagher to present Burlingame with the prestigious recognition. Burlingame is among more than 60 educators across the country who will receive the Award during the 2021-22 season. She is the first recipient from Bentonville Schools.

In addition to today’s festivities, Burlingame will join a national network of more than 2,800 Milken Educators and K-12 education leaders across the U.S.

“Every day, Kamisha Burlingame sparks joy and wonder in her students with lessons that capture their imagination and transform the classroom into full, interactive environments,” said Gallagher. “She understands that reaching students’ hearts and minds go hand in hand. Kamisha proactively connects with students and their families to support their well-rounded development. For these reasons and more, I am proud to welcome Kamisha into the Milken Educator Network.”

Hailed as the “Oscars of Teaching,” Milken Educator Awards inspire and uplift with the unique stories of educators making a profound difference for students, colleagues and communities. The Awards are not designated for lifetime achievement. 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.

“I am pleased to recognize and celebrate Ms. Burlingame as a Milken Educator,” Arkansas Department of Education Secretary Johnny Key said. “Ms. Burlingame goes the extra mile to engage with her students by creating a safe, exciting learning environment. Her focus on building positive relationships with her students and families, however, is paramount. During the pandemic when students were learning virtually, Ms. Burlingame safely visited each of her students from a distance, oftentimes

dropping off books on their doorstep so they could stay engaged in reading and learning. Congratulations, Ms. Burlingame. We are proud to call you an outstanding Arkansas educator who is worthy of this prestigious national honor!"

Oprah, a longtime education advocate, shared her congratulations to this year's recipients [in a video message](#) thanking "the most incredible educators around the country" and acknowledging her deep appreciation for the "tireless work" they do. [U.S. Secretary of Education Dr. Miguel Cardona said](#) Milken Educators "personify excellence in education" and "inspire leadership and motivate students to excel."

More About Kamisha Burlingame

In the Classroom: Kamisha Burlingame is always on the hunt for ways to engage her fourth graders at Thomas Jefferson Elementary in Bentonville, Arkansas. Students can't wait to get to school to see how she has transformed their classroom. One day it's an airplane, with Burlingame in full pilot's uniform, so students can work on reading responses from the clouds. Sometimes the classroom turns into a football field, or a meadow strewn with picnic blankets for a "book tasting." At the end of a unit on biographies, students picked a person to research, dressed as their subjects, and shared presentations with visitors who toured the classroom "gallery."

Engagement Strategies: In 2018, Burlingame attended The Ron Clark Academy, which trains teachers in creative engagement strategies—many of which have made their way into her classroom. Burlingame's students benefit from her cutting-edge, innovative practices, with lessons focused on collaboration, independent thinking, creativity and technology. Her goal: developing a classroom of learners who think beyond the assignment in front of them and leave the fourth grade as skilled problem-solvers.

Keeping Connected: Relationships with her students top Burlingame's priority list. She gets to know their likes and dislikes, strengths and weaknesses, always taking time to make sure they feel loved and respected. She keeps parents up to date on classroom activities and their children's progress with regular, proactive communication. Burlingame's excitement for school and learning sparks the same in others and inspires all around her. It shows in student outcomes: MAP assessment scores have increased steadily under her instruction, and students show gains each year on ACT summative assessments in literacy, math and science.

Books To-Go: During virtual learning due to the pandemic, Burlingame visited each student's house just to see their faces and say hello from a safe distance. When students finished the books they were reading, Burlingame delivered fresh volumes to their front doors.

Going the Extra Mile: Burlingame goes the extra mile to make sure students are set up for success. She has received grants from Walmart and Code.org for science supplies and computers. Burlingame serves on the school's Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) committee and sponsors the student council. An avid mountain biker, she helped start Jefferson's bike club and often hits the trails with groups of students after school.

Education: Burlingame earned a bachelor's in early childhood education from the University of Arkansas-Fort Smith in 2014 and a master's in advanced teaching and learning from Harding University in 2018. She holds National Board Certification in K-6 literacy.

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

Along with the financial prize, Milken Educator Award 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 also 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.

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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.mff.org).