



Ocean Township Elementary Teacher Surprised with \$25,000 National Milken Educator Award

***The 2012 "Oscar of Teaching" for New Jersey goes to Patrick O'Neill***

**For Immediate Release**

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**Trenton, NJ** –A seemingly routine school-wide assembly turned into the surprise of a lifetime when the Milken Family Foundation honored Patrick O'Neill, a fourth-grade teacher at Ocean Township Elementary School in Oakhurst, New Jersey, with a Milken Educator Award. One of education's most prestigious recognitions, the national Award—presented by Dr. Jane Foley, senior vice president of the Milken Educator Awards—comes with a no-strings-attached cash prize of \$25,000.



Patrick O'Neill accepts his Milken Educator Award.  
See Patrick's reaction [here](#)

Joining Dr. Foley in the special event were New Jersey Education Commissioner Chris Cerf, Ocean Township School District Superintendent John Lysko, Assemblywoman Caroline Casagrande, members of the Ocean Township Board of Education, as well as award-winning New Jersey educators.

"The Milken Family Foundation has dedicated more than three decades to ensuring that every student has access to quality educational opportunities to lead successful and productive lives," said Commissioner Cerf. "I am pleased that Patrick O'Neill has been recognized for his own commitment to his students' achievement and for his potential to make more contributions to the teaching profession in the future. Ocean Township is lucky to have him, and our state is proud to call him a role model for other educators to follow."

"The visibility and reputation of the Milken Educator Awards result in unlimited opportunities for educators to powerfully impact education at local, state and national levels," added Foley, who speaks from experience both as head of the Milken Educator Awards and as a 1994 Indiana Milken Educator herself.

A fixture at Ocean Township Elementary in Oakhurst, New Jersey—where he has worked since day one of his eight-year teaching career—Patrick O'Neill is a deeply committed educator who goes out of his way to solidify pupils' success. Take, for example, his student who was receiving treatment for leukemia: not only did O'Neill visit her in the hospital every day to ensure that she kept up with her learning, but when she was moved to a Memphis facility for a bone marrow transplant, he continued to provide lessons and support via Skype.

Born into a family of educators, O'Neill is carrying on the tradition in many compelling and innovative ways. Whether it is SMART boards, an ELMO document camera, computer-based assessments or mobile laptop labs, he employs the latest technology to engage his students, differentiate instruction, and track their progress. Student achievement data show that O'Neill's students' test scores have been climbing in science and math since 2007 and when compared to schools in the district, their gains are among the highest in reading and math. It should, therefore, come as no surprise that his cooperative-based classroom is often chosen to pilot district initiatives.

O'Neill is a teacher mentor. A member of the school safety committee, he heads a new anti-bullying campaign and a new literacy program. At the district level, O'Neill is helping formulate the writing curriculum, report card

revisions and technology infusion. O'Neill is active in the district outside of the classroom as well, coaching varsity and JV football at the district's high school.

The Milken Educator Award recognition is not intended as a lifetime achievement award. Recipients are selected in early to mid-career for what they have achieved and for the promise of what they will accomplish in the future. Milken Educators point to their Award as a pivotal milestone. Encompassed in the recognition is the responsibility to stretch their professional practices and leadership to even higher levels.

Hailed by *Teacher Magazine* as the "Oscars of Teaching," what separates this Award from others is that the recipients have no idea that they will be honored. Not only is the entire selection process confidential, but so is the real purpose of the school-wide assemblies where the Awards are presented. The Awards story does not end with the surprise notification. New recipients are invited to join the Milken Educator Network, a group of distinguished educators whose expertise serves as a valuable resource to fellow educators, legislators, school boards and others shaping the future of education.

The Foundation has been recognizing and rewarding the noble profession of teaching through the Milken Educator Awards for 26 years. Since first presented to a dozen California teachers, the program has grown to become the nation's preeminent teacher recognition program having honored more than 2,500 K-12 teachers, principals and specialists with over \$63 million in individual, unrestricted \$25,000 awards. More than \$135 million in funding has been devoted to the overall program, which includes powerful professional development opportunities throughout the recipients' careers in education. The exponential impact of Milken Educators is helping to improve American K-12 education.

The Awards alternates yearly between elementary and secondary educators. Each participating state department of education appoints an independent blue ribbon committee to review candidates that are sourced through a confidential selection process and recommend candidates to the Foundation.

There have been 22 recipients from New Jersey, including O'Neill, since the program began there in 2002. A total of \$550,000 has been awarded in New Jersey to date.

#### **Award Criteria:**

Candidates for the Milken Educator Awards are selected on the basis of all the following criteria:

- Exceptional educational talent as evidenced by effective instructional practices and student learning results in the classroom and school;
- Exemplary educational accomplishments beyond the classroom that provide models of excellence for the profession;
- Individuals whose contributions to education are largely unheralded yet worthy of the spotlight;
- Early- to mid-career educators who offer strong long-range potential for professional and policy leadership; and
- Engaging and inspiring presence that motivates and impacts students, colleagues and the community.

**View the 2012 Milken Educator Awards kickoff YouTube video for a peek at the surprise of a lifetime that awaits up to 40 of America's best educators:** <http://www.mff.org/newsroom/news.taf?page=videos&init=&dateYear=&vid=1200>

**See Patrick O'Neill's reaction here:**

<http://www.mff.org/newsroom/news.taf?page=videos&ecat=n&init=mea&dateYear=2012&vid=1262>

For more information about the Milken Educator Awards, visit <http://www.mff.org> or call the Foundation at (310) 570-4775. You can connect with the Foundation at [www.twitter.com/milken](http://www.twitter.com/milken), [www.facebook.com/milkeneducatorawards](http://www.facebook.com/milkeneducatorawards) and at [www.youtube.com/milkenaward](http://www.youtube.com/milkenaward).

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