

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Nashville Public Education Foundation Announces Inspiring Award Winners for the 2023 Public Schools Hall of Fame

UBS, Nissan, and Lipscomb return as sponsors for the Inspiring Innovation, Leader, and Educator Awards

NASHVILLE, TENN. – May 23, 2023 – At its annual Public Schools Hall of Fame, the Nashville Public Education Foundation (NPEF) will celebrate the alumni, educators, innovators, and leaders making a difference in the lives of Nashville’s students. This year’s Inspiring Award honorees include Inspiring Educators Dr. Jessica Abarquez-New and Lauren Binkley, Inspiring Innovation Honorees Voces de Nashville and Water Walkers, and Inspiring Leader Dr. Brian Mells. The event, presented by First Horizon Foundation is scheduled for September 27, 2023, at the Music City Center.

“We are inspired by these change agents who dedicate their service and hard work to creating a lasting impact for our students,” said **Katie Cour, Nashville Public Education Foundation, President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO)**. “Each of these honorees works tirelessly to ensure our students can thrive in our public schools every day.”

The Inspiring Leader Award, presented by Lipscomb University, is given to an educational leader in Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) who demonstrates exemplary achievements in public education at the district or school level. The winner receives \$5,000 along with an additional \$5,000 for the winner’s school.

Dr. Brian Mells, principal of Whites Creek High School, will be named as the 2023 Inspiring Leader. Under Mells’ leadership, graduation rates and ACT scores have increased and, for the first time in Whites Creek’s history, the school received an overall growth rating of Level 5 from the Tennessee Department of Education, which is the highest rating a school can receive. Prior to his current role, Dr. Mells served as a principal at Madison Middle School. During his tenure at each school, there was an increase in teacher retention, student attendance, and student academic achievement, and growth.

“We are always proud to honor Nashville community leaders who continue to make a lasting impact in public education and MNPS students,” said **Meg Harris, NPEF Board Chair**. “These individuals are inspirational, and they deserve to be celebrated for their hard work.”

Additionally, NPEF has announced its honorees for the Thomas J. Sherrard Inspiring Innovation and Inspiring Educator Awards.

The Thomas J. Sherrard Inspiring Innovation Award, presented by Nissan, recognizes outstanding organizations making a difference for Nashville’s students and families. Each Inspiring Innovation honoree will be awarded a \$5,000 grant to further their mission. This year’s recipients are:

- **Voces de Nashville**, a member-owned cooperative that trains Latina community members to teach Spanish classes to adults. MNPS faculty and staff can learn Spanish from student's family members and parents. Founded for women by women, the organization aims to unite Nashville's multicultural communities through language learning to empower women with the tools to teach their home languages and cultures.
- **Water Walkers**, a watersports and adventure-based youth tutoring and mentoring program. The organization has expanded their outdoor adventure activities while also addressing the needs for basic necessities, academic support and tutoring, managing a leadership development program for older teens, and collaborating with a behavioral health agency to provide counseling services.

The Annette Eskind Inspiring Educator Award, presented by UBS, honors two MNPS teachers who have demonstrated incredible dedication to students. Each Inspiring Educator receives \$5,000. The 2023 Inspiring Educators are:

- **Dr. Jessica Abarquez-New**, a lead teacher for the Academy of Health and Hospitality and teacher for English Language learners at Glenclyff High School. Jessica has worked in Metro Nashville Public Schools for 13 years. Prior to her current role, she served as an English tutor, long term substitute, interim English teacher and former tennis coach at Glenclyff High School. She is also a Teacher of the Year award winner. Jessica serves as the co-creator and ongoing leader of the COLT Team program which pairs new educators with advisors to foster professional growth and support in the field.
- **Lauren Binkley**, a teacher for English Language learners at Eagle View Elementary School. She worked in Metro Nashville Public Schools for 15 years, focusing on culturally responsive practice, rigor, and equity. Lauren is an MNPS Blue Ribbon Teacher and two-time Teacher of the Year award winner. She has served in leadership roles in the district and the state, including as a Tennessee SCORE Educator Fellow and as a Center for Strategic Leadership SEED Fellow in Educational Leadership.

NPEF [previously announced](#) it is honoring **Hal Cato**, CEO of the Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee (CFMT), with the Hall of Fame's highest honor, the Nelson C. Andrews Distinguished Service Award, presented by Vanderbilt University. The foundation also named this year's Distinguished Alumni Award recipients, presented by Belmont University: **André Prince**, a graduate of Pearl High School and owner of the legendary Prince's Hot Chicken; **Harold Love Jr.**, a graduate of Whites Creek High School and member of the Tennessee House of Representatives for the 58th District; and **Linda Eskind Rebrovick**, a graduate of Hillwood High School and the president of Impact Corporate Consulting.

For 19 years, NPEF has honored Nashville individuals and organizations committed to supporting the city's public schools and students during the annual Public Schools Hall of Fame. This year's event is co-chaired by **Michelle Gaskin Brown**, senior manager of public policy at Amazon and member of the NPEF board of directors, and **Dr. Alex Jahangir**, a 2021 Hall of Fame Distinguished Alumni honoree and director of the division of orthopaedic trauma at Vanderbilt University Medical Center. We are honored to have these esteemed community leaders championing this year's event in support of every student thriving in our public schools each day.

All are welcome to join NPEF to celebrate the Public Schools Hall of Fame and its honorees. More information about this year's event can be found online at <https://nashvillepef.org/hall-of-fame/>.

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About the Nashville Public Education Foundation

The Nashville Public Education Foundation is a nonprofit organization that works to remove the barriers to educational experiences by highlighting success, serving as a strategic thought partner to Metro Nashville Public Schools, convening stakeholders, and advocating for change so all students can thrive in school. Since its founding in 2002, NPEF has fostered data-driven solutions that have led to tangible results in professional learning for teachers, teacher pay, principal quality, college access and success, and more. To learn about NPEF's support of Metro Nashville Public Schools and its students, visit nashvillepef.org.

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