

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Nashville Public Education Foundation Awards Educators for Innovative Ideas to Help Students Thrive

Ten educators received \$31,000 in cash prizes in addition to seed funding at NPEF's third annual Teacherpreneur Pitch Night event

NASHVILLE, TENN. – February 29, 2024 – The Nashville Public Education Foundation (NPEF) hosted its third annual [Teacherpreneur](#) Pitch Night on February 28, 2024, at the Fisher Center at Belmont University. A cohort of ten Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) educators presented their ideas for supporting student learning, increasing parent engagement, improving teacher retention, and more for a chance to win cash prizes and seed funding, supported by Amazon, to pilot their projects. NPEF has been working with the Teacherpreneurs since December to hone their ideas, develop their cases, and practice their pitches.

"We believe that meaningful change in our schools is best driven by the educators working with our students every day," said **Katie Cour, President and CEO of the Nashville Public Education Foundation**. "This year's cohort of Teacherpreneurs has once again shown us that when we give teachers the space and support to be innovative, they will create solutions that are not only out-of-the-box but can lead to transformational change for our students."

Dr. Adrienne Battle, MNPS Director of Schools, kicked off Pitch Night and congratulated the Teacherpreneurs for their hard work. The cohort then presented their pitches to a panel of judges representing education and entrepreneurial expertise including Alfonzo Alexander, Chief Ethics and Diversity Officer at NASBA and NPEF Board Chair; Harry Allen, Chief Relationship Officer and Co-Founder of Studio Bank and NPEF Board Member; Shani Dowell, Founder and CEO of Possip; Courtney Ross, Senior Manager of Community Engagement at Amazon; and Robert N. Wallace, Jr., Executive Officer of Resource Strategy at MNPS.

In addition to seed funding to pilot their programs, the first place winner received \$10,000, the second place winner received \$7,500 and the third place winner received \$5,000 in cash prizes:

- Winning first place was Kathleen Shepherd, a first grade teacher at Haywood Elementary School, for her idea to provide engaging literacy kits for multi-lingual students and families to use together at home, both increasing students' reading and writing skills and celebrating the many languages and cultures within her school community.
- Second place went to Ashley Giddens, a school counselor at East Nashville Magnet High School, for her idea to ensure students who are incarcerated in the juvenile court system receive the necessary academic supports to transition back to the public school setting on track to graduate and pursue a postsecondary career option.
- Third place was awarded to Natalie Nikitas, a history teacher at Valor College Prep, for her idea to increase teacher retention by developing a cohort model for veteran teachers to collaborate and support one another's professional learning.

The Community Favorite Award, along with a cash prize of \$2,500, went to April Greene, a curriculum specialist at Alex Green Elementary School, for her idea to develop a program centered around helping students grow literacy skills and confidence by exploring books and stories that celebrate their personal identities, cultures, and backgrounds. This award was determined by online voting of video previews of the cohort’s pitches and audience voting at the pitch event. Six other Teacherpreneurs received the Kay Simmons Award, named after NPEF’s first executive director who passed away in 2021, along with \$1,000 to recognize their hard work.

With continued support from Amazon, the Teacherpreneur program serves as a professional learning and leadership development opportunity to harness educator expertise and inspire creative solutions to some of education’s toughest challenges.

“Amazon is proud to invest in the district’s teaching talent and their innovative solutions to improve student learning and performance,” said **Courtney Ross, Amazon’s Senior Manager of Community Engagement in Nashville**. “We have seen ideas from Teacherpreneur lead to real change in Metro Schools and we are grateful to play a role in supporting the innovation and creativity of our educators.”

Teacherpreneur is one of several programs that NPEF leads to support our educators. NPEF has recognized top teachers in the district through the annual Blue Ribbon Teacher Awards for the last ten years, partners with the district to implement other creative professional learning experiences for teachers, and provides grants for organizations working with educators.

PHOTOS AND CAPTIONS

Caption: The winning 2024 Teacherpreneur cohort members (from left to right): April Greene, Natalie Nikitas, Kathleen Shepherd, Ashley Giddens.



Caption: Dr. Adrienne Battle, MNPS Director of Schools, addresses the crowd at the 2024 Teacherpreneur Pitch Night.



Caption: Teacherpreneur first place winner with Amazon's Senior Manager, Community Engagement and NPEF President & CEO. From left to right: Courtney Ross, Kathleen Shepherd, Katie Cour.



Caption: Teacherpreneur Community Favorite winner with Amazon's Senior Manager, Community Engagement and NPEF President & CEO. From left to right: Courtney Ross, April Greene, Katie Cour.



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About the Nashville Public Education Foundation

The Nashville Public Education Foundation (NPEF) is a nonprofit organization committed to ensuring every child can thrive in Nashville's public schools. NPEF works to improve student outcomes in Nashville's public schools by identifying challenges and advancing evidence-based solutions. Since 2002, NPEF's role as a catalyst for transformation has yielded tangible results in areas such as

teacher professional development, teacher compensation, principal quality, and college access. Learn more at nashvillepef.org.

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Access to high resolution photos: [Dropbox](#)