

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Community and Business Leader Jerry Williams to Receive Highest Honor at the Nashville Public Education Foundation's 20th Public Schools Hall of Fame Event

*NPEF's landmark event also to pay tribute to MNPS alumni Chief John Drake, Charles Starks, and Dr. Susan West, highlighting their significant contributions to Nashville's community*

**NASHVILLE, TENN. – April 25, 2024** – The Nashville Public Education Foundation (NPEF) is set to honor Jerry Williams, the executive director emerita of Leadership Nashville, current chair of The Enchiridion Foundation, and 22-year Board Member of NPEF, with its highest honor at the upcoming 20<sup>th</sup> Public Schools Hall of Fame. Alongside Williams, the event will recognize Nashville Police Chief John Drake, Convention Center Authority President and CEO Charles Starks, and Belmont University Chief of Staff and Vice President for Administration Dr. Susan West as distinguished Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) alumni. The luncheon, presented by First Horizon Foundation for the seventh consecutive year, is scheduled for September 5, 2024, at the Music City Center.

“We're thrilled to honor Jerry Williams with the Nelson C. Andrews Award. Her dedication to developing Nashville's leaders is what this award is all about. Her contributions as an NPEF Board member for the past 22 years have helped focus the organization's efforts to ensure the greatest impact for our students,” said **Katie Cour, President & CEO of the Nashville Public Education Foundation**. “We're also extremely proud of our MNPS Distinguished Alumni. Their accomplishments and passion for our community bring so much pride to Nashville and are proof that our public schools make our city stronger every day.”

The Nelson C. Andrews Distinguished Service Award recognizes a Nashville community leader and advocate for children and youth who inspires others to lead and serve and who has had a significant impact on making Nashville a city that works for everyone.

For 25 years, Williams played a pivotal role in Nashville as the executive director of Leadership Nashville, an executive program that forges connections among Nashville's current and future leaders. She formerly served as president of both the Junior League of Nashville and Friends of Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt. Williams is a founding board member of NPEF and has served on the board for 22 years. She chaired The Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee and currently co-chairs the Foundation's Trustee Council. Additionally, she serves on the Regional Board of Teach for America and the Advisory Board of the Nashville Public Library Foundation. Williams is a member of the Sue Peter's Foundation in support of Girl Scouts of Middle TN. A longstanding leader in Nashville, Williams has been the recipient of multiple awards, including the YWCA Women of Achievement Award, the Tennessee State University Women of Legend & Merit Award, and the Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee Joe Kraft Humanitarian Award.

Additionally, three MNPS graduates will be honored with the Distinguished Alumni Award, presented by Belmont University. The award is a celebration of graduates of Metro Nashville



Public Schools who have displayed leadership in their professions, have made significant civic, business, and/or community contributions, and have positively impacted the lives of others. The 2024 Distinguished Alumni are the following:

- **Chief John Drake**, a graduate of East Nashville High School, is the Metropolitan Nashville Police Department's 8th Chief of Police. Chief Drake has formally served as captain, commander of the Central Precinct, Deputy Chief of the Support Services Bureau, and Deputy Chief of the Community Services Bureau. Beginning his career as a police officer in 1988, Chief Drake was selected as the 2023 Chief of the Year by the Tennessee Association of Chiefs of Police.
- **Charles Starks**, a graduate of McGavock High School, is the President and CEO of the Convention Center Authority, which owns and operates Nashville's Music City Center. Currently, he serves as Immediate Past Chair of the Professional Convention Management Association, the Habitat for Humanity of Greater Nashville Board of Directors, and the Greater Nashville Hospitality Association Board of Directors. Starks is also a former president of both state and local hospitality associations and is a graduate of the 2015 class of Leadership Nashville.
- **Dr. Susan West**, a graduate of Overton High School, is the Chief of Staff and Vice President for Administration at Belmont University. Dr. West is a member of the Peer Learning Network of Belmont University, 2006 class of Leadership Middle Tennessee and the 2015 class of Leadership Nashville. Most recently, she received the Amiga We Love Award from Conexión Américas in 2023 and was named to the Nashville Business Journal's Women of Influence List in 2024.

For two decades, NPEF has honored individuals and organizations demonstrating exceptional dedication and commitment to the city's public schools and students. **Johari Matthews**, Vice President and Executive Director of Tennessee Titans Foundation and Community Impact with the Tennessee Titans, and **Tony Heard**, a partner at the business consulting firm Infoworks, Inc. and NPEF board member and past board chair, will be leading the awards ceremony as event chairs.

NPEF invites the community to celebrate this year's honorees at the Public Schools Hall of Fame. Details about this year's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, along with information about sponsoring the event can be found at <https://nashvillepef.org/hall-of-fame/>.

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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 [www.nashvillepef.org](http://www.nashvillepef.org).

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