

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Nashville Public Education Foundation to Honor Inspiring Educators and Organizations at 20th Public Schools Hall of Fame

Educators from Ida B. Wells and Whitsitt Elementary Schools to be celebrated alongside Cosecha Community Development and Creative Girls Rock

NASHVILLE, TENN. – May 21, 2024 – On September 5, 2024, the Nashville Public Education Foundation (NPEF) will host its milestone 20th Public Schools Hall of Fame event at the Music City Center. This annual celebration honors a diverse group of individuals and organizations – including educators, Metro Nashville Public Schools alumni, and community leaders – who have made significant contributions to Nashville and its students and families.

This year's inspiring award inductees include John B. Whitsitt Elementary Executive Principal Molly Rucker, Ida B. Wells Elementary teachers Dr. Merlene Barlow and Katie Ligget, and nonprofit organizations Cosecha Community Development and Creative Girls Rock. Lipscomb University, Nissan, and UBS are returning as awards sponsors alongside First Horizon Foundation, returning as presenting sponsor for the seventh consecutive year.

"Nashville is home to so many amazing educators and community leaders who devote their lives to helping our public school students thrive," said **Katie Cour, President and CEO of the Nashville Public Education Foundation**. "Each year, we work to honor and highlight the great work of innovative organizations and exceptional teachers and school leaders making a difference in our community. This year's honorees again left us hopeful and inspired about what's possible when we invest in the future of our students."

The Ronald L. Corbin Inspiring Leader Award, presented by Lipscomb University, is given to a school leader in MNPS who demonstrates exemplary achievements in public education. This award is named after NPEF founding board member Ron Corbin in honor of his dedication to excellent public schools for all of Nashville's children and youth. The winner receives \$5,000 along with an additional \$5,000 for their school. This year's recipient is **Molly Rucker**, executive principal of John B. Whitsitt Elementary School. Previously serving as Whitsitt's assistant principal, Rucker moved into the role of executive principal in 2022. Under her focused and supportive leadership, Whitsitt has continued to demonstrate significant student academic growth while also prioritizing an inclusive and welcoming school culture for all students and their families.

"These honorees are pillars of our community. They represent strong examples of commitment and service to public schools and students," said **Alfonzo Alexander, NPEF Board Chair**. "Their efforts make real, noticeable differences for Nashville, and we are excited to celebrate their dedication and innovative work towards ensuring all students thrive each day."

The Thomas J. Sherrard Inspiring Innovation Award, presented by Nissan, recognizes outstanding organizations making a difference for Nashville's students, families, and community. Each Inspiring

Innovation honoree will be awarded a \$5,000 grant to further their mission. This year's recipients are:

Cosecha Community Development, an organization that brings neighbors together through community and school gardens and Spanish language classes. By prioritizing health, wholeness, literacy, and mentorship, they provide meaningful and hands-on learning and community-building opportunities to students, families, and school staff.

- **Creative Girls Rock**, an organization that empowers young women and girls by valuing their creativity and building their academic confidence. Now serving over 500 participants annually, Creative Girls Rock addresses the community need for arts programming in the Greater Nashville area with a focus on women empowerment, mental health and wellness, and youth development.

The Annette Eskind Inspiring Educator Award, presented by UBS, honors two MNPS teachers who have gone above and beyond to demonstrate incredible dedication to students. Each Inspiring Educator receives \$5,000. Both educators are from Ida B. Wells Elementary, a school that has seen significant academic gains in recent years. The 2024 Inspiring Educators are:

- **Dr. Merlene Barlow**, a fourth-grade math teacher. She has demonstrated a consistent dedication to helping her students build a strong understanding of mathematical concepts and develop academic skills that will serve them in her classroom and beyond. Her expertise and high expectations help students reach their full potential and improve their confidence as learners.
- **Katie Liggett**, a second-grade teacher. She brings joy and excitement to every aspect of her lessons and classroom culture, ensuring her students feel seen and supported at all times. She is actively engaged with Ida B. Wells' community, helping to organize special events and initiatives that welcome and value all students and families.

The foundation is proud to commemorate 20 years of honoring the leaders and organizations that continue to inspire our city's students. The awards ceremony will be led by event chairs **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.

NPEF previously announced that this year's event will honor **Jerry Williams**, the executive director emerita of Leadership Nashville, current chair of The Enchiridion Foundation, and 22-year NPEF Board Member, with its highest honor, the Nelson C. Andrews Distinguished Service Award. Additionally, NPEF named this year's Distinguished Alumni Award recipients, presented by Belmont University: **Chief John Drake**, a graduate of East Nashville High School, Metropolitan Nashville Police Department's 8th Chief of Police; **Charles Starks**, a graduate of McGavock High School, President and CEO of the Convention Center Authority; and **Dr. Susan West**, a graduate of John Overton High School, the Chief of Staff and Vice President for Administration at Belmont University.

All are welcome to join NPEF to celebrate the Public Schools Hall of Fame and its honorees. To learn more about 20th anniversary and sponsorship information, visit <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.

Media Contact: Sydney Goggans/ sgoggans@tinymightyco.com