

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Teacherpreneur Pitch Night Awards Over \$30K to Teachers to Support Student Success

Supported by Amazon, ten Nashville educators received cash prizes and seed funding at fourth annual event

NASHVILLE, TENN. – March 6, 2025 – The Nashville Public Education Foundation (NPEF) hosted its fourth annual [Teacherpreneur](#) Pitch Night on March 5, awarding more than \$30,000 to local teachers to fund programs that support student success. At the event, held at Belmont University’s Fisher Center for the Performing Arts, ten Nashville public school educators pitched ideas to a panel of judges for a chance to win up to \$10,000 in prize money and seed funding from Amazon to launch their pilot programs. Three public school teachers earned the evening’s top awards:

- Winning first place was Saul Calzadilla, a STEAM Teacher at Whitsitt Elementary School, for his idea to provide the framework and tools for schools to start their own community gardening programs, which will build relationships, grow knowledge, and address food insecurity.
- Second place went to John Stayskal, an English Language Arts teacher at KIPP Antioch College Prep Middle, for his idea to restructure the school day schedule to provide more consistent and meaningful collaborative planning time for teachers.
- Third place was awarded to Jamia Lockmiller, a Physical Education teacher at Tusculum Elementary School, for her idea to increase access to sports and recreational equipment to promote exercise and student engagement.

“We are proud of our Teacherpreneurs’ innovative ideas to address challenges that our students are experiencing,” said **Katie Cour, President and CEO of the Nashville Public Education Foundation**. “Our team has been working with the Teacherpreneurs since January to refine their ideas, strengthen their cases, and practice their pitches. It’s incredible to see their growth as we complete our fourth Teacherpreneur cohort. Every child deserves to thrive in school, and we’re proud to create spaces for our teachers to harness innovation, drive change, and improve student outcomes.”

Dr. Jim McIntyre, Belmont’s Dean of Education, and Metro Schools Chief Strategy Officer Sarah Chin opened the event, recognizing the Teacherpreneurs for their hard work and creativity. The cohort then presented their pitches to a panel of judges representing education and entrepreneurial expertise including Sheila Calloway, Davidson County Juvenile Court Judge; Shani Dowell, Founder and CEO of Possip; Courtney Ross, Senior Manager of Community Engagement at Amazon; and Dr. Laquita Stribling, Executive Officer for Strategy and Performance Management with 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.

The Community Favorite Award, along with a cash prize of \$2,500, went to Celia Bowman-Jeffries, a multilingual learner teacher at Antioch Middle School, for her idea to provide supports to create more welcoming and supportive social and academic learning environments for multilingual students. This award was decided through online voting on pitch preview videos and audience participation at Pitch

Night. 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.

“For the past four years, we've witnessed exceptional talent from our Teacherpreneurs who are dedicated to creating transformational change for students,” said **Courtney Ross, Amazon's Senior Manager of Community Engagement in Nashville**. "Amazon is proud to support the innovation of these educators as they tackle some of education's toughest challenges and ultimately help students thrive. We're excited to see this momentum continue as they work to improve student success and inspire others along the way.”

Teacherpreneur is just one of the many programs NPEF leads to support educators. Over the past decade, NPEF has honored top teachers in the district with the annual Blue Ribbon Teacher Awards, partnered with the district to offer innovative professional learning opportunities for teachers, and provided grants to organizations dedicated to supporting educators.

PHOTOS AND CAPTIONS

Caption: The winning 2025 Teacherpreneur cohort members (from left to right): Jamia Lockmiller, Celia Bowman-Jeffries, Saul Calzadilla, John Stayskal.



Caption: Courtney Ross, Amazon's Senior Manager of Community Engagement, addresses the crowd at the 2025 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, Saul Calzadilla, Katie Cour.



Caption: Teacherpreneur Community Favorite winner with Amazon’s Senior Manager, Community Engagement and NPEF President & CEO. From left to right: Courtney Ross, Celia Bowman-Jeffries, 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: [OneDrive](#)