



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Nashville Public Education Foundation Names Gini Pupo-Walker and Hal Cato as Chairs of the 22nd Hall of Fame Luncheon

The annual event will honor Metro Nashville Public School educators, alumni, and business and community supporters; honoree nominations are being accepted.

NASHVILLE, TENN. – Feb. 10, 2026 — Revered non-profit leaders, **Gini Pupo-Walker** and **Hal Cato**, have been selected to chair the [Nashville Public Education Foundation](#)’s 22nd Hall of Fame Luncheon. Pupo-Walker is the Director of National Education Strategy for the Raikes Foundation, where she leads the development and implementation of their grantmaking strategy for their K-12 and higher education portfolios. Cato is the CEO of the Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee, the region’s leader in philanthropic activity and civic connection that cultivate strong communities.

The event is set for **Thursday, August 27, 2026, at 11:30 a.m., and will be held at the Music City Center**. We are excited to have [First Horizon Foundation](#) returning as the presenting sponsor for the ninth year. NPEF’s Hall of Fame recognizes Metro Nashville Public School educators and alumni who exemplify the best of public education through their personal and professional endeavors. Last year’s event gathered 700 attendees, including local and state elected officials, corporate executives, business leaders, non-profit champions, and education supporters.

“I am thrilled to support NPEF and chair this remarkable event to the benefit of Nashville’s public schools,” shared Pupo-Walker. “Being a former educator, and someone whose life’s work is rooted in strengthening and expanding education, it is an honor to commend individuals who richly invest into our city’s educational excellence.” In 2018, she was elected to the Metro Nashville Public School Board, making her the first Latino/a to be elected to such a position in Tennessee. A notable champion of education, Pupo-Walker is the Founder and former Executive Director of EdTrust - Tennessee, and serves as a board member of Aventura Community School, the Memorial Foundation, TIRRC Votes, and Brown’s Promise. Pupo-Walker was honored with the Distinguished Alumni Award at the 2020 Public Schools Hall of Fame.

NPEF President and CEO Dr. Diarese George shared, “We are proud to continue the Nashville Public Education Foundation’s annual tradition of recognizing and celebrating individuals within our communities who embody the hope, impact, and possibilities of our public schools.” The awards

emphasize the value of community, by encouraging community members to nominate individuals for two categories: the Nelson C. Andrews Distinguished Service Award and the MNPS Distinguished Alumni Award. Nominations are open through March 1 and submission forms are available on [the Hall of Fame website](#).

Cato has made an indelible mark in the non-profit sector for decades. Prior to leading the Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee, his visionary mindset, organizational leadership, and commitment to uplifting vulnerable groups was demonstrated in roles as CEO of Thistle Farms, Oasis Center, and an integral contributor to the founding of Bright Horizons Childcare. He received the Nelson C. Andrews Distinguished Service Award at the 2023 Public Schools Hall of Fame. “NPEF’s Hall of Fame is an event that education leaders and supporters across our city look forward to each year,” Cato reflected. “It is an opportunity for our community to come together around a shared vision for our students and schools and to celebrate the positive efforts toward achieving that vision.”

The 2026 Public Schools Hall of Fame honorees will be announced in the coming months, and tickets will be available following these announcements later this year. Sponsorships are available by contacting Melinda Judd at melinda.judd@nashvillepef.org. More information is available 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 nashvillepef.org.

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