



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Barbara Bowers, bbowers@mff.org; (310) 488-3994

Milken Family Foundation Surprises Albuquerque Teacher with \$25,000 Milken Educator Award

New Mexico's "Oscar of Teaching" goes to Andrew Cook from Manzano High School

ALBUQUERQUE, NM (March 14, 2014) — Cheers rang out when Dr. Jane Foley, senior vice president, Milken Educator Awards, announced Andrew Cook as New Mexico's 2013-14 Milken Educator Award recipient. The honor, one of education's most prestigious recognitions, comes with an unrestricted cash prize of \$25,000. In front of students, peers and invited guests, Cook, who teaches Spanish and Italian languages at Manzano High School in Albuquerque, New Mexico, was heralded with a fanfare typically reserved for stellar performances by athletes and entertainers.

The recognition is not a lifetime achievement award. Recipients are selected in early to mid-career for what they have achieved... and for the promise of what they will accomplish. Encompassed in the recognition is the responsibility for those honored to stretch their professional practices and leadership to even higher levels. Joining in the celebration was Hanna Skandera, State Secretary of Education.

"Our public education system is at the heart of America's promise and essential to safeguarding the American dream for future generations," said [Lowell Milken](#), chairman and co-founder of the Milken Family Foundation. "With research confirming that effective teachers represent the single most important school-related factor in raising student achievement, it is important to honor them, learn from them, and inspire more capable people to enter the profession. As the program's motto extols, *the future belongs to the educated.*"

For Andrew Cook, Manzano High School (MHS) is a family affair. The former student, now a Spanish and Italian languages teacher, is married to an MHS grad, and his father and brother were both instructors at the school.

Cook, who has been teaching in the district for 12 years, is widely regarded as a master of technology in the classroom. He serves as the department chair of modern and classical languages (MCL) and works diligently with the school's professional learning community to train teachers in a variety of areas, from Common Core State Standards to the use of Promethean Boards. Cook was the first teacher in New Mexico to become a Nationally Board Certified Teacher (NBCT) of foreign languages. Today, thanks in large part to his mentorship and support, Manzano High School now boasts eight NBCT teachers.

Cook uses project-based learning to engross students in engaging activities as they develop ever-increasing proficiencies. In his classroom, students write screenplays using their newly acquired language skills and then act, direct, shoot and edit the dramatic productions. To enhance student comprehension, he composes original musical pieces to accompany his language lessons. Colleagues note that Cook is an expert at analyzing student needs and adapting lessons so that students of all abilities can thrive and excel. He makes kids believe and excel beyond their own expectations.

As a member of the school's Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) site team, he has been instrumental in leading professional development to train teachers how to incorporate AVID strategies into their instructional practices. Student outcomes speak to the program's success. In 2012, 100% of AVID students graduated from MHS with 69% accepted to college. In 2014-15, Andrew Cook will be teaching the next cohort of incoming freshmen AVID students.

Committed to MHS's proud traditions of excellence, Cook recognized the need to change practices and policies to adapt to the school's increased rates of poverty, mobility and cultural diversity. He led his colleagues in the development of the Manzano Community Coalition to study anecdotal data and make recommendations for the future. Out of this work came several programs to strengthen the community, including computer classes for parents, a clothing bank, food bank, community garden and an annual multicultural assembly. Whether he's designing new support systems to address the dropout rate or entertaining the student body as a member of the school's faculty rock band, Andrew Cook will be giving it his all to make MHS the best that it can be.

The Awards story doesn't end with the surprise notification. New recipients are invited to join the Milken Educator Network, a group of distinguished educators coast-to-coast whose expertise serves as a valuable resource to fellow educators, legislators, school boards and others shaping the future of education.

Since first presented to a dozen California teachers, the program has grown to become the nation's preeminent teacher recognition program having honored nearly 2,600 K-12 teachers, principals and specialists. More than \$136 million in funding, including over \$64 million in individual \$25,000 awards, has been devoted to the overall program, which includes powerful professional development opportunities throughout recipients' careers. From local to state to national and even international levels, the exponential impact of Milken Educators strengthens American K-12 education.

Alternating yearly between elementary and secondary educators, the Awards are sourced through each participating state department of education, which appoints an independent blue ribbon committee to confidentially review candidates for recommendation to the Foundation.

For more information about the Milken Educator Awards, visit www.MilkenEducatorAwards.org or call the Foundation at (310) 570-4775. Follow the Awards at www.twitter.com/milken, www.facebook.com/milkeneducatorawards and at www.youtube.com/milkenaward.

Education reform leader Lowell Milken created the Milken Educator Awards to recognize exemplary teachers and established the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET) to generate more talented teachers, www.niet.org. NIET operates TAP: The System for Teacher and Student Advancement and the Best Practices Center. Lowell Milken recently provided the founding gift for the UCLA School of Law's Lowell Milken Institute for Business Law and Policy. For more information about Lowell visit www.lowellmilken.com.