

Five Public School Educators Receive National Recognition from The NEA Foundation

Washington, D.C. (October 7, 2024)—[The NEA Foundation](#) announced today the names of five public school educators from across the country who will receive the [Horace Mann Awards for Teaching Excellence](#), one of the highest honors in public education. The awards will be presented at the [Salute to Excellence in Education Gala](#) on February 14, 2025 in Washington, D.C. The event will also include the premiere screening of documentary films about the awardees' teaching practices and impact in their school communities.

The recipients of the 2025 Horace Mann Awards for Teaching Excellence are:

- Jacqueline Brown, a high school business and technology educator at Okolona High School in Okolona, Mississippi, nominated by the Mississippi Association of Educators;
- Matthew Hamilton, a sixth and seventh grade social studies educator at East Jordan Public Schools, in East Jordan, Michigan, nominated by the Michigan Education Association;
- Reva Lobatos, a second grade educator at Fremont County School District #25 in Riverton, Wyoming, nominated by the Wyoming Education Association.
- Joe Nappi, a high school and university social studies educator at Monmouth Regional High School in Tinton Falls, New Jersey, nominated by the New Jersey Education Association;
- Maribel Vilchez, a third grade educator at Lydia Hawk Elementary School in Lacey, Washington, nominated by the Washington Education Association

The awardees were selected by an expert panel and evaluated based on excellence in the classroom, dedication to equity and diversity, engagement with families and communities, commitment to professional development, and advocacy for the teaching profession.

“The educators we are recognizing today exemplify the dedication and innovation necessary to inspire youth and build authentic connections,” said Sara A. Sneed, president and CEO of The NEA Foundation. “Their commitments to fostering inclusive and equitable learning



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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environments are truly commendable. We are absolutely thrilled to celebrate them and their fellow educators at the Salute to Excellence in Education in February.”

“The educators receiving the Horace Mann Awards for Teaching Excellence embody the commitment to helping every child reach their full potential,” said Marita Zuraitis, president of the Horace Mann Educators Foundation Board of Directors. “As a steadfast supporter of public education, The Horace Mann Educators Foundation is deeply honored to celebrate these educators for their commitments to their students and communities.”

For more than 20 years, The NEA Foundation and Horace Mann have celebrated outstanding educators from around the country with the Horace Mann Awards for Teaching Excellence. Each 2025 honoree will receive \$10,000 and is a finalist for the NEA Member Benefits Award, the top honor in public education.

The NEA Foundation Salute to Excellence in Education Gala and the Awards for Teaching Excellence are presented with support from FNBO, Horace Mann Educators Foundation, NEA Member Benefits, Travelers Insurance, American Fidelity, and Bank of America. To learn more about the 2025 awardees or the Salute to Excellence in Education Gala, visit our website at www.neafoundation.org.