FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Helping Students Connect With Their Celebrity Crushes Through Science Earns Teacher Raisa Eady a $25,000 Milken Educator Award

Alabama Educator Stimulates the Fertile Minds of Biology Students at Pinson Valley High School

Montgomery, Ala. – In a breeding experiment gone horribly right, Alabama biology teacher Raisa Eady is connecting high schoolers with their celebrity crushes.

Engaging young minds in studying science any way she can, this teacher at Pinson Valley High uses the tools of genetics research to show students their hypothetical Hollywood progeny. It's part of Eady's secret sauce of rapport, trust, and high expectations, which her students respond to in a big way.

It's not all fun and games, of course, but Eady inspires confidence in her students as she pushes them toward greater understanding and educational growth.

Yet it was Eady enjoying unanticipated success this morning at a surprise school assembly where she was presented with a Milken Educator Award by Milken Educator Awards Senior Vice President Dr. Jane Foley and Alabama Superintendent of Education Dr. Eric Mackey.

An appreciative Eady was named a 2019-20 recipient of the national recognition, which comes with an unrestricted $25,000 cash prize.

She is the only Milken Educator Award winner from Alabama this year, and is among up to 40 honorees for 2019-20.

The Milken Educator Awards, hailed by Teacher magazine as the “Oscars of Teaching” has been opening minds and shaping futures for over 30 years. Research shows teacher quality is the driving in-school factor behind student growth and achievement. The initiative not only aims to reward great teachers, but to celebrate, elevate and activate those innovators in the classroom who are guiding America’s next generation of leaders. Milken Educators believe, “The future belongs to the educated.”

Eady is bringing that future closer for her rural Alabama students by prioritizing STEM education and promoting a strong AP biology initiative—as well as boosting literacy and ESL programs. As chair of the school district's science program, she is encouraging more students to think outside the box and strive for more and greater academic and real-life opportunities. Eady is a relentlessly positive presence in the classroom and beyond, whether she's engaging students in extracurricular activities, mentoring new teachers or stimulating professional growth in colleagues.

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"As Yeats said, education is not the filling of a pail but the lighting of a fire, and Raisa Eady really knows how to light a fire under her students," said Foley. "She engages, challenges and inspires them to apply science to their lives and to use it as a tool to create unimaginable futures for themselves and all of us. We're proud to welcome Raisa Eady as a Milken Educator."

“There are nearly 50,000 teachers in the State of Alabama, and the role they play in the growth and intellectual development of our children is invaluable,” said Mackey. “So, to have a teacher recognized in such a public and national platform takes what is already an awesome responsibility and places a spotlight on what is not recognized often enough – excellent teaching. We are proud of Mrs. Eady, but more importantly, proud of the field that she represents and all of the incredible teachers who give of themselves for the benefit of our children every day.”

“We are so incredibly proud of all of our teachers, so to have one set aside for such a distinction is very special,” said Jefferson County Interim District Superintendent Dr. Walter Gonsoulin. “The magnitude of this award is a testament to the hard work that educators in Jefferson County Schools bring to the classroom every day. The honor that has been presented to Mrs. Eady is well deserved and is shared in spirit by her colleagues, students, and the entire Jefferson County School District.”

**About Milken Educator Raisa Eady**

Biology teacher Raisa Eady’s unit on inheritance starts with an unusual assignment: Bring in a picture of your “celebrity crush.” Students at Alabama’s Pinson Valley High School determine the phenotypes and genotypes for a set of characteristics and use the picture to determine those for the celebrities. Then, using Punnett squares, they predict the appearance of the hypothetical offspring produced by a fictional mating of student and crush. Eady insists on making biology relevant to her students’ lives. She builds great rapport with her pupils and uses daily learning targets, grouping, visuals and formative assessments to engage them. Eady does not apologize for her high standards, which students are inspired to meet and exceed in the safe learning environment she creates. They trust her, know she is their advocate and believe she will do whatever it takes to help them succeed.

Eady, the chair of Pinson Valley’s science department, serves as lead teacher for the district’s 150 science educators in grades 6-12. She mentors new teachers and is always happy to help them develop activities that promote higher-order thinking.

Eady leads the district’s Literacy Design Collaborative Initiative and serves on the school’s ESL committee and transformation team. Eady is working to build a robust AP Biology program; the number of students taking the course and AP exam has increased over the past three years. She leads professional learning communities and professional development for the building and district, motivating her colleagues to “up their game.”

At meetings with colleagues, Eady silences any negativity, meeting it with proactivity, productivity and a growth mindset. She serves as a strong role model for students interested in careers in both STEM and education.

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She coaches the Science Olympiad and sponsors the Science National Honor Society. In 2018, Eady spent the summer working with cancer therapeutics and studying CTLA-4 expression in transgenic mice during a fellowship with Southern Research, a nonprofit biotechnology and pharmaceutical group.

Eady earned a bachelor’s in biology education in 2012 from Alabama State University and a master’s in biology education in 2018 from the University of West Alabama.

More information about Eady, plus links to photos and a video from today’s assembly, can be found on the Milken Educator Awards website at:


The National Milken Educator Award

Milken Educators are selected in early to mid-career for what they have achieved and for the promise of what they will accomplish. In addition to the $25,000 prize and public recognition, the honor includes membership in the National Milken Educator Network, a group of more than 2,700 top teachers, principals, and specialists dedicated to strengthening education.

In addition to participation in the Milken Educator Network, 2019-20 recipients will attend a Milken Educator Forum in Indianapolis from March 26-28, 2020 where they will network with their new colleagues and exchange ideas with state and federal leaders on the future of education. In addition, the Milken Educator Awards’ “Why Not Us” program will pair each 2019-20 recipient with a veteran Milken Educator mentor to explore and prepare for expanded leadership roles that strengthen education practice and policy.

More than $140 million in funding, including $70 million in individual $25,000 awards, has been devoted to the overall Awards initiative, which includes powerful professional development opportunities throughout recipients’ careers. Many have gone on to earn advanced degrees, and be placed in prominent posts and on state and national education committees.

The Awards alternate yearly between elementary and secondary educators. Unlike most teacher recognition programs, the Milken Educator Award is completely unique: Educators cannot apply for this recognition and do not even know they are under consideration.

Candidates are sourced through a confidential selection process and then are reviewed by blue ribbon panels appointed by state departments of education. Those most exceptional are recommended for the Award, with final selection made by the Milken Family Foundation.

The cash award is unrestricted. Recipients have used the money in diverse ways; for instance, on their children’s or their own continuing education, financing dream field trips, establishing scholarships, and even on the adoption of children.

To get regular updates on the surprise Milken Educator Award events, follow and use the #MilkenAward hashtag on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. See information and watch the award tour at:

- www.facebook.com/milkeneducatorawards
- www.twitter.com/milken
- www.youtube.com/milkenaward
- www.instagram.com/milkenfamilyfdn
About the Milken Educator Awards
The first Milken Educator Awards were presented by the Milken Family Foundation in 1987. The Awards provide public recognition and individual financial rewards of $25,000 to elementary and secondary school teachers, principals and specialists from around the country who are furthering excellence in education.

To learn more about this prestigious national award, visit www.MilkenEducatorAwards.org or contact the Milken Family Foundation at (310) 570-4772.

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