Media Release

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Bellflower Unified Kindergarten Teacher Stunned by $25,000 Milken Award

BELLFLOWER – Washington Elementary kindergarten teacher Katherine Shaw was stunned Friday as she learned during a surprise ceremony that she is the latest U.S. teacher to receive the $25,000 Milken Educators Award, announced to cheers from her colleagues and hundreds of students.

"I had no idea, I had no idea. My hands were shaking," Shaw said. "I come to work every day to do something I love."

Shaw is the first educator from Bellflower Unified to receive the award, now in its 30th year, which recognizes teachers early in their careers for their potential contributions.

Shaw was praised by Milken Family Foundation Chairman Lowell Milken, Bellflower Unified Superintendent Dr. Brian Jacobs and State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson for her skill at forging connections with students, families and her colleagues.

"She sparks a joy of learning in her students, leading them to new heights of excellence, and motivates her peers to create similar learning experiences in their classroom," Jacobs said.

Shaw, an English learner who struggled with reading, credited her own teachers with inspiring her. She has also taught sixth, fourth and second grade. She is in her second year teaching kindergarten.

"Kindergarten was a challenge for me because I had never taught 5-year-olds before," she said. "It is their foundation – their foundation to read, to learn, to wonder. It's been great."

Shaw is known for her classroom energy – she is constantly in motion, engaging with her students, and shapes her approach to accommodate a variety of learning needs.

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When a child needs a lot of repetition and guidance, she will stand next to the child while modeling a skill so the student to connect more intimately. Because she has a high number of English learners, she is animated in her instruction, and often uses student backgrounds to personalize lessons. She gives constant praise to reinforce good work habits and uses a variety of tools to keep students focused. Her classroom is a "print-rich" environment that encourages reading.

Shaw forges strong relationships with parents – doing home visits and encouraging families to volunteer in her classroom. For parents who might face a language barrier to helping, she finds tasks that meet their skills – keeping them engaged in their child's learning.

Shaw also mentors fellow teachers through the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment program.

Guests at the surprise ceremony were told the event was to mark Washington's status as a 2016 California Gold Ribbon School. But Foundation leader Lowell Milken let everyone know the reason for his visit was a secret – and engaged students in discovering that it was an award for an excellent teacher.

Shaw hadn't even known she was nominated for the award, which connects her to a network of past award winners – a number of whom attended the event and welcomed Shaw into the "Milken family."

Shaw shared a little of her philosophy as a teacher.

"Teaching is a profession that comes with a lot of help from people – the teachers that you work with, your administrators. It's not just one person, it's a community of people that help you become the educator you are," she said. "I think you revamp yourself every year … Every day is a new day."

She said she's not sure how she will spend the money, but is considering a trip and buying some iPads for her classroom.

PHOTOS

BUSD_MILKEN_1: Washington Elementary kindergarten teacher Katherine Shaw hugs Bellflower Unified Superintendent Dr. Brian Jacobs after learning she won a $25,000 Milken Educators Award recognizing her excellence and potential. She is one of two Californians to win the award in 2017.

Additional photos available at caschoolnews.net

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Bellflower Unified School District provides a pathway for all students to attain the expertise and develop skills of academic excellence that will empower them to become lifelong active learners, demonstrate respect for themselves and others in a dynamic, diverse and global society, become responsible, informed, productive, independent and contributing citizens, and perform successfully in their chosen field and in society.