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**Brookings Science Teacher Camrin Vaux Receives \$25,000 Milken Educator Award for Personalizing Student Learning**

*Vaux's project-based learning boosts student engagement in STEM at Camelot Intermediate School*

*Oprah Winfrey congratulates Milken Educators in heartwarming video message as 'light in this world'*

For full bio, photos and video, visit

<https://www.milkeneducatorawards.org/educators/view/camrin-vaux>

**Santa Monica, Calif.**, (March 23, 2022) — At Camelot Intermediate School in Brookings, South Dakota, students are building a strong STEM foundation thanks to Camrin Vaux. The fifth grade teacher regularly adapts her lessons to engage and challenge all students, fusing fundamental science skills with exciting project-based learning. Today, Vaux received a Milken Educator Award for her innovative teaching at a surprise all-school assembly surrounded by cheering colleagues, students, education officials and media.

South Dakota Secretary of Education Tiffany Sanderson joined Milken Educator Awards Senior Program Director Greg Gallagher to present Vaux with the national recognition. Vaux will receive an unrestricted \$25,000 cash prize and join a national network of more than 2,800 Milken Educators and education leaders across the U.S.

“Camrin Vaux goes above and beyond to make science accessible to each of her students, crafting lessons that meet their individual needs,” said Gallagher. “Her drive to innovate STEM education at Camelot contributes to the success of students and colleagues alike. We are proud to congratulate and welcome Camrin into the national Milken Educator Network.”

Vaux is among more than 60 educators coast-to-coast who will receive the Award during the 2021-22 school year, and the second recipient from South Dakota. Nichole Bowman, a math teacher at T.F. Riggs High School, earned the Award yesterday. A Brookings School District educator was last awarded in 2003.

“Camrin is deeply invested in the success and health of her students, colleagues and community,” said Secretary of Education Tiffany Sanderson. “She ensures her classroom instruction is engaging and challenging for students, helps her colleagues to live active lives, and supports the Brookings fire department as a member of the auxiliary. Excellent teachers are excellent role models. Ms. Vaux sets high standards through her service and profession.”

Hailed as the “Oscars of Teaching,” Milken Educator Awards inspire and uplift with the unique stories of educators making a profound difference for students, colleagues and communities. The Awards are not

designated for lifetime achievement. Recipients are heralded while early to mid-career for what they have achieved — and for the promise of what they will accomplish given the resources and opportunities inherent in the Award.

Oprah, a longtime education advocate, shared her congratulations to this year’s recipients [in a video message](#) thanking “the most incredible educators around the country” and acknowledging her deep appreciation for the “tireless work” they do.

### **More About Camrin Vaux**

**Personalized Success:** Vaux creates individualized contracts with students to keep them accountable for meeting their learning goals. At Camelot, teachers build “quests” to guide students through the curriculum, with learning benchmarks conferring Squire, Knight and King status. Vaux uses classroom, district and state assessment data to design her instruction, creating personalized pathways to proficiency for each learner. Her students spread out in the hallway to learn about states of matter and work with local university professors for project-based learning. Last year, Vaux’s students researched the effectiveness of mask mandates and shared their research at a city council meeting, impressing elected officials and community members.

**Instructional Innovation:** Vaux works tirelessly to improve the instructional experience for all learners. When Camelot introduced Mass Customized Learning (MCL), an approach focused on meeting individual learning needs, Vaux was among the first to implement elements of the program in her classroom. Now the MCL facilitator, she tracks schoolwide data on science learning objectives, leads the personalized learning committee, creates lesson plans and leads visitors on MCL tours. When the pandemic moved classes online in spring 2020, Vaux spent countless hours mastering Canvas, EmPower and other technology, then served as the go-to guru for educators throughout the district.

**Community Impact:** Vaux leads Camelot’s fifth grade team, mentors new teachers, and serves on building and district continuous improvement committees, as well as the principal’s advisory committee. She directs a local volleyball club, teaches Sunday School at her church, and is a member of the Brookings Fire Department Auxiliary. As Camelot’s staff wellness coordinator, Vaux organizes group exercise classes, wellness lectures, and an annual 5K and 10K race. She raised more than \$70,000 to equip a staff workout room on campus. Vaux’s wellness efforts have saved considerable money on the district’s health insurance premiums, much of which has been returned to staff members as bonuses.

**Education:** Vaux earned a bachelor’s in 2006 from Dakota State University and a master’s of education in 2012 from South Dakota State University.

### **More About the Milken Educator Awards:** *“The future belongs to the educated.”*

Along with the financial prize, Milken Educator Award recipients join the national Milken Educator Network, a group of more than 2,800 top teachers, principals and specialists. The network serves as a rich resource for fellow educators, legislators, school boards and others dedicated to excellence in education.

- The honorees will also attend an all-expenses-paid Milken Educator Awards Forum, where they will network with their new colleagues as well as veteran Milken Educators and other education leaders about how to increase their impact on K-12 education. In addition, they will learn about how to become involved in the Milken Friends Forever (MFFs) mentoring program, in which freshman Milken Educators receive personalized coaching and support from a Milken Educator

veteran on ways to elevate their instructional practice and take an active role in educational leadership, policy and practice.

- Over the years, more than \$140 million in funding, including \$70 million for the individual cash awards, has been devoted to the overall Milken Awards initiative, which includes powerful professional development opportunities throughout recipients' careers.
- Veteran Milken Educators frequently go on to serve in leadership roles at state, national and international levels.
- "We find you. You don't find us!" Unlike most teacher recognition programs, the Milken Educator Awards initiative has no formal nomination or application process. Candidates are sourced through a confidential selection process and then reviewed by blue ribbon panels in each state. The most exceptional candidates are recommended for the award, with final selection made by the Milken Family Foundation.
- The \$25,000 cash award is unrestricted. Recipients have used the money in diverse ways. For instance, some have spent the funds on their children's or their own continuing education, financing dream field trips, establishing scholarships, and even adopting children.

To get regular updates on the surprise Milken Educator Award events or to watch the award events unfold, follow and use the #MilkenAward hashtag on [Facebook](#) (@MilkenEducatorAwards), [Twitter](#) (@Milken), [YouTube](#) (/MilkenAward), [Instagram](#) (MilkenFamilyFdn), and [TikTok](#) (@MilkenAward).

For more information, visit [MilkenEducatorAwards.org](#) or call the Milken Family Foundation at (310) 570-4772.

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#### ***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. Recipients are heralded in early to mid-career for what they have achieved and for the promise of what they will accomplish. The initiative was created by the Milken Family Foundation, which celebrates 40 years of elevating education in America and around the world. Learn more at [MFF.org](#).*