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Roosevelt High School teacher receives \$25,000 Milken Educator Award

NOTE TO EDITORS: Professional photos and video footage from the event will be available at <http://milkeneducatorawards.org/newsroom/media-kit/>.

Left to right: Sioux Falls Mayor Mike Huether; T.J. Nelson, of Sen. Mike Rounds; Gina Benz; Dr. Jane Foley; Taylor Hoekstra, representative from office of Sen. John Thune



SIOUX FALLS, S.D. – Gina Benz, an English teacher at Roosevelt High School in Sioux Falls, didn't walk the red carpet today, but she did receive a \$25,000 award that Teacher magazine calls the "Oscar of Teaching." State Education Secretary Dr. Melody Schopp and Dr. Jane Foley, senior vice president of the Milken Educator Awards, surprised Benz with a Milken Educator Award during a school assembly this morning.

"Teaching is an honorable profession," said Schopp. "Every day across our state, thousands of educators quietly do this important work. Today is one of those special days when great teaching makes headlines."

Benz teaches Advanced Placement Language and Composition as well as Foundations of Language and Composition, a class that includes English language learners and special education students. She is known for getting results from her students, whether they are high achievers or struggling learners. She is also the AP coordinator for the school. Benz mentors new and veteran teachers. Her school's leaders often seek her input. Benz received a Bachelor of Arts in English and secondary education from the University of Sioux Falls and a master's from South Dakota State University.

"Gina has a real passion for teacher leadership," said Roosevelt principal, Tim Hazlett. "She takes it upon herself to support new teachers, personally and professionally. She's committed to the overall function of the school. It's almost a moral obligation for her. She has frank, yet professional conversations with staff and is committed to the profession."

"Gina is known for having a steady demeanor and is a model of character and integrity," said Dr. Jane Foley, senior vice president, Milken Educator Awards. "If a student is feeling depressed or is having a problem, they know she is there for them. She is special for a myriad of reasons, and this is why she is being rewarded with a Milken Educator Award today."

The Milken Educator Awards were conceived by Lowell Milken to recognize the importance of outstanding educators and encourage talented young people to enter the teaching profession. Since South Dakota joined the Milken Educator Awards program in 2002, a total of \$450,000 has been awarded to 18 South Dakota recipients.

Candidates for the Milken Educator Awards are selected on the following criteria:

- Exceptional educational talent, as evidenced by effective instructional practices and student learning results in the classroom and school
- Exemplary educational accomplishments beyond the classroom that provide models of excellence for the profession
- Individuals whose education contributions are largely unheralded yet worthy of the spotlight
- Early- to mid-career educators who offer strong, long-range potential for professional and policy leadership
- Engaging and inspiring presence that motivates and impacts students, colleagues and the community

To learn more about the Milken Educator Award, visit www.milkeneducatorawards.org.