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Fourth grade teacher in Mitchell receives \$25,000 Milken Educator Award



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

MITCHELL, S.D. – Amanda Christensen, a fourth grade teacher at Longfellow Elementary School in Mitchell, has received a \$25,000 award that Teacher magazine calls the "Oscar of Teaching." Gov. Dennis Daugaard, State Education Secretary Dr. Melody Schopp and Greg Gallagher, senior program administrator for the Milken Educator Awards, surprised Christensen with a Milken Educator Award during a school assembly this morning.

(l to r): Dr. Joe Graves, superintendent of Mitchell School District, First Lady Linda Daugaard, Amanda Christensen, Gov. Dennis Daugaard, Secretary of Education Melody Schopp

"Teachers are the foundation of a quality education," said Gov. Daugaard. "It's an honor to be part of this special recognition for one of our state's educators. I commend Amanda for the great work she is doing in both her classroom and her community."

One example of Christensen's work with the community is the relationship she has developed with LifeQuest, a local organization that helps adults with disabilities. LifeQuest clients have donated books to Christensen's classroom. She then invites the clients into her classroom, so her students can read the donated books to them. In the spring, her students visit their friends at LifeQuest to replant flower beds.

Christensen received a Bachelor of Arts in elementary education with a minor in special education and a master's from Augustana University in Sioux Falls, S.D.

"There are so many great things happening in South Dakota classrooms," said Secretary of Education Dr. Melody Schopp. "Amanda Christensen's classroom is one such example. I feel deeply fortunate on days like this to get to celebrate the teaching profession. I'm excited for Amanda and proud of all of our state's teachers who make a difference in the lives of students every day."

The Milken Educator Awards program, created by the Milken Family Foundation, is in its 30th year. The prestigious honor will be presented at up to 35 schools during the 2016-17 school year. More than \$138 million in funding, including \$68 million in individual \$25,000 awards, has been devoted to the program, which includes professional development opportunities throughout recipients'

careers. Since South Dakota joined the Milken Educator Awards program in 2002, a total of \$475,000 has been awarded to 19 South Dakota recipients.

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Candidates for the Milken Educator Awards are selected based 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 contributions to education 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.