



## NEWS RELEASE

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### SPRINGDALE TEACHER WINS MILKEN NATIONAL EDUCATOR AWARD

SPRINGDALE - Justin Isaac Minkel thought he was attending a school assembly in which Harvey Jones Elementary School was being honored as the first stop in a statewide tour of schools by Arkansas Education Commissioner Dr. Ken James.

What Minkel didn't know was that the assembly was actually being held for him.

Minkel is a winner of a 2006 Milken Family Foundation National Educator Award, which includes an unrestricted financial prize of \$25,000. Up to 100 educators across the country are being recognized for their outstanding work with the awards at surprise ceremonies this fall.

In addition to Dr. James, Springdale Superintendent Dr. Jim Rollins and Foundation Executive Vice President Richard Sandler helped present the surprise award. "The Milken National Educator Awards represent the largest national teacher recognition program in the United States," Dr. James said. "We are pleased to add Justin Minkel to the distinguished list of Arkansas winners. Past winners would tell him the excitement will not end with today's ceremony."

In addition to today's emotional event, all Milken National Educators will be recognized at a national gala and awards ceremony in the spring. National Educator Award winners also become members of the Milken Educator Network, a coalition of educators who provide expert resources and serve as partners to network members and policymakers as they help cultivate and expand innovative programs in their classrooms, schools and districts.

Milken Family Foundation Chairman and Co-founder Lowell Milken created these awards in 1985 to recognize, celebrate and attract the highest caliber school professionals. Since the program's inception, more than \$54 million in cash prizes have been awarded to 2,100-plus educators. In Arkansas, the Foundation has awarded \$1.5 million to 60 recipients since the program began.

"Excellence must not be the exception in our schools, but rather the norm," Lowell Milken has said.

Minkel is an example of that excellence, Sandler said today.

Minkel, a third grade teacher at Jones Elementary, has taught in the Springdale School District for two years. He was graduated from Fayetteville High School in 1996 and then earned a bachelor of arts degree from Cornell University in 2000, where he graduated *summa cum laude*. He earned a master's in elementary education from the University of California at Berkeley in 2004. While at Berkeley, he also earned a certificate for teaching English as a Second Language.

This year, Minkel's class has 25 students, 19 of whom come from homes in which Spanish is the native language. As a whole, Jones Elementary School's student population consists of 93 percent poverty students and 85 percent minority students.

Jones' principal Debbie Flora wrote in her letter recommending Minkel for the award that he "is an Arkansan who has traveled the world and attended highly distinguished universities. His experiences and preparation have enabled him to provide a rich education experience for poverty and minority students. Justin Minkel possesses potential for impacting the education of any child in the nation, yet he has chosen some of Arkansas' most difficult children to educate. He is truly making a lasting impression on the lives of the children he serves."

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***The Arkansas Department of Education strives to ensure that all children in the state have access to a quality education by providing educators, administrators and staff with leadership, resources and training.***