

NEA Foundation Honors Five Public School Educators with National Award

The NEA Foundation announces five public school educators who will receive the coveted 2026 Horace Mann Awards for Teaching Excellence.

WASHINGTON, DC, UNITED STATES, October 7, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [The NEA Foundation](#) announced the names of five public school educators from across the country who will be recognized with one of the highest honors in public education, the [Horace Mann Awards for Teaching Excellence](#). The awards will be presented at the Salute to Excellence in Education Gala on February 13, 2026 in Washington, D.C. The event will also include the premiere screening of documentary films about the honorees' teaching practices and the impact they have in their communities.



Five public school teachers from across the country have been selected to receive The NEA Foundation's 2026 Horace Mann Awards for Teaching Excellence, one of the highest honors in public education

The recipients of the 2026 Horace Mann Awards for Teaching Excellence are:

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The educators receiving the Horace Mann Awards for Teaching Excellence are redefining what it means to serve students.”

Marita Zuraitis

- Janet Damon, a high school history educator at DELTA High School in Denver, Colorado, nominated by the Colorado Education Association;
- Melyssa Ferro, a middle school science educator at Syringa Middle School in Caldwell, Idaho, nominated by the Idaho Education Association;
- JoMeka Gray, a kindergarten educator at Kennedy-Powell STEM Academy in Temple, Texas, nominated by the Texas

State Education Association.

- Stephanie King, a high school English educator at Granger High School in Granger, Washington, nominated by the Washington Education Association;
- Pete Stone, a high school English educator at Lewisville High School in Chester, South Carolina, nominated by the South Carolina Education Association

The awardees were selected by an expert panel and evaluated based on excellence in the classroom, dedication to increasing opportunities for all students, engagement with families and communities, commitment to professional development, and advocacy for the teaching profession.

“The educators we are honoring today are powerful catalysts for change in their classrooms and communities,” said Sara A. Sneed, president and CEO of The NEA Foundation. “By cultivating inclusive learning environments where every student can be seen, supported, and inspired, they are changing lives for countless youth and families. We couldn’t be more excited to uplift their stories, practices, and impact at the 2026 Salute to Excellence in Education.”

“The educators receiving the Horace Mann Awards for Teaching Excellence are redefining what it means to serve students,” said Marita Zuraitis, president of the [Horace Mann Educators Foundation](#) Board of Directors. “The Horace Mann Educators Foundation is proud to honor their unwavering dedication to nurturing student potential and strengthening school communities.”

For more than two decades, The NEA Foundation and Horace Mann have celebrated outstanding educators from around the country each year with the Horace Mann Awards for Teaching Excellence. Each 2026 honoree will receive \$10,000 and is a finalist for the NEA Member Benefits Award, the top honor in public education.

The NEA Foundation Salute to Excellence in Education Gala and the Awards for Teaching Excellence are presented with support from FNBO, Horace Mann Educators Foundation, NEA Member Benefits, Travelers Insurance, American Fidelity, and Bank of America. To learn more about the 2026 awardees or the Salute to Excellence in Education Gala, visit our website at www.neafoundation.org.

About Horace Mann Educators Foundation

Horace Mann Educators Foundation is an independent charitable organization formed by Horace Mann Educators Corporation in 2020 primarily to recognize the dedication of educators to helping each student reach their full potential. The Foundation draws on Horace Mann’s 80-year history of serving educators. For more information, visit the Foundation webpage at csr.horacemann.com/foundation.

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