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Contact: Sabrina Skacan: (310) 570-4773 (office); (310) 989-5875 (cell); sskacan@mff.org

There's No Limit to Achievement under Phoenix Principal Timothy Thomas, Honored with \$25,000 Milken Educator Award

His Model of Integrity and Dedication Transforms Under-Performing Schools

SANTA MONICA, Calif., (February 15, 2017)—Principal Timothy Thomas has earned a reputation as a “turnaround” expert, gleaned from his experience as a master teacher with a keen eye for creating a supportive environment for teachers and students to thrive. But Thomas had no inkling that he would be the center of attention today as Milken Family Foundation Chairman and Co-Founder Lowell Milken, Arizona Superintendent of Public Instruction Diane Douglas and Laveen Elementary School District Superintendent Dr. Bill Johnson recognized him for his outstanding instructional leadership and curriculum development during a surprise all-school assembly. In the spirit of the school motto, colleagues and student Mustangs “ride with pride” in celebration as Thomas received the prestigious Milken Educator Award.

Thomas is the only Milken Educator Award winner from Arizona this year, and the first from the Laveen Elementary School District. He is among up to 35 honorees who will receive this national recognition and unrestricted \$25,000 cash prize for 2016-17.

When Thomas took over as principal at Laveen’s Rogers Ranch School in 2013, the school was facing serious challenges: low student achievement, high staff turnover, discipline issues, facilities in disrepair, and unhappy parents. One year later the K-8 STEM school improved from a D to a high B in Arizona’s school grading system. Teacher retention rates were up, and staff, students and parents were singing Thomas’ praises. In 2014, the State of Arizona recognized Rogers Ranch, which serves a high-need community with a large percentage of English Language Learners, for outstanding growth in academic achievement.

This season marks the 30th year of the Milken Educator Awards, hailed by *Teacher* magazine as the “Oscars of Teaching.”

“Where others see challenges, Timothy Thomas sees potential. He knows how to level the playing field and provide educational opportunities for achievement, regardless of the socio-economic conditions of the students or school he serves,” said Lowell Milken. “To turn around one school is quite a feat, but to turn around two schools is exceptional and a roadmap for others to follow. Timothy is that special type of leader all schools deserve.”

“One of my favorite things to do as Arizona’s Superintendent of Public Instruction is to help recognize truly remarkable and deserving educators like Timothy Thomas,” said Superintendent Douglas. “I am privileged to be able to witness what a respected leader he is for this school. There is no doubt that his students, teachers and the community benefit from his passion and knowledge.”

“One of Mr. Thomas’ many great attributes is that he is always teaching, and he is always learning. Mr. Thomas is the instructional leader everyone hopes for in a school principal, and at the same time he is always growing, refining and improving,” said Dr. Johnson. “Staff and students readily strive to achieve the high expectations Mr. Thomas has for them, because they see that he holds himself to the highest standards.”

Before joining Rogers Ranch, Thomas led a similarly successful turnaround effort as principal of Cordova Middle School in Phoenix’s Alhambra Elementary School District. In Thomas’ first year, the school beat state and district averages in student achievement, led the district in student and teacher attendance, and became Alhambra’s highest-performing middle school.

Thomas’ instructional leadership and dedication to mentoring teachers have been essential to achieving the gains at both schools. The principal regularly observes classrooms and provides frequent feedback to teachers. Thomas has also focused on bringing more technology into the curriculum at Rogers Ranch, and provided tech training for faculty development. Other schools across Arizona use Rogers Ranch as a model for elementary STEM instruction and technology integration, and frequently observe Rogers Ranch via site visits and Google Classroom.

Thomas has made a lasting impact on his students, who often come back to update him on their progress in high school and college. During an assembly when Thomas was a teacher, one of his former students moved the audience to tears when he described Thomas’ impact on his life. Thomas also has a talent for building bridges with families, encouraging parent involvement and turning resistant parents into vocal supporters.

Thomas began his career in education teaching middle school math in 2002. He has developed advanced math curriculum, established after-school outlets for students including tutoring, clubs and sports programs as well as partnered with a science museum and created lessons for a new Saturday STEM program.

Thomas graduated from Arizona State University in 2001 with a bachelor’s in elementary education. He earned a master’s in educational leadership from Northern Arizona University in 2009.

More information about Thomas, plus links to photos and a video from today’s assembly, can be found on the Milken Educator Awards website at <http://www.milkeneducatorawards.org/educators/view/timothy-thomas>.

Milken Educators are selected in early to mid-career for what they have achieved and for the promise of what they will accomplish. In addition to the \$25,000 prize and public recognition,

Thomas' honor includes membership in the National Milken Educator Network, a group of more than 2,700 top principals, teachers and specialists dedicated to strengthening education.

In addition to participation in the Milken Educator Network, 2016-17 recipients will attend a Milken Educator Forum, March 23-25, 2017, in New Orleans. Educators will have the opportunity to network with their new colleagues and hear from state and federal officials about the importance of maximizing their leadership roles to advance educator effectiveness.

More than \$138 million in funding, including \$68 million in individual \$25,000 awards, has been devoted to the overall Awards program, which includes powerful professional development opportunities throughout recipients' careers. Many have gone on to earn advanced degrees and be placed in prominent posts and on state and national education committees.

The Awards alternate yearly between elementary and secondary educators. Unlike most teacher recognition programs, the Milken Educator Awards has no formal nomination or application process. Candidates are sourced through a confidential selection process and then reviewed by blue ribbon panels appointed by state departments of education. Those most exceptional are recommended for the Award, with final approval by the Milken Family Foundation.

Past recipients have used their Awards to fund their children's education or their own continuing education. Others have financed dream field trips, established scholarships and even funded the adoption of children.

To get regular updates on the surprise Milken Educator Award events, follow and use the #MilkenAward hashtag on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. The Milken Educator Awards tour is on social media at www.facebook.com/milkeneducatorawards, www.twitter.com/milken, www.youtube.com/milkenaward, and <http://instagram.com/milkenfamilyfdn>.

For more information about the Milken Educator Awards, visit www.MilkenEducatorAwards.org or call MFF at (310) 570-4772.

About the Milken Educator Awards

The Milken Educator Awards, created by the Milken Family Foundation, is in its 30th year. 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.

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