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# Jennings Creek teacher wins prestigious Milken Educator Award

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Jennings Creek Elementary School third grade teacher Shane Baker received the award at a school assembly on Thursday, Oct. 26, 2023. The award, known as “the C teaching and has been presented this 2023-24 school year to up to 75 teachers. Contact Grace Ramey/grace.ramey@bgdailynews.com)

Grace Ramey

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Jennings Creek  
teacher wins  
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Milken  
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Shane Baker walked into work at Jennings Creek Elementary worrying if an assembly planned that day might throw off his reading lesson.

To his surprise, he walked out with a \$25,000 check and a national award.

Baker, a 3rd-grade teacher, was surprised Thursday with a Milken Educator Award in honor of his “innovation and excellence” in teaching. He is the first Warren County Public Schools employee to receive the recognition.



“There’s a lot of great educators here,” Baker said. “I guess now I’m lucky enough to consider myself one and have some national recognition of that, too.”

Students and teachers were only told that an “important assembly” was planned, featuring guests like Lt. Gov. Jacqueline Coleman, interim Commissioner of the Kentucky Department of Education Robin

Kinney, Warren County Public Schools Superintendent Rob Clayton and other education leaders.

The look on Baker's face when they announced his name said the secret was well kept. Students cheered and jumped from their seats to hug him as he walked to the podium.

Baker called his wife, Abbie, to share the news following the ceremony. After a brief silence to compose herself, she told him, "I am so proud of you" through tears and giggles.

Baker, who was adopted from South Korea at a young age and grew up in Corbin, said a large part of his love for Warren County Schools stems from the diversity of the students he teaches.

"It's such a unique environment that you just can't get in very many other places, particularly in Kentucky," Baker said. "It's a wonderful feeling to see kids who come from different backgrounds or to see kids who look like me because I didn't get that experience growing up."

Baker said 10% of the reward will likely go to church tithes and a portion will be set aside for giving back to others.

He's not sure what he'll use the rest on, but with his 10-month-old daughter at home, Baker said it's a "great opportunity" to give her a head start in life.

Baker was identified as a potential recipient for his use of technology in the classroom, like green screens and 3-D printers, and for creating a "warm, welcoming place for students of all abilities" through his six years of teaching. The award cannot be applied for.

Along with the award, Baker will receive an all-expenses-paid trip to Los Angeles in June 2024 for the Milken Educator Awards Forum, where he'll meet other award recipients.

"I hope it allows me to continue getting better at what I do because I don't feel like I'm worthy of being recognized to be one of the top teachers in the nation," Baker said.

“Hopefully I can learn from people who have even more wisdom and know-how than I do. I’m very humbled to be a part of it.”

The award, organized by the Milken Family Foundation, will honor up to 75 recipients this year nationwide, two within Kentucky. Since 1987, the foundation has recognized over 2,900 teachers and given over \$75 million in individual prizes.

The first and last Bowling Green teacher to receive the award was William King, a Bowling Green High School teacher and administrator recognized in 2013.

Recipients are sought out early in their careers for what they’ve achieved and “for the promise of what they will accomplish” with their award, according to the foundation.

Cody Rich, principal of Jennings Creek, was one of only a handful of administrators aware of the recognition beforehand. Rich said he spent the week before convincing

teachers he'd never heard of the award and telling colleagues that "Taylor Swift was coming."

"We were sworn to secrecy," Rich said.

Rich said Baker's award was well deserved as he brings "such a positive energy" to the school.

"He's a family person, and he treats his kids like family," Rich said. "He has such an amazing energy in the classroom. He's like your best friend from high school, everyone likes him.

"You won't find anyone who'll say a negative thing about Shane Baker."

Rich added Baker isn't the only person who walked away honored by the award.

"If you ask our students, they think they have the best teachers, I think we have the best teachers," Rich said. "For a student here, (the award) is validation that they have the best teachers in the country."

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## Michael Collins

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