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Let the Celebrations Begin! Rhode Island Teacher Is First in the Nation To Be Named a 2026 Milken Educator

Central Falls' Briana Jones surprised with \$25,000 Award for her impactful, engaging special education instruction

SANTA MONICA, Calif. (October 21, 2026) — As the crowd of students, teachers, local dignitaries and media gathered this morning at Central Falls High School, they prepared for what they thought would be an assembly with Education Commissioner Angélica Infante-Green. In a surprising turn of events, Milken Educator Awards Senior Vice President Dr. Jane Foley joined Commissioner Infante-Green on stage to share exciting news: Briana Jones, CFHS' special education transition program and Career and Technical Education (CTE) Business Entrepreneurship Culinary program teacher, is the nation's *FIRST* 2026-27 Milken Educator Award recipient!

Surrounded by a roaring gymnasium, Jones proudly accepted the prestigious Award and its unrestricted \$25,000 cash prize. The Milken Educator Awards, celebrating *40 Years of Elevating Educators*, have no formal applications or nominations. Outstanding K-12 educators are sought out while early to mid-career for what they have achieved—and for the promise of what they will accomplish given the resources and opportunities afforded by the Award.

"Briana Jones' commitment to her students is changing lives in Central Falls," said Dr. Foley, a 1994 Milken Educator Award recipient from Indiana. "Her empathy, innovation and passion make her a trusted guide for students as they become productive members of the workforce and leaders in society. I am pleased to welcome Briana into the national Milken Educator family of excellence, where she will have the opportunity to share her successful strategies and broaden her positive influence."

Jones is Rhode Island's 86th recipient since The Ocean State joined the Milken Educator Awards program in 1990. She is the sole Milken Educator Award recipient in Rhode Island this 2026-27 school year and the first-ever recipient in Central Falls School District.

"Briana Jones represents the very best of Rhode Island educators and is a fitting honoree for the 2026 Milken Educator Award," said Commissioner Angelica Infante-Green. "Through Briana's unwavering belief in every student's potential, she has created transformative opportunities that empower young people of all backgrounds and abilities to build confidence, develop career-ready skills, and achieve greater independence. Her impact extends far beyond the classroom, enriching the lives of students and families while helping to strengthen the entire Central Falls community."

The Milken Family Foundation's 2026-27 tour will honor up to 30 educators coast to coast—adding to the Milken Educator Network of more than 3,000 professionals nationwide. Since the Awards' first presentation in 1987, more than \$76 million in individual cash prizes and over \$147 million has been invested in the Milken Educator Award national network overall, empowering recipients to broaden their impact and encouraging young, capable people to consider a career in education.

More About Briana Jones

Out-of-the-box Instruction: For the past 15 years, Central Falls High School special education teacher Briana Jones has taught the school's transition program for students ages 18-22, and recently, she also began leading the Career and Technical

Education (CTE) Business Entrepreneurship Culinary program. Her hands-on curriculum builds confidence, independence, and real-world skills for her students to reach their potential.

Spearheading New Opportunities: Jones models her can-do attitude in every endeavor. She decided to launch the culinary arts program's food truck—without knowing how to drive the truck or run a kitchen. "The Taste of Central Falls" food truck is part of the Rhode Island Department of Education's *Menu for Success* student-operated food truck program, which first launched in Central Falls. Since then, the food truck program has become a model for similar programs across Rhode Island, providing opportunities for special education students to learn how to take orders, prepare meals, manage finances and pursue industry-recognized food safety certifications. Jones expanded the program to include both general and special education students, a testimony to her commitment to fostering inclusivity at CFHS.

Cultivating Connection: She is both a teacher and a coach, finding ways to involve students, parents and community leaders in everything from academic planning meetings to internship opportunities. She seeks out meaningful employment for her students and trains parents to serve as their children's "job coaches," a paid position under Rhode Island state law.

A Tireless Advocate: Her commitment to the community extends deep into Central Falls and beyond. She volunteers with Unified Sports and Special Olympics; serves as the special education lead at both CHFS and in the district; mentors peer educators; leads professional development training on Universal Design Learning; and teaches special education classes as an adjunct professor at the University of Rhode Island.

Education: Jones completed her bachelor's degree from Rhode Island College in 2013.

The Milken Educator Award Reaps Lifelong Benefits

- The \$25,000 cash Award is unrestricted. Recipients have used the money in diverse ways. Some recipients have spent the funds on their children's or their own continuing education, financing dream field trips, establishing scholarships, and even adopting children.
- Honorees receive powerful mentorship opportunities for expanded leadership roles that strengthen education practice and policy. Milken Friends Forever (MFF) pairs a new recipient with a veteran Milken Educator mentor; the Expanding MFF Resource and Explorer Program fosters individual veteran Milken Educator partnerships around specific topic areas; Activating Milken Educators (AME) promotes group collaboration in and across states to bring solutions to pressing educational needs; and the Milken Educator Collective connects recipients with shared content areas, grade levels, or professional roles. Milken MeetUps abound across the nation to deepen learning and connection and expand innovation in education.
- The honorees will attend an all-expenses-paid Milken Educator Awards Forum from June 4-6, 2027, in Washington, D.C., where they will network with their new colleagues, as well as veteran Milken Educators and other leaders, about how to amplify their voices as beacons of excellence in the profession.
- Veteran Milken Educators demonstrate a wide range of leadership roles at state, national and international levels.

The Milken Educator Award might come to a community near you! *Who will be next?* Join us as we surprise these remarkable individuals and celebrate their dedication to excellence in education! Follow the tour and use the **#MEA40** and **#MilkenAward** hashtags on: [YouTube](#) (MilkenAward) | [Facebook](#) (MilkenEducatorAwards) | [Instagram](#) (MilkenFamilyFdn) | [TikTok](#) (MilkenAward) | [X](#) (Milken) | [LinkedIn](#) (MilkenFamilyFdn).

Visit MilkenEducatorAwards.org or call the Milken Family Foundation at (310) 570-4772 for more information.

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About the Milken Educator Awards: "The Future Belongs to the Educated"

The first Milken Educator Awards were presented by the Milken Family Foundation in 1987. Created by philanthropist and education visionary [Lowell Milken](#), the Awards provide public recognition and individual financial rewards of \$25,000 to K-12

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. The Milken Family Foundation celebrates over four decades of elevating education in America and around the world. Learn more at MFF.org.