



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Anchorage Teacher Valerie Baalerud Receives Milken Educator Award

ANCHORAGE -- Valerie Baalerud, a history teacher at Eagle River High School in Anchorage, has received the 2017-18 Alaska Milken Educator Award, a prestigious national recognition. Baalerud, who was honored in a surprise ceremony this morning at her school, will receive a \$25,000 award.

“Great teachers change lives, inspire excellence, and shape the future,” said Alaska Education Commissioner Dr. Michael Johnson in a statement. “Valerie Baalerud demonstrates the high level of talent and dedication that creates the environment where students learn and thrive. As an Advanced Placement teacher, Valerie builds a learning community where she enthusiastically engages, helps, and inspires students and finds ways for them to succeed. Her well-deserved honor reflects on all of our teachers and on the importance of having highly effective, dynamic educators in every classroom as we provide an excellent education for every student every day.”

Blue ribbon committees in participating states review candidates for the Milken Family Foundation. Milken recipients are chosen for their educational talent, educational accomplishments beyond the classroom, potential for professional and policy leadership, and an engaging and inspiring presence.

In awarding Ms. Baalerud, the Milken Family Foundation cited:

Valerie Baalerud treats her students like historians, demanding rigorous thought and analysis, emphasizing primary source texts and historical photographs, and helping them connect the dots between historical events and current approaches to geopolitical issues. She goes out of her way to infuse character education into her curriculum, harnessing students’ curiosity, exposing them to different points of view and challenging them to advocate for their beliefs.

Baalerud is known to work tirelessly to ensure the success of all students. Her AP World students score at the national average on the AP exam, and Baalerud’s overall student failure rate is zero. The chair of the history department, Baalerud has coached Model United Nations, flag football and track; led the school’s celebration of National History Day; and advised Eagle River’s student government. She also coaches the Drama, Debate and Forensics (DDF) club and

produces some of the most competitive debaters in the district. Seniors chose Baalerud to give their graduation address in just her third year of teaching.

Baalerud earned her bachelor of arts degree in history and master of arts degree in teaching in 2011 from the University of Alaska Anchorage.

For more information about the Milken Family Foundation visit www.mff.org. For Eagle River High School, contact Principal Martin Lang at 907-742-2700.

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Hands-on history lessons land Valerie Baalerud a \$25,000 Milken Educator Award

Anchorage teacher inspires high-school historians at Alaska's Eagle River High

SANTA MONICA, Calif., (Feb 1, 2018)—They say those who do not remember history are condemned to repeat it, but students at Anchorage, Alaska's Eagle River High are remembering their history better than ever thanks to dedicated social studies teacher Valerie Baalerud. She treats her students like junior historians so they actively learn lessons of context and interpretation, subjecting historical texts and photographs to rigorous thought and analysis. School history is also changing with rising test scores and an improved AP class ranking for Eagle River.

Yet it was Baalerud who was making her own kind of personal history this morning at a surprise school assembly where she was presented with a Milken Educator Award by Alaska Commissioner of Education Michael Johnson, a 2008 recipient of the Award, and CEO of the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching Dr. Gary Stark, who received the Award in 2001. An elated Baalerud was named a 2017-18 recipient of the national recognition, which comes with an unrestricted \$25,000 cash prize. She is the only Milken Educator Award winner from Alaska this year, and is among the 44 honorees for 2017-18.

The Milken Educator Awards, hailed by Teacher magazine as the "Oscars of Teaching" has been opening minds and shaping futures for 30 years. Research shows teacher quality is the driving in-school factor behind student growth and achievement. The initiative not only aims to reward great teachers, but to celebrate, elevate and activate those innovators in the classroom who are guiding America's next generation of leaders. Milken Educators believe, "The future belongs to the educated."

In addition to her teaching expertise, Baalerud is a shining example and a thoughtful mentor to fellow educators by helping promote innovative teaching methods and develop new curricula. With a hands-on approach that keeps her students actively learning, Baalerud is helping them make history, literally, by tying history lessons in to current events and asking students to defend their own choices for top historical moments. By giving students the intellectual strategies to interpret received wisdom and think critically, Baalerud is preparing them not only for academic advancement but is also providing analytical tools for success in the wider world.

"Harry Truman once said 'There is nothing new in the world except the history you do not know.' And giving students hands-on experience with such unknown knowns, is part of what Valerie Baalerud imparts to her learners," said Stark. "By making an abstract subject like history concrete for her students, Baalerud is lighting the way along the path of lifelong learning. We commend her as a thoughtful guide and a passionate motivator, leading her students now so that ultimately they themselves can learn how to lead."

"Great teachers change lives, inspire excellence, and shape the future," said Johnson. "Valerie Baalerud demonstrates the high level of talent and dedication that creates the environment where students learn and thrive. As an Advanced Placement teacher, Valerie builds a learning community where she enthusiastically engages, helps, and inspires students and finds ways for them to succeed. Her well-

deserved honor reflects on all of our teachers and on the importance of having highly effective, dynamic educators in every classroom as we provide an excellent education for every student every day. I am honored to meet Valerie in person and recognize her with this award.”

“Being an outstanding educator is so much more than teaching content, it’s also about the experience a student receives,” said Anchorage School District Superintendent Dr. Deena Bishop. “Every day, Ms. Baalerud makes her classroom a place where students want to be. They work hard to meet her high expectations. A historian herself, she shapes her students to use research wisely and to share their beliefs and positions. Outside the classroom, she leads school and District learning in her work on curriculum development and policy for teenagers’ use of cell phones. Together, Ms. Baalerud and her students are building a great foundation of knowledge and love of learning.”

About Milken Educator Valerie Baalerud

Baalerud, a history teacher at Eagle River High School in Anchorage, starts every class by writing a quote from a historical figure on the board. Students copy it down, research the person and context, and then share their interpretations with the class. Baalerud treats her students like historians, demanding rigorous thought and analysis, emphasizing primary source texts and historical photographs, and helping them connect the dots between historical events and current approaches to geopolitical issues. Her AP World History students end the year by defending their top 10 events in world history and creating 1920s-style radio shows. Baalerud goes out of her way to infuse character education into her curriculum, harnessing students’ curiosity, exposing them to different points of view and challenging them to advocate for their beliefs.

In addition to AP World History—the first AP-level class open to Eagle River’s sophomores—Baalerud teaches several regular history classes, which include students hand-placed by the school’s counselors and special education teachers. Baalerud is known to work tirelessly to ensure the success of all students, especially the those most in need. Her AP World students score at the national average on the AP exam, and Baalerud’s overall student failure rate is zero. The chair of the history department, Baalerud has coached Model United Nations, flag football and track; led the school’s celebration of National History Day; and advised Eagle River’s student government. She also coaches the Drama, Debate and Forensics (DDF) club and produces some of the most competitive debaters in the district. Seniors chose Baalerud to give their graduation address in just her third year of teaching.

Baalerud is involved in curriculum development for both the building and the district; peers often consult her when planning lessons and adopting innovative teaching strategies. When she became concerned about the influence of social media and technology on teenagers’ communication and cognitive development, Baalerud led a professional learning community to explore the research; the district is using her input to create a policy on student use of cell phones. She is an outspoken advocate for fair budgeting for public education, a trait that appears to run in the family—her oldest daughter currently sits on the Anchorage School District school board as its student advisor.

Baalerud earned both bachelor’s and master’s degrees in 2011 from the University of Alaska Anchorage.

More information about Baalerud, 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/Valerie-Baalerud>.

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

In addition to participation in the Milken Educator Network, 2017-18 recipients will attend a Milken Educator Forum in Washington, D.C., March 20-23, 2018. Educators will have the opportunity to network with their new colleagues and hear from state and federal officials about 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 initiative, which includes powerful professional learning 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 Award is completely unique: Educators cannot apply for this recognition and do not even know they are under consideration. Candidates are sourced through a confidential selection process and then are 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 very first Milken Educator Awards were presented by the Milken Family Foundation 30 years ago in 1987. 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.