

**Golden Apple Award Chicagoland Finalists Announced**  
*31<sup>st</sup> Anniversary of the Golden Apple Award for Excellence in Teaching*

CHICAGO (March 21, 2016) - [Golden Apple](#), a leading nonprofit committed to celebrating and developing great teachers with the ability and passion to make life-changing differences in the lives of students, proudly announces the 30 finalists for the 2016 Golden Apple Awards for Excellence in Teaching. The awards recognize and honor outstanding teachers for their role in building a stronger, better-educated society. This year's finalists were selected from a pool of more than 400 nominations, and represent 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade teachers throughout Chicago and the surrounding suburbs.

The 2016 finalists are:

<b>Teacher</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>County</b>
Michael Ayala	John Hersey High School	Arlington Hts.	Cook
Colleen Backer	Saint Charles North High School	St. Charles	Kane
Stewart Bailey	Carl Sandburg High School	Orland Park	Cook
John Camardella	Prospect High School	Mt. Prospect	Cook
Edward Cisneros	Multicultural Academy of Scholarship	Chicago	Cook
Jason Crean	Lyons Township High School	Western Springs	Cook
Timothy DeBoer	Joliet Township High School, West Campus	Joliet	Will
Emily Drown	Morgan Park Academy	Chicago	Cook
Laila Elamin	Aqsa School	Bridgeview	Cook
Jeff Grant	Downers Grove North High School	Downers Grove	DuPage
Danny Gray	Thornwood High School	South Holland	Cook
Mark Hibner	Palatine High School	Palatine	Cook
Mark Janka	Young Women's Leadership Charter School of Chicago	Chicago	Cook
Justin Johnson	Niles West High School	Skokie	Cook
Dennis Kass	Infinity Math, Science, and Technology High School	Chicago	Cook
Todd Katz	Whitney M. Young Magnet High School	Chicago	Cook
LaQuesha Martin	Thornton Fractional South High School	Lansing	Cook
Peter McNulty	Loyola Academy High School	Wilmette	Cook
Erin Neidt	John Hancock College Preparatory High School	Chicago	Cook
Joshua Norten	Cary-Grove Community High School	Cary	McHenry
Leo Park	Northside College Preparatory High School	Chicago	Cook

Sherri Rukes	Libertyville High School	Libertyville	Lake
Christine Saxman	Deerfield High School	Deerfield	Lake
Pankaj Sharma	Niles North High School	Skokie	Cook
Jessica Stovall	Oak Park and River Forest High School	Oak Park	Cook
Debra Thomas	Rich East High School	Park Forest	Cook
Lisa Thyer	Amos Alonzo Stagg High School	Palos Hills	Cook
Benjamin Walker	Walter Payton College Prep High School	Chicago	Cook
Claire Walter	The Wolcott School	Chicago	Cook
Katherine Whittington	Percy L. Julian High School	Chicago	Cook

A Celebration of Excellence in honor of the 30 finalists will be held on Saturday, April 2 at the Hilton Rosemont Chicago O'Hare. Event details and tickets are available at [goldenapple.org/celebration](http://goldenapple.org/celebration). All are welcome to join the Celebration.

The 30 finalists will experience a final round of review and classroom observations prior to the selection and announcement this spring of the 10 award recipients. Golden Apple's award selection committee is comprised of college and university professors, educational consultants, administrators and former Golden Apple Award recipients. Committee members utilize industry and research based professional standards to identify teachers who exemplify the best of the teaching profession. As part of the final selection process, the finalists will be observed in their classrooms and the selection committee will conduct interviews with the teachers' colleagues, supervisors, students and parents.

"Now more than ever, superior teacher quality defines the educational experience children have," said Dominic Belmonte, President and CEO of Golden Apple. "These finalists have evidenced transformative talent in improving students' lives as well as their learning acumen. Golden Apple is proud to pursue its mission of honoring teacher excellence through these candidates."

For over 30 years, Golden Apple has recognized outstanding teachers throughout Illinois each year. Created by founders Mike and Pat Koldyke, Golden Apple's mission is to inspire, develop and support teacher excellence in Illinois. Golden Apple award recipients play a critical role in furthering the programs of Golden Apple, particularly as members of the faculty who help prepare [Golden Apple Scholars of Illinois](#) program participants to be future teachers within schools-of-need.

Each Golden Apple Award recipient receives a tuition-free, spring quarter sabbatical to study at Northwestern University. Each recipient also receives a \$5,000 cash award. Perhaps most importantly, award recipients become Fellows of the Golden Apple Academy of Educators, giving them a stronger voice and a larger stage from which to make a difference in education within Illinois and nationally.

Nominations for the 2017 Golden Apple Awards for Excellence in Teaching will open in mid-April. The 2017 Golden Apple Awards for Excellence in Teaching will honor

teachers in grades 4-8. Teachers who are eligible for nomination must be full-time classroom teachers at public or non-public schools within Cook, DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry or Will counties. The Golden Apple Awards for Excellence in Teaching concentrate on specific grade levels each year.

Golden Apple also announced today the four finalists for the Stanley C. Golder Leadership Award, which honors exceptional Principals and Heads of Schools. Learn more at [goldenapple.org/celebration](http://goldenapple.org/celebration).

### **About Golden Apple**

2016 marks Golden Apple's 31st year of innovating teacher preparation and leadership to transform both the careers of teachers as well as the lives of students in Illinois. Many of our Golden Apple Award recipients choose to give back by participating as instructors, academic coaches, and mentors in both our aspiring teachers program (i.e., "The Golden Apple Scholars") and our professional development program (i.e., "The Golden Apple STEM Institute").

Our focus is on advancing educational excellence for Illinois' most under-served students. Scholars are recruited from the communities in which they return to serve - with a passion for teaching and a drive to create positive change for young people in their communities. We enhance their college education with exemplary advanced teacher preparation, game-changing resources and lifelong support, and, they, in turn, stay in teaching for five or more years.

Golden Apple is comprised of recognized superior educators, including Golden Apple Award recipients and finalists, leading a passionate team of devoted staff with technical and program expertise, as well as a connected and committed board of directors charged with overseeing our strategic vision. Visit <http://www.goldenapple.org> for more information.

Media contact:  
Eileen Rochford  
312-953-3305  
[eileenr@theharbingergroup.com](mailto:eileenr@theharbingergroup.com)