



## Elizabeth Science Teacher Surprised with \$25,000 Milken Award

**For Immediate Release**

**Contact:** Michael Yapple  
Allison Kobus  
609-292-1126

**Date:** December 8, 2014

**Elizabeth, NJ** – Tracy Espiritu, an experienced science teacher who has introduced astronomy to hundreds of Elizabeth students and their families, today became the star at a surprise school assembly where she received a \$25,000 Milken Educator Award.

The award, sponsored by the Milken Family Foundation, recognizes educators across America for furthering excellence in education. Espiritu was the only New Jersey educator selected for the honor this year, and one of up to 40 selected nationally. Joining school officials in the surprise assembly held in School 29 in Elizabeth were New Jersey's First Lady Mary Pat Christie and Acting Education Commissioner David C. Hespe.

"The Governor and I congratulate Tracy Espiritu on receiving this incredible honor for excellence in teaching from the Milken Family Foundation," said the First Lady. "Tracy is a true inspiration and role model who has made a difference in the lives of her students and fellow colleagues. She, along with the talented faculty and staff at Einstein Academy, exemplify the best in New Jersey education."

"Tracy Espiritu is an ideal candidate for this award. She began her career in the private sector and left it for a career in teaching more than 11 years ago. Since that time, she has ably demonstrated her commitment to Elizabeth's entire education community," said Acting Education Commissioner David Hespe. "We are fortunate in New Jersey to be able to count on teachers such as Tracy to foster our children's curiosity and inspire them to learn and succeed."

Espiritu has been a leader and guiding force in developing and implementing new and exciting ideas related to STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Architecture, and Math) into Elizabeth's curriculum.

Espiritu is personally responsible for many firsts in Elizabeth Public Schools, including the introduction of family astronomy nights, which are evening community events featuring astronomy activities and star gazing. She is also responsible for spearheading a committee that succeeded in having the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) recognize Elizabeth's School 29 Dr. Albert Einstein Academy, a magnet school, as a NASA Explorer School.

Espiritu is considered a "teacher leader," as she takes on initiatives such as coordinating and leading school-wide and district-wide professional development activities, as well as grade-level meetings. She has mentored new staff members and has served on the district's instructional leadership team to implement best practices in the classroom.

Her supervisors and colleagues point out that Tracy excels equally in the classroom, where she inspires her students individually and collectively, and engages them as active participants, whether they be gifted and talented or students who may be struggling. Surmounting economic and other challenges, more than 80 percent of Einstein's students have scored proficient or advanced proficient in math over the past four years, in part due to Espiritu's efforts in her classes and throughout the school.

Espiritu has been able to increase and enhance STEAM instruction in Elizabeth's schools through partnerships she developed directly with The College of New Jersey, the Greater Newark Conservancy, Kean University, NASA and New Jersey Institute of Technology.

Since the first Milken Educator Awards were announced in 1987, more than 2,600 K-12 teachers, principals and specialists have received cash awards of \$25,000 each, which can be used at the discretion of the recipients.

The awards alternate yearly between elementary and secondary educators, and they always are built around the element of surprise. This year, staff at School 29 were told to prepare to host officials from the New Jersey Department of Education who were coming to speak with students about the importance of STEAM education in preparing them for the future.

For more information about the awards program, visit the New Jersey Department of Education's [Educator Recognition](#) web page or the [Milken Awards](#) web page.