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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
August 8, 2023



Freedom Federal Credit Union awards grant funds to its 2023 Golden Apple Annual Education Award recipients (L to R): Christina Polsinelli, Colleen Cornacchione, Kevin Sams, Diane May, and Lisa Perry. Not pictured: Don Heiderman, Stacey Durkovic and Sarah O'Donnell.

FREEDOM FEDERAL CREDIT UNION SELECTS EIGHT EDUCATORS AS THEIR 2023 GOLDEN APPLE AWARDS RECIPIENTS

Educators from across Harford and Baltimore Counties Were Honored on August 1

Bel Air, MD – At a reception held at Mountain Branch in Joppa on Tuesday, August 1, 2023, Freedom Federal Credit Union honored Ms. Christina Polsinelli and Mr. Don Heiderman, as the grand prize award recipients of the Credit Union's 2023 Golden Apple Annual Educator Awards. The program, now in its twelfth year, doubled its grant program last year to include Baltimore County. Golden Apple Award

applications are evaluated by a panel of judges made up of Freedom employees, directors, and community leaders from both counties.

The two top grant awards both went to educators who had envisioned an environment tailored to teaching life skills.

Ms. Polsinelli, a physical education teacher at Baltimore County's St. Stephen School, is using her \$2,000 grant award to build a new sensory pathway and rock-climbing zone, bringing adventure education to her curriculum. Like Ms. Polsinelli, Mr. Heiderman also recognized the importance of tactile learning, and applied for a grant that would help his students learn immersively. Mr. Heiderman, who was represented by his colleague, Mary Theresa Delaney, accepted the \$2000 award on behalf of Fallston High School to create an interactive vocational room for STRIVE, a program serving students on the spectrum.

Freedom's Golden Apple Award judges elected to present \$1,000 awards to Dr. Stacey Durkovic' of Martin Boulevard Elementary in Baltimore County and Colleen Cornacchione of George D. Lisby Elementary at Hillsdale in Harford County. Assistant Principal, Dr. Durkovic', is using their award to fund a school store, operated by their special needs students, and supported by their fourth-grade buddies. Ms. Cornacchione, School Counselor, was funded for her groundbreaking program to reduce chronic absenteeism, known as Attendance Champions. Attendance Champions rewards students identified as high-risk for being absent, with small tokens for coming to school during a set period. The program just finished its first year and has already cut chronic absenteeism from 42% to just under 24%.

Four additional recipients were awarded \$500 grants. In Baltimore County, Kevin Sams, Career and Technical Education Department Chair for Dundalk High School, is using his grant to expand volunteer projects by their Charitable Services Club, for the betterment of their school and community. Principal Lisa Perry of Perry Hall Middle School has plans to promote small group learning and collaboration in her math department through the integration of vertical white board spaces.

In Harford County, \$500 grants were awarded to Diane May, Science Teacher at Patterson Mill Middle School, along with Sarah O'Donnell, ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages) Teacher for Bel Air Elementary School. Ms. May has plans to transform her students into scientists through the use of new lab experiments and specialty equipment. Ms. O'Donnell is beginning an ESOL Lending Library that will eventually be accessible across Harford County Public Schools. The library will celebrate the diverse cultures of ESOL students, while encouraging them to read in English and share their cultures with their peers.

Mike MacPherson, President and CEO of Freedom Federal Credit Union, hosted and emceed the reception. "It continues to be an honor for Freedom to support our teachers and educators, especially from among our membership, in their endeavors to better education in the communities we serve. Today we are grateful to welcome representatives from The Archdiocese of Baltimore, Baltimore County Public Schools, and Harford County Public Schools, in addition to many dignitaries and friends as we gather in support of these eight worthy educators. They are an excellent representation of our long-

standing commitment to supporting educators and their visions for making a difference,” stated MacPherson.

Ben Richardson, Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources at Harford County Public Schools (HCPS), offered opening remarks to the attendees. “Freedom Federal has supported the Golden Apple Awards program for the past twelve years. That’s twelve years of direct support to our teachers and staff, who, thanks to your partnership, have been given an opportunity to explore new ways to educate and support our school community,” stated Richardson.

Dr. Racquel Jones, Chief of Schools for Baltimore County Public Schools (BCPS), was also in attendance and offered closing remarks to the attendees. “It’s an honor to be included in today’s celebrations. Thank you, Freedom Federal Credit Union. We very much appreciate your support and look forward to your continued partnership with Baltimore County Public Schools. Congratulations again to the eight educators, the recipients of this year’s awards. It was my honor to listen to your creative ideas and to really just think about inclusivity, diversity, science, STEM, educational equity, and access. You all are literally changing the trajectory of our students and making an indelible impact in their lives,” said Jones.

The annual awards are intended to support Freedom Federal Credit Union members who are employed at a Harford or Baltimore County school and have a creative vision for education that can only be met with community support. All applicants were asked to submit an essay demonstrating how their idea would serve their students, class, school, or their local community.

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About Freedom Federal Credit Union

Freedom Federal Credit Union is a community-chartered federal credit union offering consumer financial services to those who live, work, volunteer, worship, attend school, or have family in Harford and Baltimore Counties. Additionally, Freedom offers a full line of banking services for all businesses, associations, and other organizations that are based in Harford or Baltimore Counties. Freedom has been in business since 1953 and has six locations throughout Harford and Baltimore Counties. To learn more, visit freedomfcu.org.

About Baltimore County Public Schools

[Baltimore County Public Schools](#), the nation’s 22nd largest school system, is focused on raising the bar and closing gaps to prepare our students for the future. Thanks to innovative and talented leaders, teachers, staff, and students, BCPS celebrates [many honors](#).

About Harford County Public Schools

The mission of [Harford County Public Schools](#) is that each student will attain academic and personal success in a safe and caring environment that honors the diversity of our students and staff. The vision

of the Board of Education of Harford County is to inspire and prepare each student to achieve success in college and career.