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### **Elizabeth Educator Receives \$25,000 Milken Family Foundation National Educator Award for Excellence in the Classroom; Honored by Governor James E. McGreevey, Commissioner of Education William L. Librera and the Foundation at Surprise Assembly**

ELIZABETH — Governor James E. McGreevey and the Department of Education, in a partnership with the nationally lauded Milken Family Foundation, are pleased to honor Stephen Liddawi with a 2002 National Educator Award.

Liddawi is a 15-year educator who is currently principal at Christopher Columbus Elementary School. Among Liddawi's accomplishments is the implementation of the Whole Schools Reform Model, which helped placed his school in one of the highest levels set forth by the federal government for "No Child Left Behind" legislation.

The state of New Jersey and the Milken Family Foundation are in the first-year of a partnership. The state is now one of 46 nationwide to recognize outstanding teachers in the classroom. Founder Lowell Milken, the foundation's chairman, created the award program in 1985.

"Today, the state joins in honoring Stephen Liddawi with a 2002 National Educator Award," Governor McGreevey said. "His abilities in the classroom have not gone unnoticed. In fact, my administration will take each and every opportunity we can to honor such strong abilities in our classrooms. A teacher's success is our children's success."

Since 1985, the Milken National Awards Program, which honors teachers, principals and specialists in public education from Kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, has become the largest teacher recognition program in the United States. By the end of October, the Foundation will have presented nearly \$45 million to more than 1,750 educators nationwide.

Liddawi has worked his way up the ranks from classroom teacher to staff developer to assistant principal. Before becoming principal, he also worked as a new teacher mentor. He has also accelerated student achievement at all grade levels by implementing a "Success for All" school program.

Liddawi is precisely the type of teacher the McGreevey administration is proud to honor as part of the Milken Foundation national recognition awards. His excellence leading his school befits the Governor's 20-point plan for education reform plan. Lauding teachers who continue to provide quality education for students statewide is paramount.

Liddawi received the award during a surprise assembly Wednesday afternoon at his school. In addition to Governor McGreevey and Lowell Milken, Commissioner of Education William L. Librera attended as well.

"Many of our teachers are unsung heroes in the classroom," Commissioner Librera said. "Our mission is to bring some much-needed recognition to them."

Teachers are recommended for the prestigious award without their knowledge by a blue-ribbon panel appointed by a state's Department of Education. Recipients of the Milken Awards are selected based on the following criteria:

- Exceptional educational talent as evidenced by outstanding instructional practices in the classroom, school and profession;
- Outstanding accomplishment and strong, long-range leadership potential for professional and policy leadership; and
- Engaging and inspiring presence that motivates and impacts students, colleagues and the community at-large.

Recipients like Liddawi are presented with their \$25,000 award checks at the Milken Family Foundation National Education Conference, an all-expense paid professional development conference held in Los Angeles. They also join the Milken Educator Network, a coalition of more than 1,700 top educators who have access to a variety of expert resources to help cultivate and expand innovative programs in their classrooms, schools and districts.

For more information about the \$25,000 Milken National Educator Awards, please contact Jon Zlock, a Department of Education spokesman, at (609) 633-9594 or the Milken Family Foundation at (310) 998-3009. Additional information can be found on the Foundation's website, [www.mff.org](http://www.mff.org).