



**Pinellas Education
Foundation**

Inspired minds transform lives

Evening of *Excellence* 2022

Sponsored by  **aetna**

East Lake High's Eileen Iacobucci Named 2022 Teacher of the Year



East Lake High School Art Teacher Eileen Iacobucci was stunned as her name was announced from the stage at Mahaffey Theater on Wednesday evening during the annual Evening of Excellence hosted by the Pinellas Education Foundation. Iacobucci was one of 10 finalists and 131 teachers, all of whom had been named Teacher of the Year by their respective schools. Hundreds attended the event in person and online, rising from their velvet and virtual seats for a standing ovation as this year's winner was announced by Pinellas County Schools Superintendent, Dr. Michael Grego.



Eileen Iacobucci's reaction to the Teacher of the Year announcement.

"And now, the moment we've all been waiting for ... As the curtain opens, let's give another round of applause to ALL of tonight's finalists! They truly represent the best in education," Grego said.

When Grego called her name, Iacobucci slowly made her way to the podium on stage. She was clearly touched by the response of her colleagues and students, acknowledging both those in the theater and those who were tuning in through the livestream.

"Oh, my gosh! Wow! Wow," Iacobucci gushed. "Thank you so much for this incredible honor. Thank you to Pinellas County Schools. Thank you to the Pinellas Education Foundation and to my principal, Ms. Carmela Haley, and the faculty and staff at East Lake High School, and most importantly, to my students, who make the job I love so fulfilling."

"I went into this career 37 years ago," Iacobucci added, "knowing that this was something that I would always love doing ... I believe that every child is deserving of a visual arts education. Art is the language we all speak. It's critical thinking, problem-solving, and inclusiveness. It transcends all disciplines ... It's acceptance, it's risk-taking and it's timeless. With art, there's always more to discover. The possibilities are endless ... Most importantly, art gives our students' stories a voice."



Originally from Amherst, MA, Iacobucci earned her BFA in Art Education from the University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth and her M.Ed. from Cambridge College in Cambridge, MA. She has worked for Pinellas County Schools since 1998, first at Sunset Hills Elementary and Lake St. George Elementary, then Palm Harbor Middle School, and finally at her dream job, East Lake High. She serves as a mentor teacher to new professionals and an advocate for the visual arts in education, as well as her role as department chair.



Top 10 Teacher of the Year finalists with their student presenters accompanied by Stacy Baier, Pinellas Education Foundation; Eileen Long, Pinellas County School Board; Dr. Michael Grego, Pinellas County Schools; and Sandra Lozada, Aetna

The other Teacher of the Year finalists were **Catalina Andujar**, Eisenhower Elementary; **Esvictoria Blasingane**, Pinellas Secondary; **Bonnie Capra**, Pinellas Technical College, St. Petersburg; **Ivana Grant**, Richard O. Jacobson Technical High; **Justin Howard**, Campbell Park Elementary; **Lorna Kelley**, Tyrone Middle; **Deanna Russo**, Seminole High; **Sarah Swoch**, Pinellas Park Middle; and **Melissa Walls**, Safety Harbor Elementary. Finalists were named by a panel of judges based on multiple criteria, with the winner selected in a second round of scoring.

The Evening of Excellence was made possible by Presenting Sponsor Aetna and a number of additional community and corporate partners, including DITEK, Suncoast Credit Union, Ajax, Kane's Furniture, A.D. Morgan, Duke Energy, Helios Education Foundation, Maurice A. & Thelma P. Rothman Family Foundation, Caspers Company, Nielsen, Clearwater Gas System, Regions Bank, Creative Contractors, Inc., Great Bay Distributors, Nova Southeastern University Florida, Publix, Pinellas Community Foundation, Rays/Rowdies Foundation, and Duggan Cooley & David Martinez-Cooley. Media sponsors included the Tampa Bay Times and WUSF Public Media.

All finalists received generous prize packages provided by sponsors, and as Teacher of the Year, Iacobucci received, among other things, a His & Hers Limousine ride to school the day following the event; a \$7,500 furniture package from Kane's Furniture; \$5,300 for The F. Kiernan Schoonmaker Educator of the Year Award at the Pinellas Community Foundation; a \$5,000 classroom grant from the Maurice A. and Thelma P. Rothman Family Foundation; a \$1,000 cash award from the Pinellas Education Foundation; a \$500 gift card from Aetna; \$200 in gift cards from Publix; and a private suite and recognition at the Rays Up for Education Night to be held at Tropicana Field later this spring.

The Pinellas Education Foundation elevates and supports the teaching profession every day, whether through classroom grants, access to scholarships and professional development, or recognition programs. It has hosted the Evening of Excellence event for more than 20 years. "This is an opportunity to recognize teachers as the cornerstone of student achievement," said Dr. Stacy Baier, Foundation CEO. "The Foundation is committed to advancing equitable outcomes for all students and supporting the education professionals who make that possible. We are fortunate to have so many dedicated, passionate teachers in Pinellas County."

(See additional photos on the next page)

2022 Evening of Excellence Photo Gallery



Roy De Jesus from Bay News 9 served as the Master of Ceremonies.



Family and friends from around the world cheered on their favorite finalists by participating in the virtual Teacher's Lounge as seen here with finalist Sarah Swoch of Pinellas Park Middle School.



Emerging Teachers of the Year Natalie El Amrani and Gabrielle Medina with Helios Education Foundation's Kirsten Schmitz Phelps and Superintendent Dr. Michael Grego



St. Petersburg Mayor Ken Welch greets the crowd.



Iyona shares touching remarks on stage about her favorite teacher Justin Howard of Campbell Park Elementary School.



Tarpon Springs High School Jazz Ensemble directed by Robert Bosma entertained the audience throughout the evening.



Finalist Melissa Walls hugs her student Hailey after moving remarks.



Superintendent, Dr. Michael Grego; Sandra Lozada of Aetna; 2022 Pinellas Teacher of the Year Eileen Iacobucci; and Pinellas Education Foundation CEO, Dr. Stacy Baier



2021 Pinellas and Florida Teacher of the Year Sarah Painter interviewing 2020 Pinellas Teacher of the Year David Martinez-Cooley during the award show.



Melissa Lostraglio of DITEK introducing the first group of finalists.



All 131 Teacher of the Year honorees were introduced to the crowd.

Thank You to Our Sponsors!



Scott Callison of Suncoast Credit Union introducing finalists.