



**Pinellas Education
Foundation**

Inspired minds transform lives

Evening of *Excellence* 2023

Presented by  **aetna**

Azalea Middle's Dr. Adam Zele Named 2023 Pinellas County Schools' Teacher of the Year



Azalea Middle School's math teacher Adam Zele, Ph.D., was in shock when his name was announced on stage by Mr. Kevin Hendrick, Pinellas County Schools Superintendent, at the Mahaffey Theater on February 9th during the annual Evening of Excellence hosted by the Pinellas Education Foundation.

Zele was one of 10 top finalists and 130 teachers, all of whom had been named Teacher of the Year by their respective schools. Hundreds of educators, family, friends, and distinguished guests attended this event in person and online.

After Zele approached the podium to accept the award, he asked for two of his students in attendance to join him on stage stating, "If I'm a good teacher, it's because I have the privilege of having some of the most incredible students, they're the reason I'm a good teacher."





Top 10 Teacher of the Year finalists with their student presenters

Zelevan earned his bachelor's degree in economics from the University of Pennsylvania Wharton School. He later continued his education at Duke University earning his master's in divinity and a doctorate in history and religion. Teaching was not his first career; Zelevan was also an entrepreneur, financial consultant, college professor and church pastor. He said he slowly realized the teaching aspects of every position he held were what he enjoyed most, leading him to go into education.

As he was accepting the award, Zelevan acknowledged his positive journey in Pinellas County Schools becoming a teacher. He said, "The experience through the transition to teaching program, the education I got from the mentors was invaluable in this journey." Zelevan went on describing his passion for teaching, "I love being a teacher. Being a teacher is the greatest honor of my life. Getting to work with people like these three young ladies up here is a privilege beyond words. I am so honored right now."

The other Teacher of the Year finalists were **Rebecca Byrne**, Azalea Elementary; **Jerry Cantrell**, Seminole High; **Amber Holmes**, Melrose Elementary; **Dana Ingebretson**, Boca Ciega High; **Rachel Mita**, Sandy Lane Elementary; **Jaclyn Reyes**, Cypress Woods Elementary; **Shelli Sorensen**, Osceola Middle; **Nicole Szydlowski**, Seminole Middle; and **Courtney Thompson**, Nina Harris ESE Center. Finalists were named by a panel of judges based on multiple criteria, with the winner selected in a second round of scoring.

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, Helios Education Foundation, A.D. Morgan, Astro Skate Family Fun Center, City of Clearwater, Duggan Cooley and David Martinez-Cooley, Great Bay Distributors, Maurice A. and Thelma P. Rothman Family Foundation, Nielsen, Nova Southeastern University, Regions Bank, St. Petersburg College, and Walbridge. Our Media Sponsor this year was the Tampa Bay Times.

All finalists received a generous prize package provided by sponsors, and as Teacher of the Year, Zele received, among other prizes, a His & Hers Limousine ride to school the day following the event; a 5-night Hawaiian getaway courtesy of Astro Skate Family Fun Center; a luxury car rental from Crown Automotive; a \$7,500 furniture package from Kane's Furniture; a \$5,000 classroom grant from the Maurice A. & Thelma P. Rothman Family Foundation; a \$3,000 cash award from the Pinellas Community Foundation; a \$1,000 cash award from the Pinellas Education Foundation; an Outstanding Educator Ring from Balfour; a special experience, including a private suite at Rays Up for Education Night at Tropicana Field; and a Mahaffey Theater gift package for upcoming shows.

"Evening of Excellence is an opportunity to celebrate teachers and show our appreciation for their impact that reaches well beyond the classroom," said Dr. Stacy Baier, CEO of the Pinellas Education Foundation. "The Foundation's mission is to accelerate educational achievement for all students, and we are fortunate in Pinellas County to have so many exemplary teachers dedicated to improving student outcomes."

(see additional photos on the next page)

2023 Evening of Excellence Photo Gallery



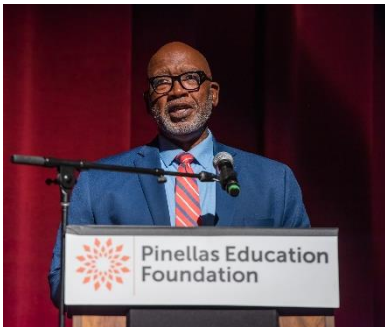
Jorja Roman from Bay News 9, Mistress of Ceremonies



All 130 Teacher of the Year honorees introduced themselves to the crowd.



Oakhurst Elementary nominee Margo Moravick with Principal Kelly Kennedy



St. Petersburg Mayor Ken Welch provided opening remarks.



Emerging Teachers of the Year Floyd Howard and Faun Baldizzi with Superintendent Kevin Hendrick and 2022 Teacher of the Year Eileen Iacobucci



Kourtney Berry with Suncoast Credit Union introducing top 10 finalists



Nominees waving to the crowd



Superintendent Kevin Hendrick, School Board Chairperson Lisa Cane and Sandra Lozada from Aetna cheering for the winner

Thank You to Our Sponsors!

