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Frederick County, Manassas Educators Top List of VEA Award-Winners

RICHMOND—Joy Kirk of Frederick County, Leroy J. Williams of Manassas, Dr. Cynthia Cave of the Virginia Department of Education, and high school students from Prince William County top the list of winners of 2019 awards from the Virginia Education Association, all honored for their outstanding work in and for public education. They and other honorees received their awards at a dinner here Friday night, held in conjunction with VEA's annual convention.

Here's a rundown of this year's award recipients:

Award for Teaching Excellence. **Joy Kirk** has spent her entire 24-year career in **Frederick County**, teaches gifted students at Admiral Byrd Middle School, and is known by her colleagues for her passion and leadership in classroom practice, advocacy for the profession, attention to diversity, community engagement, and professional development.

Kirk says she's constantly amazed at the willingness of adults to answer the questions of middle school students and has had NASA scientists, doctors, athletes, and writers visit her classroom. Those experts are often first identified and later followed up with by her students.

A former student wrote, in support of her nomination, "She had plastic stars that glowed in her classroom, and every Friday she'd turn off the lights and read us a poem about how each and every one of us are bright shining stars. Now, whenever I'm struggling I remember I'm a bright, shining star and nothing can stand in my way. That's 100 percent because of the impact Mrs. Kirk had on my life."

Education Support Professional (ESP) of the Year. **Leroy J. Williams**, as the school security officer at Metz Middle School in **Manassas**, designs safety plans for the school, helps resolve conflicts, conducts safety drills, assists staff members with unruly students, serves as a greeter, chaperones events, and assists administrators and the school resource officer. He also serves as the school's athletic director in the fall. He is a 40-year veteran of the city's schools.

Friend of Education Award. This award, VEA's highest honor, recognizes an individual or group who shows outstanding leadership and action at the state level. **Dr. Cynthia Cave** recently retired as the Assistant Superintendent for Policy and Communications at the Virginia Department of Education, an agency she's served for more than 20 years. During her tenure there, she worked tirelessly in support of public education in both the legislature and in making policy. Her invaluable insights made sure that both Virginia's Standards of Quality and Standards of Accreditation were designed with the best interests of both students and educators in mind.

Fitz Turner Award for Outstanding Contributions in Intergroup Relations. This award is named for the former president of the predominantly black Virginia Teachers Association, which merged with VEA in 1967. It honors an individual or organization that's contributed to the enhancement of human and civil rights in Virginia.

Dialogue on Race of Montgomery County is a group founded in 2010 with the goal of bringing people together to talk about race and address problems of inequity. Today, a significant part of the group's work is with local schools, helping to make progress on important goals, including lowering the dropout rate for African-American students, closing achievement gaps among the county's students, hiring more educators of color, and addressing discipline disparities between African-American and other students.

Barbara Johns Youth Award for Human Relations and Civil Rights. Named for the courageous young woman who spearheaded student protests in Prince Edward County in 1951, this award honors outstanding work being done by young people.

2019's winner is **Team Shine Together and Purple Reign**, a group of students at Battlefield High School in **Prince William County**. The group developed when some members of the school's Purple Reign Dance Team joined the school's Buddy Club, which helps general education and special education students work together. The dancers thought their buddies would love to learn to dance. That idea led to Team Shine Together, which now performs at homecoming games, pep rallies, and school drumline parades with Purple Reign and is one of the most popular programs at the school.

Robley S. Jones Political Activist Award. This honor, in only its third year, is named for VEA's retired Director of Government Relations and former Association president, and honors individuals for their contributions to education legislation or policy, or to the election of public education-friendly candidates.

Sam Eure is a member of the **Newport News** Education Association, after spending most of his teaching career in **York County**, where he served as YEA president. He's a longtime member of VEA's Legislative Committee, helping to create the Union's agenda leading into numerous sessions of the General Assembly. He's always been well-schooled on political candidates and ready to spread the word on which ones are true friends of public education.

VEA-Retired Distinguished Service Award. This salutes a retired educator who has made significant contributions to the growth of the active and retired Association, the promotion of public education, and the welfare of public educators.

Barbara Mann is a former president of the **Chesterfield** Education Association and current president of the Chesterfield chapter of VEA-Retired, who has long worked tirelessly on behalf of the Union as both an active and retired member. She is a consistent lobbying presence at the General Assembly, both in person and online, keeps CEA-Retired members up-to-the-minute on education issues, helps recruit new members, and served on the VEA-Retired Council. CEA has named its annual teacher scholarship after her.

In addition, a 2018 Political Activism Award was presented to the **Stafford Education Association** in recognition of its "No Ifs, Ands, or Buts" campaign, designed to get a 5 percent raise for every school employee in the county, and its persistence in getting the "Rebecca Bill" passed by the General Assembly. The **Spotsylvania Education Association** received a Community Service Award for its outreach efforts.

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