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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JACKSONVILLE PUBLIC EDUCATION FUND ANNOUNCES FIVE FINALISTS FOR 2021 VYSTAR DUVAL COUNTY TEACHER OF THE YEAR

**One teacher will be given the county's top teaching honor live on WJXT/Channel 4
on January 27.**

JACKSONVILLE, Fla., Dec. 1, 2020 — The Jacksonville Public Education Fund is proud to announce the top five finalists for 2021 VyStar Duval County Teacher of the Year.

The finalists were chosen by a community selection committee that reviewed their applications, conducted interviews and watched footage of their instruction in the classroom or online. One of the five finalists will be announced as winner of the county-wide honor live on WJXT/Channel 4 as schools tune in from watch parties around the district.

The EDDY Awards: Live from Jacksonville! TV Special airs on January 27, 2021 from 12:30 PM to 1:30 PM on WJXT/Channel 4 and streams on news4jax.com

The EDDY Awards luncheon will take place simultaneously on January 27. Through a partnership with WJXT/Channel 4, Morning Show anchor Melanie Lawson will take TV audiences live to the event, where the winner of the top honor will be announced. Beyond the five finalists and the winner, the TV Special will also celebrate every Teacher of the Year, as well as the work of every teacher in Duval County who has worked so hard to support students during this difficult year.

"We want to make our teachers feel like celebrities," said JPEF President Rachael Tutwiler Fortune. "After everything they've done for our kids, they deserve to have a moment when the community comes together and celebrates them."

"Part of being Jacksonville's one true local television station is partnering with great organizations like the Jacksonville Public Education Fund to recognize talented and hard working educators in our community," said Bob Ellis, Vice-President and General Manager of WJXT-Channel 4/WCWJ 17. "We are proud to honor the work these dedicated individuals do everyday to help our children grow and become successful in the classroom, as well as in life. At Channel 4, we share their commitment to make Jacksonville a better place to live and learn."

Read more about the top five finalists below.

Kenneth Ford - Carter G. Woodson Elementary – Wells Fargo Finalist

Kenneth Ford teaches fifth grade math and science at Carter G. Woodson Elementary. He has three years of experience teaching, and he is a catalytic teacher leader at his school. He developed his school's plan for data-driven instruction, leads science instruction and works to use positive behavior management. He attributes his life and career to his eighth grade teacher, Ms. Tave, who helped him re-integrate into school after treatment for leukemia. "She made room for me to operate at my greatest self," says Mr. Ford. "Because of Ms. Tave, I'll proudly teach the band of misfits every year."

Jameea Jackson-Gaines - Richard Lewis Brown Gifted and Academically Talented Academy – Deutsche Bank Finalist

Jameea Jackson-Gaines teaches first grade at RL Brown Gifted and Academically Talented Academy. She has been teaching for seven years. She serves in many leadership roles in her school, including

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positive behavior management, using data to improve school culture, serving as a teacher liaison for her school's PTA, and founding the "Sunshine Team" at her school. She also founded the Association for Teacher Collaboration, which allows teachers to support one another throughout Duval County, including helping new teachers set up their very first classrooms. "Teaching is truly a work of heart. I don't do it for the accolades, I do it for the impact. Let's do it with grace, let's do it with passion but most of all, let's do it with love."

Kimberly Parker - Lake Lucina Elementary – Florida Blue Finalist

Kimberly Parker teaches first grade virtually at Lake Lucina Elementary. She has 32 years of teaching experience in several schools throughout Duval County, and she specializes in helping to turn around schools through literacy. She has led system-level training in evidence-based reading instruction, and she has also taught literacy at UNF an adjunct instructor. "You ask what allows me to move students' academic success in class? It is simple: I give them a backpack full of love, hope, guidance, and tools necessary to be successful."

Nadine Ebri - Southside Middle – VyStar Finalist

Nadine Ebri teaches eighth grade algebra at Southside Middle. She has seven years of teaching experience. A few years ago, she posted a video of her students learning long division with the help of a rap song and dance. To her surprise, the video received more than 17 million views from classrooms all over the world, and allowed her to present on culturally relevant instruction to close the opportunity gap at a teaching conference in Miami. Now, during the pandemic, she is leading in her school as a Microsoft Innovator Educator. "I soon realized that my love for technology would be critical in transforming our school's ability to remain connected with students."

Jim Schmitt - Mandarin High – Rotary Finalist

Jim Schmitt teaches history and global perspectives and research at Mandarin High School. He has 27 years of teaching experience. Throughout his career, he has excelled as a teacher leader, developing a writing program for at-risk students, writing a \$10,000 grant for a school-to-work program, and serving as a standards coach. When COVID-19 hit, he took a leadership role in helping teachers collaborate even more, developing a community discussion group to exchange technology strategies that work. "In today's world, with uncertainty and at times, fear for the future, we as teachers know that our class is a haven of hope for our students. Teachers' love of students is the difference maker in society."

This year, JPEF is doing more than ever to celebrate teachers and offer them professional learning to make an impact in their schools. This year, we launched our Teacher Leadership Initiative, which offers 48 fellows the chance to learn with local and national experts and earn professional learning credits. JPEF has also worked to provide surprises all year: delivering yard signs to their houses, so their neighbors know to congratulate them for being Teacher of the Year, delivering premium snack boxes to their schools and sharing congratulations messages from community leaders.

The EDDY Awards Live is made possible by our generous sponsors, including title sponsor VyStar Credit Union. Sponsorship packages offering significant visibility through the TV special are still available. Please contact Jen Silva at jen@jaxpef.org to learn more, or visit jaxpef.org/eddy-awards. Community members can help support our efforts to celebrate teachers, including in our Giving Days Match Campaign for Giving Tuesday, through which all donations are matched. **Sign up to volunteer or donate now at jaxpef.org/give.**

For more information about the Teacher Leadership Initiative, please contact Warren Buck at warren@jaxpef.org.

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About the Jacksonville Public Education Fund

The Jacksonville Public Education Fund is an independent think-and-do tank that believes in the potential of all students. We work tirelessly to close the opportunity gap for low-income students and students of color. We convene educators, school system leaders and the community to pilot and help scale evidence-based solutions that advance school quality in Duval County.