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## **Educators Surprised With Academic Awards**

By Aaron Blevins, 10/13/2011

To Jordan, an eight-year old Temple Emanuel Academy Day School student, excellence is being “perfect and amazing.” Milken Family Foundation executive vice president Richard Sandler couldn’t have summed it up better himself.



*Teacher Juli Shanblatt reacts at receiving a \$15,000 award. (photo by Aaron Blevins)*

Sandler was at Temple Emanuel on Burton Way last week to surprise teacher Marnie Greenwald, who was presented one of four 2011 Milken Jewish Educator Awards for her work as a first-grade teacher at the school. As Greenwald eventually found out, being “perfect and amazing” netted her \$15,000.

“I’ve been very privileged to have spent my entire career teaching in Jewish day schools,” she said. “I do what I do because it makes me happy. I can’t think of another profession I’d choose.”

Students and faculty members had gathered in the school’s auditorium believing that they were congregating for an assembly. When Sandler said the foundation wanted to honor teachers and give a select few \$15,000, the students were awestruck.

Once Greenwald’s name was called, the audience stood and applauded, leaving the first-grade teacher speechless. After lots of hugs and smiles, she referenced her upbringing in Minnesota, where her mother, an avid reader, instilled a love of literature into Greenwald by challenging her to read all of the local library’s children’s books before moving on to the adult selections.

“What better thing to do than teach children to read?” she said through tears.

Greenwald has been teaching for more than 20 years and is said to have a gentle and nurturing demeanor. Donna Raskin, head of school, said Greenwald’s students always display excellent writing abilities.

The Milken Family Foundation’s day, however, had just begun. Sandler, flanked by Bureau of Jewish Education (BJE) executive director Dr. Gil Graff, had three more awards to give out. Two of the awards were given to Hava Mirovski, of Sinai Akiba Academy, and Lisa Feldman, of Weizmann Day School.



*Marnie Greenwald, a 1st grade teacher at Temple Emanuel Academy Day School, was one of the educators surprised with \$15,000 awards. (photo by Aaron Blevins)*

The last award was presented at the Bais Yaakov School for Girls on Beverly Boulevard, where underclassmen were increasingly curious about the presence of the media. Some students speculated that a celebrity was coming.

“We’re here for a very special reason,” Sandler said. “We’re here to do something that, quite frankly, we don’t do enough of as a society. We believe, at the Milken Family Foundation, that our teachers have the most important job in all society. It’s our teachers that prepare us. They prepare us spiritually, they prepare us intellectually, to take our place in society, which is a very complex world today.”

He then asked all of the Bais Yaakov teachers to stand and be recognized. Sandler said society gives so many awards to so many professions, but rarely are teachers acknowledged for their work. He referenced the Grammys, the Heisman Trophy and the Nobel and Pulitzer prizes.

“We honor so many different people,” Sandler said. “You can get a prize for almost anything, besides the most important profession.”

The mention of the \$15,000 prize again elicited excitement from the student body.

“I know what you’re thinking, but no, she’s not going to share it with you,” Sandler said, drawing laughs. “It is the winner’s choice.”

He then announced that the winner was science and math teacher Juli Shanblatt, who had developed the school’s Advanced Placement Physics program. She also chairs the school’s Western Association of Schools and Colleges/Bureau of Jewish Education Accreditation Committee.

"I'm totally, totally, totally shocked," Shanblatt said. "I don't know what else to say."

She said school officials had told her that the award was going to Rabbi Yoel Bursztyn, the educational director for the school.

"You guys are tricky," Shanblatt said.

According to a statement, award recipients are selected by a committee of educators and leaders from the Jewish community. To be eligible, educators must teach at least 15 hours per week at a K-12, BJE-affiliated school. They must also have seven years of experience at a BJE-affiliated school. Sandler said the foundation gives out four educator awards per year, and serves 38 schools with approximately 1,000 teachers.