

# SHE'S ALL CLASS

Coventry High School English teacher Lauren Hopkins is nationally recognized with \$25,000 Milken Educator Award

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COVENTRY — Local English teacher and literacy specialist Lauren Hopkins received the surprise of a lifetime this week when she was presented with \$25,000 and a Milken Educator Award in front of a full crowd of 1,600 students, faculty, local legislators and town officials at Coventry High School.

Hopkins had been kept in the dark about the true purpose of the assembly Thursday morning, advertised as “Oaker Pride and Pathways,” a celebration of the district’s efforts to increase college and career readiness. Instead of celebrating the school’s work in preparing students for college, the group gathered to celebrate Hopkins specifically for her dedication to teaching.

Teacher Magazine has called the Milken Educator Awards the “Oscars of teaching,” having been around for the last 30 years. Hopkins has been teaching at CHS for all 16 years of her teaching career and is now among 45 other recipients throughout the country to receive the 2017-18 award and \$25,000 cash prize. She is the only award winner from Rhode Island this year.

Shocked and overwhelmed at receiving the award, Hopkins said she thinks of each of her students as her own children and said she could not be more honored to represent the school.

“I am unbelievably honored and so overwhelmed,” she said to the students. “I am so proud to be part of this Oaker nation. I come to work every day and get to see your faces. You make this so much more than a career for me. I call you my kids because you are. I’m so proud to be here representing the unbelievable teachers I work with every

day. Hopkins is a National Board Certified teacher known to and loved by all students at CHS. Although she works with students of all grade levels ranging from gifted to those with special needs, she has worked especially hard with struggling students and learners all of varieties, generally those who lag two years or more behind their grade level in reading. Her coworkers say she goes to great lengths to personalize her instruction and goes out of her way to select texts that will be of interest to her students. Her library classroom has more than 100 books she has personally read and recommends.

See HOPKINS, page A3



Photo by Kendra Lolio

Above: Jane Foley and Ken Wagner congratulate Lauren Hopkins on the Milken Educator Award. She is the only Rhode Island teacher to be honored this year. Below: Students react to the announcement.







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Coventry High School English teacher Lauren Hopkins, second from right, reacts after learning she is a recipient of a Milken Educator Award for \$25,000, one of the nation's most prestigious honors for school teachers. Milken Educator Award Senior Vice President Jane Foley, at center, makes the announcement. Standing at right is Rhode Island Education Commissioner Ken Wagner.



# Hopkins

Continued from page A1

When asked what she plans to do with the money, Hopkins said she isn't entirely sure just yet, but noted that she will absolutely be adding more books to her classroom library (and her personal collection).

"I was not expecting this at all," she said after receiving award. "I was clapping and getting excited and didn't even realize they called my name. It took a few minutes to sink in. We have amazing people who show us every day they appreciate us and this happened to be a huge way of doing that."

Rhode Island Commissioner of Education Ken Wagner was on hand to congratulate Hopkins and said she is the perfect example of a teacher worthy of such an award.

"When I look at some of the top priorities we set for this school year – strong literacy instruction, developing career pathways through more personalized learning, shared school leadership – Lauren Hopkins is working to support these initiatives and more every single day at Coventry High School," he said. "Great learning requires great teaching, and Lauren is an example of the type of committed, compassionate educator it takes to bring out the best in our students."

Coventry Schools Superintendent Craig Levis said he is proud to see the award go to one of Coventry's many deserving educators.

"While there are many educators in RI who were considered for this recognition and honor, I cannot think of a teacher who is more deserving," he said. "To all new teachers out there, I would say watch and listen to Lauren; see how she engages, prompts and challenges her students. Feel her passion and commitment. This is the art of teaching."

Milken Educator Awards Senior Vice President Jane Foley traveled to Rhode Island from Santa Monica, California, to be there for the award presentation.

"From at-risk to gifted students, Lauren Hopkins always ensures her learners are intellectually challenged and instructed in the complex discipline of English Language Arts," Foley said. "Strong literacy skills are paramount for every individual as they navigate other high school curricula and venture toward college and career paths. Her passion for literature comes alive for these students and it has benefitted the whole school environment."

Foley also praised CHS for its 12 percent increase in graduation rates since Hopkins began her tenure there.

Hopkins earned her bachelor's

degree in secondary and middle English education from the University of Rhode Island in 2001. She is known at the school as a great cultivator of professional learning in Coventry and has been active in aligning the district's ELA curriculum to the Common Core standards as well as teaching literacy courses sponsored by the American Federation of Teachers. She also mentors younger teachers and is a member of the Culture and Climate Committee, School Improvement Team, Strategic Planning Committee and Advisory Committee.

"She's just fantastic," said Coventry High School Principal Michael Hobin. "She is the perfect example of the excellent teachers we have here."

Local representative Patricia Morgan was also in attendance for the ceremony, as well as members of the Coventry School Committee, Coventry Town Council President Glen Shibley and Coventry Town Manager Graham Waters.

Hopkins relayed a special message for her students.

"Whatever career they pursue, they need to be passionate about it. You don't want to waste your days toiling away at a job you don't appreciate and love."

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Lauren Hopkins addresses the assembly in her honor at Coventry High School.