

Westside Community Schools Announces 2025 Phillip & Terri Schrager Foundation Distinguished Teaching Award Winners

Each year, the Phillip and Terri Schrager Foundation honors two deserving Westside Community Schools educators leading the way in innovation in the classroom. On May 23, the 2025 Schrager Distinguished Teaching Awards were presented to two Westside Community Schools educators: **Benjamin Baber**, mathematics teacher at Westside High School, and **Linda Safranek**, reading coordinator at Westbrook Elementary.

BENJAMIN BABER Mathematics Teacher Westside High School



Westside High School Math Teacher Ben Baber has been named a 2025 recipient of the Phillip & Terri Schrager Foundation Distinguished

Teaching Award, honoring his exceptional commitment to students, colleagues, and the future of education.

Baber is known not only for his deep knowledge of mathematics, but for the way he brings the subject to life. Through real-world applications, innovative use of technology, and a commitment to meeting each student's individual needs, he makes math meaningful and accessible for all. Baber's impact isn't confined to his classroom.

Baber is deeply involved in collaborative efforts at the building level, working with colleagues to enhance teaching strategies and ensure instruction is engaging, effective, and inclusive. Colleagues frequently turn to him for advice and support, citing his generosity with time and ideas. His open, thoughtful approach has helped foster a culture of continuous learning and shared success within the school's math department and beyond.

What truly sets Baber apart is his ability to connect with students. By building strong relationships rooted in trust and respect, he creates an environment where all learners feel seen, supported, and challenged. He helps students develop more than just content knowledge; he helps them build resilience, confidence, and a sense of purpose.

Baber's dedication to his students, his colleagues, and the profession as a whole exemplifies the spirit of the Schrager Award: honoring educators who elevate not just academic outcomes, but the entire learning experience.

Westside Community Schools is proud to celebrate Ben Baber as a 2025 Schrager Award recipient and grateful for the impact he makes each and every day.

LINDA SAFRANEK Reading Coordinator Westbrook Elementary



Westbrook Elementary Reading Coordinator Linda Safranek has been named one of Westside Community Schools' 2025

Phillip & Terri Schrager Foundation Distinguished Teaching Award recipients, a prestigious honor recognizing exceptional educators who go above and beyond for their students and schools.

For nearly 30 years, Safranek has served Westside Community Schools in a variety of roles: speech-language pathologist, reading teacher, curriculum leader, and mentor. Regardless of her title, she has demonstrated a fierce commitment to students, especially those who need her the most.

Safranek arrives at school every day with purpose, humility, and heart, quietly changing lives without ever seeking recognition. Colleagues describe Safranek as both deeply knowledgeable and endlessly curious, often ahead of educational trends and creating space for collaboration and growth.

Safranek is known for giving up her own time to work one-on-one with struggling readers, meeting students during lunch breaks or planning periods. But her influence extends far beyond individual interventions. She mentors fellow educators and is passionate about shaping reading instruction across the district.

This year, Safranek stepped into a new role at Westbrook Elementary, and by sharing her warmth, wisdom, and leadership, she has quickly become a cornerstone. Staff say she has transformed the school's reading program and inspired others to grow in their own practice.

The Schrager Award honors educators who embody the highest ideals of the profession. For Westside Community Schools, Linda Safranek is exactly that: a lifelong advocate for students, a leader among peers, and a reminder that small moments can have a lifelong impact.



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