

## **FLAG Award for Teaching Excellence Announces \$315,000 in Prizes for Top NYC Public School Teachers**

**— Five Win \$25,000 Each, Plus \$10,000 Prize for their Schools, and 10 Finalists Win \$10,000 Each, Plus \$2,000 for their Schools —**

**— Winning Teachers in Each Borough Transformed Underfunded Music Programs, Used Science to Promote Advocacy, Created Technology to Address Student Needs, and Renovated Physical and Virtual Spaces to Bring Learning to Life —**

**(June 25, 2021, New York, N.Y.)**—Today the [FLAG Award for Teaching Excellence](#) announced five grand prize winners—one from each borough of New York City—who represent the best public school teaching has to offer. **Dana Monteiro**, a music educator at Frederick Douglass Academy in Manhattan and the founder of Harlem Samba; **Patricia Lockhart**, the science teacher at Hubert H. Humphrey elementary school/PS 57 on Staten Island; **Andrew Chiappetta**, a second grade special education teacher at The Brooklyn New School/PS 146; **Cheryl Rizzo**, a middle school English Language Arts teacher at The Lindenwood School/PS 232 in Queens; and **Penelope Smetters-Jacono**, the founding band director at Celia Cruz Bronx High School of Music in the Bronx will each receive a \$25,000 cash prize and their schools will receive \$10,000.

“Anyone who’s ever met a public school teacher knows that they are always putting their students first, and this year’s winners proved that point and so much more. All of the teachers we’ve learned about through this process have shown that nothing—not even a global pandemic that took so much from so many—could stop them from innovating and creating spaces where students could learn, share, grow, and thrive,” said **Glenn Fuhrman, Co-Founder of The FLAG Award for Teaching Excellence**.

“The five winning educators spend their lives advocating for their students, making sure that their school experiences are supportive and engaging, and preparing them to be citizens of the world. We are excited to honor them,” said **Amanda Fuhrman, Co-Founder of The FLAG Award for Teaching Excellence**.

The FLAG Award for Teaching Excellence, which just completed its second year with an expansion to the entire city, received close to 1,000 nominations from students, parents, principals, and colleagues. Thirty-five semifinalists were selected from the nominees, and they were required to complete a comprehensive application, participate in an interview process which included an interview with their principal, and submit supplementary material.

The \$25,000 cash prizes for the winners are for teachers’ personal use. The additional school awards of \$10,000 each are to be used for arts education initiatives with input from the winning teachers. (Arts education is an area that is often underfunded in public schools.) There are also 10 finalists who will receive \$10,000 for their personal use and their schools will receive \$2,000 each to use toward an arts-based initiative. And, 20 semi-finalists will receive \$500 for their personal use and their schools will receive \$500 each.

An independent jury comprising education, community, and philanthropic leaders, including **Dr. Betty A. Rosa, Commissioner of Education and President of the University of the State of New York**, selected the winners based on criteria that placed emphasis on the student experience.

“Teachers, students, administrators, and families are completing a school year unlike anything we have ever experienced before, and it is important that we take the time to honor what has been accomplished. I am thrilled at this opportunity to recognize and celebrate our inspirational teachers,” said **Dr. Betty A. Rosa**.

Additional jury members include last year’s winner, [Dr. Lou Lahana](#); Max Kenner, founder and executive director of the Bard Prison Initiative (BPI); Félix V. Matos Rodríguez, Chancellor of the City University of New York; and Nicola Vassell, founder, Nicola Vassell Gallery.

### **About the Winners**

#### *Brooklyn: Andrew Chiappetta, PS 146 Brooklyn New School*

When schools moved to remote learning in March 2020, second grade special education teacher Andrew Chiappetta knew Google Classroom would not be appropriate for his students. In the week between when in-person classes ended and remote learning began, he built a website that functioned as a virtual classroom. Over the summer, he used his self-taught coding skills to improve it so that in the fall it included two-way direct communication with the students, individualized scheduling, video lessons, assignments, and examples of classmates' work. The response was so positive—from students, parents, and faculty—that the website is now being used by the entire grade. Chiappetta would like his school to use their prize money to purchase and renovate a shipping container to serve as a school art gallery for student work, where older students would maintain the space and mentor younger student artists in it.

#### *Staten Island: Patricia Lockhart, Hubert H Humphrey PS 57*

“Everywhere you look in the building, there's a piece of her,” says Patricia Lockhart’s principal. And when you peruse the list of programs this beloved Staten Island elementary school science teacher has created and administered throughout her 30 years of teaching, it’s no wonder. But it is her advocacy work—and effective grant-writing—on behalf of her students and the causes they deem important that really stands out. She and her students turned a personal tragedy into an opportunity to save lives through their fight for new federal policy on fire escapes; they created a humanitarian relief project for refugees in Liberia (where many students’ families are from); and they started a foundation to care for and learn from the wetlands that sit across from their school. Lockhart’s popular soap box derby program started as a classroom lesson on simple machines and has evolved into a city-wide competition where winners go on to compete nationally. She hopes her school will use their prize money to help fund her students’ formal proposal to build a soap box racing track on Staten Island.

#### *Manhattan: Dana Monteiro, Frederick Douglass Academy*

When music classes at Dana Monteiro’s Harlem high school nearly doubled in size, teaching traditional band or jazz was no longer feasible, especially when most students had no prior musical experience. He had an epiphany soon after, while vacationing in Brazil: Samba. Not only is the genre more inclusive for large groups of performers, but it is also accessible for beginners. Monteiro began drum lessons upon his return, and ultimately transformed his music department to center around Samba. The change has opened a new world of music to his students, and over the years, he has brought the Samba program to nearly a dozen other

schools through a nonprofit he founded, “A Life with Drums.” Monteiro hopes his school will use their prize money to build out Frederick Douglass Academy’s recording studio, which would improve his ability to record the Samba band and benefit a course he has been teaching on digital music production.

*Queens: Cheryl Rizzo, PS 232 The Lindenwood School*

Books have the power to transport readers into another world, and Cheryl Rizzo is the kind of English Language Arts teacher who takes it one step further by transforming her classroom—real and virtual—to enhance what a class is reading. Over the years, her classroom has become a coffee shop, a yoga studio, and a campsite. When school moved online, her students created a virtual escape room to accompany their reading of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. She works to nurture her students’ creativity and empowers them to contribute to lesson plans. Rizzo created a student ELA advisory group in which the kids vote for their representatives who then serve as liaisons between her and the entire grade. She also founded “Cookies and Conversations,” a book club where students, parents, and faculty members take action alongside the texts they read. One “Cookies and Conversations” project was the creation of a community garden. She would like her school to use their prize money to turn this small green space into “a source of inspiration and a place to create.”

*The Bronx: Penelope Smetters-Jacono, Celia Cruz Bronx High School of Music*

Penelope Smetters-Jacono built the Celia Cruz Bronx High School band department from scratch and has spent nearly two decades fortifying it by creating a pipeline of passionate student musicians and fighting for equity in music education. She founded a free summer program for middle school students interested in music, and those who complete this program automatically gain entry to the high school. Three former music students are now middle school band teachers, and they help promote their beloved former teacher’s program to their students. In 2020, her band was a finalist at the Essentially Ellington High School Jazz Festival, the most prestigious and competitive high school jazz competition in the country—a first for a New York City high school band. Smetters-Jacono would like her school to use their prize money to buy less-commonly-used instruments, which tend to be more expensive. Students who play these instruments often have more college scholarship opportunities because so few people play them.

### **Finalists**

Collin Andrulonis, Baychester Middle School (Bronx)  
Lisa Barnshaw-Sijan, Bronx Arena High School (Bronx)  
Elisabeth Cohen, MS 54 Booker T. Washington (Manhattan)  
Lauren DeBonis, Urban Assembly Bronx Academy of Letters (Bronx)  
Hanan Harchol, High School of Art & Design (Manhattan)  
Bertha Kurmen Leiva, East River Academy (Queens)  
Tiffany Lenoj Jones, City-As-School/Manhattan (Manhattan)  
Shola K. Roberts, MS 354, The School of Integrated Learning (Brooklyn)  
Ilan Weissman, Ella Baker School (Manhattan)  
Malika Willis, Brooklyn New School PS146 (Brooklyn)

### **Semi-finalists**

Christina Buccola Henriquez, Academy for Personal Leadership & Excellence (APLE) (Bronx)  
Donna Catapano, JHS 278 Marine Park (Brooklyn)  
Davon Clarke, The Children’s Workshop School (Manhattan)

Anastasia Difino, PS 120 (Queens)  
Christopher Esquierdo, PS 163 The Flushing Heights School (Queens)  
Diane Frisone, PS 506 School of Journalism and Technology (Brooklyn)  
Nicholas Galletta, PS 20 (Staten Island)  
Lisa Greenwald, Stuyvesant High School (Manhattan)  
Christine Hunkele, Judith S. Kaye High School (Queens)  
Sean Jacobsen, Michael J. Petrides School (Staten Island)  
Corey Levin, Yorkville East Middle School (Manhattan)  
Megan Minturn, Brooklyn International High School (Brooklyn)  
Shannon Potts, Special Music School (Manhattan)  
Nadya Robinson, PS 261 Philip Livingston (Brooklyn)  
Amalia Schiff, Bronx School for Law, Government & Justice (Bronx)  
Islah Tauheed, Linden Tree Elementary School PS 567 (Bronx)  
Lynn Tiede, Columbia Secondary School for Math, Science and Engineering (Manhattan)  
Carolyn Unterman, PS 26 (Staten Island)  
Elizabeth "Eli" Uruga, Ella Baker School (Manhattan)  
Anthony Voulgarides, Washington Heights Expeditionary Learning School (WHEELS)  
(Manhattan)

### **About the FLAG Award for Teaching Excellence**

[The FLAG Award for Teaching Excellence](#) award, founded by Glenn and Amanda Fuhrman, recognizes and celebrates extraordinary public school teachers who inspire learning through creativity, passion, and commitment. This award is funded by The FLAG Foundation for Excellence in Education and by The Fuhrman Family Foundation. It is administered by co-presidents, Risa Daniels and Laura Twersky.