



CEEE Honors Ms. Erica Varites with 2026 Bonnie T. Meszaros Economic Educator of the Year Award

The University of Delaware's Center for Economic Education and Entrepreneurship (CEEE) is proud to announce **Ms. Erica Varites**, a 5th-grade Cooke Elementary School teacher in Delaware, as the recipient of the **2026 Bonnie T. Meszaros Economic Educator of the Year Award (BTM Award)**. This distinguished award recognizes a Delaware educator who demonstrates a sustained commitment to advancing economic education through exemplary teaching, professional learning, and leadership in economic program development.

The BTM Award celebrates educators who bring economics to life in the classroom while also strengthening the field of economic education across the state. Ms. Varites exemplifies these qualities through innovative instruction, a deep focus on student engagement, and meaningful contributions to curriculum development and instructional improvement.

A Philosophy Rooted in Relevance and Engagement

Ms. Varites consistently integrates economics standards into her instruction, designing learning experiences that are interactive, relevant, and engaging for young learners. Through

simulations, readers' theater, and hands-on activities, she helps students build a meaningful understanding of economic concepts in ways that connect directly to their everyday lives.

"I love teaching economics to my fifth-grade class. Using the latest trends and what the students are interested in is essential in economics education. For example, when teaching determinants of demand, the increase in Travis Kelce's jersey sales after Taylor Swift attended one of his football games in 2023 is a concept the fifth graders understand. Student interaction throughout lessons and activities enhances understanding, such as using readers' theater and simulations of the economics standards. Due to the real-world impact economics has on my students, I am committed to social studies education and making the lessons come alive and be relevant to young students."

Her approach reflects a clear belief that economic education should be dynamic, accessible, and grounded in real-world connections that resonate with students.

Programs such as Junior Achievement BizTown further extend student learning by allowing them to experience real-world economic decision-making in an immersive environment. These experiences help students connect classroom content to everyday life, building both financial literacy and critical thinking skills. Her students consistently respond with enthusiasm and curiosity. One student shared, *"Ms. Varites makes economics so much fun and easy to understand—I love economics!"* reflecting the impact of her engaging and accessible teaching approach.

Commitment to Professional Learning and Leadership in Economic Education

Ms. Varites demonstrates a deep and sustained commitment to advancing her expertise in economic education through ongoing professional learning and collaboration with educators across Delaware. She actively engages in conferences, workshops, and teacher networks that strengthen her instructional practice and keep her teaching aligned with best practices. This continuous learning directly informs her classroom instruction, ensuring her students experience relevant, engaging, and up-to-date economic education.

In addition to her professional growth, Ms. Varites plays an important role in strengthening economic education beyond her classroom. She has contributed to district-level curriculum development, collaborating with colleagues to design standards-aligned lessons, assessments, and instructional materials. Her long-standing service as a Social Studies Council Member and her participation in statewide instructional and bias review processes further demonstrate her commitment to improving the quality, accuracy, and inclusivity of economics instruction for students across Delaware.

Through her innovative instruction, sustained professional learning, and leadership in curriculum development, Ms. Erica Varites exemplifies the highest standards of economic education. Her ability to connect economic concepts to students' lives in meaningful, engaging ways reflects the spirit and purpose of the Bonnie T. Meszaros Economic Educator of the Year Award.

CEEE proudly recognizes Ms. Varites for her exceptional contributions to economic education and congratulates her on this well-deserved honor as the 2026 award recipient.

CEEE Honors Kylee Holliday with 2026 Ronni K. Cohen Personal Finance Educator of the Year Award

The University of Delaware's Center for Economic Education and Entrepreneurship (CEEE) is proud to announce **Mrs. Kylee Holliday** as the recipient of the **2026 Ronni K. Cohen Personal Finance Educator of the Year Award (RKC Award)**. This distinguished honor recognizes a Delaware educator who demonstrates sustained excellence and leadership in advancing personal finance education through teaching, professional learning, and program development.

The RKC Award celebrates educators who equip students with the knowledge and skills needed to make informed financial decisions and build long-term financial confidence. Mrs. Holliday exemplifies this mission through her impactful instruction, statewide leadership, and deep commitment to ensuring all students have access to meaningful personal finance education.

Making Personal Finance Real and Relevant for Students

In the classroom, Mrs. Holliday transforms personal finance into an engaging, real-world learning experience. She designs instruction around the financial decisions students are already making or will soon face, including budgeting, saving, credit, investing, and life after graduation. Through simulations, projects, and discussion-based learning, she helps students practice decision-making in authentic contexts.

Her approach emphasizes both relevance and honesty, creating a classroom environment where students can openly explore financial realities and build confidence in their decision-making. As she explains, *"Personal finance is more than a course requirement; it's about giving students a sense of control, helping them understand their options, and showing them that their choices, both today and in the future, matter."*

The impact of her teaching extends beyond the classroom. Students have applied their learning in meaningful ways, from helping families open savings accounts to beginning early investing and filing taxes. One former student shared years later that taking her class had made a lasting difference in his financial and professional life, an example of the enduring impact of her instruction.

Leadership, Advocacy, and Impact in Financial Literacy Education

Mrs. Holliday has played a pivotal role in expanding access to financial literacy across the Red Clay Consolidated School District and beyond. She led efforts to extend financial literacy coursework to all district high schools and developed a financial literacy mini-unit embedded in ninth-grade economics, ensuring all students receive foundational instruction early in their learning journey.

Beyond curriculum development, she is a key leader in professional learning sessions and educator support. Mrs. Holliday regularly facilitates training sessions and conference presentations for district, state, and CEEE-led initiatives. Her work includes updates to the *Keys to Financial Success* curriculum and multi-session training for secondary educators.

At the state level, she has also been a strong advocate for strengthening financial literacy education requirements, helping elevate the importance of personal finance instruction in policy discussions. Her leadership and impact have been recognized beyond Delaware as well, including an invitation to contribute a chapter to a forthcoming college-level financial literacy textbook, reflecting her standing as a respected voice in the field who connects classroom practice to broader educational and real-world financial understanding.

A Lasting Commitment to Student Success

Across her work as a teacher, curriculum leader, and advocate, Mrs. Holliday consistently demonstrates a belief that personal finance education empowers students to take control of their futures. Her instruction, leadership, and advocacy reflect a deep commitment to ensuring students not only learn financial concepts but also apply them in ways that shape their lives beyond the classroom.

CEEE proudly congratulates Mrs. Holliday on being named the **2026 Ronni K. Cohen Personal Finance Educator of the Year** and celebrates her extraordinary contributions to advancing financial literacy for students across Delaware.