



Message from the Head of School

April 17, 2026

30 Nisan 5786

Dear Leffell School Community:

It is with immense pride and excitement that I share the news that this morning, during a surprise presentation at the Upper School-wide assembly, **High School History Department Chair Harry Shontz was presented with the [Milken Educator Award](#).**

Created in 1987 by philanthropist and education visionary Lowell Milken, and often referred to as the “**Oscar of Teaching**,” the Milken Educator Award is the nation’s preeminent educator recognition initiative, rewarding instructional excellence, professional leadership, and potential for even greater contributions to the field. **Harry is the first educator in Westchester County — and the second from any Jewish school nationally — to receive this prestigious honor in the nearly forty years since its creation**, and he is one of only 27 teachers across the country to be selected for the award during the 2025-2026 academic year.

Lowell Milken was on hand today to personally present the award to Harry before our entire Upper School student body, faculty, and staff, and we had the honor also of being joined by Israeli Ambassador to the United Nations Danny Danon, White Plains Mayor Justin Brasch, Westchester County Legislator David T. Imamura, New York State Assemblywoman MaryJane Shimsky, several Milken Educators selected in prior years, and other dignitaries.

Harry was chosen for this award by virtue of his curricular and pedagogic creativity, his dedicated leadership, his extraordinary contributions to the broader life of the school community inside and outside the classroom (including coaching our small but mighty group of competitive swimmers!), and his strongly positive connections with students and colleagues. He has a reputation for bringing history to life and eliciting maximum engagement from his students through the highly regarded “Gaming the Government” course, which he adapted from the “Reacting to the Past” program that is utilized at a number of universities — and under Harry’s leadership, our High School history department has incorporated this deeply immersive, experiential methodology into other courses as well.

The Milken Educator Award is not a lifetime achievement prize. Rather, it is an honor reserved for early-to-mid-career professionals, intended to recognize both their achievements to this point and the promise that they demonstrate for shaping the field of education into the future. We look forward to benefiting from Harry's educational leadership, charismatic presence, and enriching contributions to school culture for years to come!

In receiving this award, Harry joins the Milken Educator Network, a group of more than 3000 distinguished professionals nationwide dedicated to strengthening K-12 education. As the Milken Family Foundation says, "the future belongs to the educated," and we are so fortunate that Harry is part of the exceptional team of Leffell School educators who are preparing our students to craft the future of our Jewish community and the broader world.

You can learn more about the Milken Educator Awards [here](#), and you can view Harry's Milken Educator Profile, as well as photos and a video from today's assembly, [here](#).

Please join me in congratulating Harry Shontz on this incredible, well-deserved honor. We are blessed to have him leading our High School history department and inspiring our students every day.

Shabbat shalom,

Michael Kay

Head of School



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