On Thursday, October 3, 2019, Pedro A. Rivera, the Pennsylvania Secretary of Education, and Dr. Jane Foley, Senior Vice President of the Milken Educator Awards, came to Marple Newtown High School. The Milken Educator Awards recognition program honored its first educator in 1987 and remains unrivaled as the most prestigious educator award in the country. The Milken Family Foundation sponsors the initiative and bestows awards to educators whose achievements, contributions, and dedication to their students are found to be commendable. During a school-wide assembly at Marple Newtown High School (MNHS), which included local dignitaries, Marple Newtown Board of School Directors, school administrators, teachers, students, Dr. Foley not only recognized Mrs. Elizabeth Landes as one of the most innovative and committed teachers across the country, but also surprised her with an unrestricted 25,000.00 check. Mrs. Landes is the only Milken Educator Award winner from Pennsylvania this year.

Mrs. Landes' innovation and creativity begins with implementing data-driven lessons interspersed with ingenuity. Her contributions to the MNHS Science Department through incorporation of intensive and longitudinal professional development contributes to innovative lessons focusing on rigor and engagement. Mrs. Landes teaches Advanced Placement Environmental Science and variations of Biology, including Honors Biology, college preparatory Biology, and Biology Keystone Support. These experiences along with organizing community events foster collegial reverence and an astute understanding of students’ aspirations as they transition to post-secondary outcomes.

Throughout the school year, Mrs. Landes tirelessly plans interactive lessons to engage students at their appropriate levels of difficulty, which supports a differentiated classroom. In order to accomplish absolute engagement, Mrs. Landes not only fulfills the curriculum map, but also creates unique instructional experiences for students. For example, numerous administrators have observed her engaging the school’s most challenging students with complex concepts. These include 38 pieces of eligible content associated with the Biology Keystone Exam, such as biochemistry, bioenergetics, and homeostasis and transport. Baseline data accrues through formative assessment while analysis of students’ performance shapes subsequent lessons. Mrs. Landes evaluates their diverse levels of performance to determine the volume of rigor integrated into individualized lessons. Countless hours of strategic thought contribute to increased student performance on post-assessments whether they be formative or summative. These lessons, among myriad others, demonstrate implementation of differentiated strategies, assessment, and data utilization shaped through years of dedication to the professions of education and science.

The aforementioned devotion to planning resonates as a model with Mrs. Landes’ peers. Teachers’ motivation toward developing stimulating lessons and contributing to the greater school community increases each year they work with her. Mrs. Landes’ collaboration with other professionals across the school district includes roles as a faculty trainer for differentiated instruction and Nearpod. She also assumes an integral role in realigning the science curriculum to coincide with Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS).

Mrs. Landes advances the role of biology and environmental science into students’ lives while establishing a nexus between the classroom and communal philanthropy. She invests significant time and resources as the primary organizer of Project 10, an annual service event where hundreds of students engage in a Walk-A-Thon to benefit a selected charity. Throughout the years, Mrs. Landes has collaborated with UNICEF, St. Jude Children’s Hospital, Philabundance, Charity: Water, and Susan G. Komen for the Cure. These philanthropic efforts contribute to cultivating a positive culture at MNHS. Students not only take enormous pride in their annual donation, but also their cumulative donations of more than $34,000.00 since the inception of Project 10.

Mrs. Landes’ commitment to academic focus and enhancing student and community engagement through personal devotion serves as an exemplar for novice and experienced educators alike. MNHS continues to be a wonderful high school due to teachers, such as Mrs. Landes, who illustrate the characteristics of a distinguished educator.

After the assembly program ended, Mrs. Landes contacted her husband and mother to share her exciting news. Then, MNHS Principal, Mr. John Beltrante, informed Mrs. Landes a substitute teacher would cover her classes for the remainder of the day so she could tend to potential Milken Family Foundation needs. In true, dedicated fashion, Mrs. Landes gently declined class coverage and expressed the desire to be with her students while fulfilling the foundation's needs at the end of the school day. The entire Marple Newtown School District community congratulates Mrs. Landes on her prestigious award and display of “Tiger Pride”.