



**23rd Heinz Awards Honor Education Reformer Norman Atkins  
for Changing How Teachers Are Taught and Improving Learning Outcomes  
for Vulnerable, Low-Income Students**

*Atkins's pioneering approach to teacher preparation is equipping teachers and school leaders with the skills, mindsets, and knowledge to help all children achieve*

**PITTSBURGH, September 18, 2018**—The Heinz Family Foundation today named education reformer Norman Atkins the recipient of the prestigious 23<sup>rd</sup> Heinz Award in the Human Condition category. Mr. Atkins is recognized for pioneering new education and teacher training models that are effecting dramatic, positive change in educational achievement among low-income student populations, and for co-founding the Relay Graduate School of Education, the first major redesign of teacher preparation in this country in decades.

As part of the accolade, Mr. Atkins will receive an unrestricted cash award of \$250,000.

A former journalist with a lifetime passion for the issues of race, class and poverty—his work appeared in such publications as *The Washington Post*, *Boston Globe* and *The New York Times Magazine*—Mr. Atkins chose to focus his career on helping children and families break the cycle of intergenerational poverty. As co-executive director of the Robin Hood Foundation, he provided support to a variety of family, social service, and after-school programs, and during that time observed public school classrooms in New York City, as well as small, community schools that were also serving low-income children in some of the city's poorest neighborhoods. The impact of those visits led Mr. Atkins, who holds a master's degree in education from Columbia University, to found Uncommon Schools, an organization that establishes and manages urban schools that prepare low-income children for college. Over more than 20 years, Uncommon Schools has created and spread methods for developing teachers and instructional leaders that have been widely adopted nationwide. Its students are attending and finishing college at six times the rate of their low-income peers nationally.

Seeing a disconnect between how education schools are preparing aspiring teachers, and what teachers need to know to be successful in the classroom, Mr. Atkins went on to co-found the Relay Graduate School of Education, a title that refers to the idea that it takes a relay of highly effective teachers to put a child on a positive academic and life trajectory.

The Relay approach differs from traditional teacher education in that it thoughtfully integrates theory and practice, immersing aspiring and early career teachers in PK-12 classrooms, and providing them with intensive practice and feedback. Believing that a young teacher armed only with theory is not prepared to face a classroom full of middle-schoolers, or a group of second-graders dealing with the fallout of poverty and other social challenges, Relay relies on a faculty of excellent current and former classroom teachers

and principals, each with a track record of successfully raising achievement in their own classrooms, and has its own curriculum. Graduate students engage in teaching sessions that allow them to deliver lessons, receive feedback on how they can improve their approach, then repeat their session, applying what they have learned from faculty master teachers. To graduate, Relay students must deliver measurable results in the classroom and prove they've helped their students master the year's academic content.

“At Relay we have set out to recruit, prepare, and develop teachers to have the mindset, the skills and the knowledge that they need in order to be effective at changing life trajectories for low-income kids,” says Mr. Atkins. “Our mission is to teach and equip teachers and school leaders to develop in all students the academic skills and strength of character needed to succeed in college and life.”

This past school year, Relay trained 3,000 current and aspiring teachers and 750 school leaders nationwide. On average, the early elementary children taught by Relay students average 1.3 years of growth in reading in a single year.

“Norman has fearlessly called attention to a core issue impacting our nation's schools – that our teachers are too often at a disadvantage when working with students burdened by poverty, adversity or other challenges to their environment,” said Teresa Heinz, Chairman of the Heinz Family Foundation. “His fresh, practical approach to teaching teachers represents a potential and significant breakthrough in turning around failing classrooms and benefiting children now and future generations.”

At a time when enrollment in teacher preparatory programs is declining—a factor in teacher shortages nationwide—Relay is marking a 40 percent increase year-over-year in its teacher and principal training programs, and is also highly successful in attracting a diverse teacher workforce.

“A lack of diversity among teachers is a national problem that needs to be addressed,” says Mr. Atkins. “At Relay we have set out to recruit, train and develop a diverse group of aspiring teachers. As part of that mission we have developed the largest residency program in the country, which gives teachers a one-year apprenticeship in the classroom with another experienced teacher, after which they become the teacher of record going into the second year. Of those participating in our residency program, about two-thirds identify as teachers of color.”

This is a significant increase over the national average of 18 percent and 20 percent, respectively, for teachers and leaders of color nationwide. Relay programs also support principals and school leaders through the National Principals Academy (NPA) and the National Principal Supervisors Academy (NPSA), intensive, one-year programs focused on instructional school leadership.

Established to honor the memory of U.S. Senator John Heinz, the Heinz Awards this year recognize those who have made significant contributions in five distinct areas of great importance to Senator Heinz: Arts and Humanities; Environment; Human Condition; Public Policy; and Technology, the Economy and Employment. Now in its 23<sup>rd</sup> year, the Heinz Awards has recognized 139 individuals and awarded more than \$27.5 million to the honorees. For more information about the awardees visit [www.heinzawards.net/2018](http://www.heinzawards.net/2018).

In addition to Mr. Atkins, the 23<sup>rd</sup> Heinz Awards honored the following individuals, who will receive their awards in Pittsburgh on October 24, 2018:

- **Arts and Humanities: Ralph Lemon**, an innovative choreographer and multidisciplinary artist whose richly moving body of work addresses concepts of race, justice and identity in performances that interweave movement, media, visual arts and language;
- **Environment: Ming Kuo, Ph.D.**, a psychologist whose research on the impact of urban green space on physical and mental health is changing urban forest and landscape design policy;
- **Public Policy: Sherri Mason, Ph.D.**, a global expert on freshwater microplastic pollution whose research is raising awareness of the sources and volume of microplastics and microfibers in U.S. freshwater systems, leading to state, federal and international policy change;
- **Public Policy: Enric Sala, Ph.D.**, a marine ecologist working at the intersection of science and policy to protect the world's last pristine marine environments; and
- **Technology, the Economy and Employment: Linda Rottenberg**, a social entrepreneur whose global nonprofit is opening doors of economic opportunity for entrepreneurs in both emerging countries and the United States.

EDITORS/REPORTERS: To obtain photos of Mr. Atkins or any of the other recipients, please contact Abby Manishor at [amanishor@burness.com](mailto:amanishor@burness.com) or 917-539-3308.

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### **About the Heinz Awards**

Established by Teresa Heinz in 1993 to honor the memory of her late husband, U.S. Senator John Heinz, the Heinz Awards celebrates the accomplishments and spirit of the Senator by recognizing the extraordinary achievements of individuals in the areas of greatest importance to him. The awards, administered by the Heinz Family Foundation, recognize individuals for their contributions in the areas of Arts and Humanities; Environment; Human Condition; Public Policy; and Technology, the Economy and Employment. Nominations are submitted by invited experts, who serve anonymously, and are reviewed by jurors appointed by the Heinz Family Foundation. The jurors make recommendations to the Board of Directors, which subsequently selects the Award recipients. For more information on the Heinz Awards, visit [www.heinzawards.net](http://www.heinzawards.net).

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