



MEDIA CONTACTS

Aquinas Early, on behalf of the 1954 Project | aeary@explorefcg.com | 708-420-8570

Angelica Ramirez, on behalf of the 1954 Project | aramirez@explorefcg.com | 312-874-0670

The 1954 Project Presents: The 2021 Luminary Awards

The Cleveland Avenue Foundation for Education Celebrates Excellence in Education Leadership and Black Philanthropy

CHICAGO, IL (April 14, 2021) - The Cleveland Avenue Foundation for Education (The CAFE) is excited to celebrate Black excellence in education with *The 1954 Project Presents: The 2021 Luminary Awards*. The 1954 Project is a philanthropic initiative that aims to provide significant financial and capacity-building support to diverse Black non-profit leaders in education in order to accelerate their impact.

The 1954 Project focuses its support on three domains: investing in innovative and culturally affirming approaches to teaching and learning, expanding educator and leader diversity, and increasing economic mobility in the African American community.

The 1954 Project Presents: The 2021 Luminary Awards will be held virtually on Wednesday, April 28th at 11:00am CDT. The event looks to highlight the innovative work of outstanding Black leaders across the education landscape, honor and build upon the rich traditions of philanthropy in the Black community and build a dynamic and inclusive community of allies that shares our values.

This unique event will feature appearances by Academy and Grammy award-winning artist and activist, Common, philanthropic power couple, Cookie and Earvin “Magic” Johnson, actor and philanthropist Jay Ellis, and many more.

“The 1954 Project seeks to radically reimagine how philanthropy connects with diverse Black leaders in education by providing these leaders with substantial, flexible support in order to drive innovation, improve student outcomes, and create lasting systemic change,” said Liz Thompson, co-founder of The CAFE. “We are inspired by the

ubiquitous talent and genius of Black leaders within the education field and aspire to fully nurture the ideas generated from this extraordinary collective of thought leaders and practitioners.”

These traits are amply represented among the 2021 class of Luminaries. This year’s inaugural class will each receive a grant award in the amount of \$1M. This year’s class includes:

Aimée Eubanks Davis, Braven - Luminary in Economic Mobility

Eubanks Davis is the CEO of Braven, a national non-profit that helps underrepresented college students develop the skills, confidence, experiences and networks to secure strong first jobs after graduation, which leads to a lifetime of economic mobility. Eubanks Davis’ career achievements reflect her innovative and entrepreneurial spirit as well as her ability to lead large teams and transformative initiatives related to diversity and inclusion, systemic change in higher ed, and more.

Sharif El-Mekki, Center for Black Educator Development - Luminary in Diversity in Education

El-Mekki is the founder and the CEO of the Center for Black Educator Development as well as the founder of The Fellowship-Black Male Educators for Social Justice. The Center for Black Educator Development exists to ensure there will be equity in the recruiting, training, hiring, and retention of quality educators that reflect the cultural background and share common socio-political interests of the students they serve. El-Mekki served as one of Secretary Arne Duncan’s inaugural group of Principal Ambassadors, providing the principalship perspective to the US Secretary of Education.

Nicole Lynn Lewis, Generation Hope - Luminary in Economic Mobility

Lewis is the founder and CEO of Generation Hope. Generation Hope's mission is to ensure all student parents have the opportunities to succeed and experience economic mobility by engaging education and policy partners to drive systemic change and by providing direct support to teen parents in college as well as their children through holistic, two-generation programming. In just 10 years, Lewis has created a truly unique and thriving organization that is gaining national attention for its whole-family approach to dismantling poverty.

Adrian Mims, The Calculus Project - Luminary in Innovation in Teaching and Learning

Dr. Mims is the founder and CEO of the Calculus Project which exists to disrupt and reverse racial achievement gaps in higher level math that ultimately predict economic outcomes for students. The programmatic model starts in middle school by preparing

students for higher level math in high school. It includes wrap-around support in the form of tutoring, building learning cohorts, and engaging in identity affirming curriculum.

Hiewet Senghor, Black Teacher Collaborative - *Luminary in Innovation in Teaching and Learning*

Senghor is the founder and CEO of the Black Teacher Collaborative (BTC), a non-profit organization that believes in the genius and beauty of Black children and the unique role of Black teachers in cultivating those gifts. As the founder of BTC, Senghor casts a bold vision for a Black-led education focused social entrepreneurship venture that works to build the mindsets, skills, and knowledge of Black teachers specific to the relationship between positive racial identity and learning and the development of Black children.

The 1954 Project not only looks to provide financial supports, but also influence traditional philanthropy and the broader education ecosystem to recognize the unique and important role of Black leaders in education. It will bring together existing innovative ideas and lived experiences and leverage these unique assets to ensure that ALL students flourish.

This initiative is made possible through seed funding from The Cleveland Avenue Foundation for Education and the Walton Family Foundation along with the generous support of additional foundation partners and a host of individual investors.

To register for *The 1954 Project Presents: The 2021 Luminary Awards* or for more information, visit 1954Project.org.

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ABOUT THE CLEVELAND AVENUE FOUNDATION FOR EDUCATION

The Cleveland Avenue Foundation for Education, The CAFE – a (501c3), was founded in 2014 by Liz and Don Thompson. The CAFE is committed to supporting and mentoring students and professionals as they progress through various stages in life and to broadening the landscape of African-American philanthropy. For more information, visit thecafe.org, and follow us on [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#), or [Twitter](#).

ABOUT THE 1954 PROJECT

The 1954 Project is a philanthropic initiative focused on embracing Black leadership in the education sector in order to fulfill the promise of quality education for ALL. Led by the Black community with a goal of raising \$100 million, in partnership with allies, the 1954 project exists at the intersection of education, leadership, and giving. Learn more at 1954project.org