

Long Beach Educator Named National Toyota Teacher of the Year

April 29, 2013

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (April 29, 2013) –The National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL) and Toyota today announced that Carolyn Blocker, an educator from Long Beach, California with nearly 25 years of experience, received the 2013 Toyota Teacher of the Year award at the National Conference on Family Literacy on April 28 in Louisville, Kentucky.

For 17 years, Toyota has sponsored the Teacher of the Year award in partnership with the National Center for Family Literacy to honor educators nationwide who reach beyond the classroom to impact families' lives.

This year's winner, Blocker has worked for the past seven years to improve the lives of more than 300 families as a parent education teacher at the [Long Beach School for Adults](#). Blocker and her community's participants boast numerous achievements, including significant parent engagement and a 90 percent retention of families, despite facing hurdles ranging from economic challenges to language barriers.

Blocker will receive \$20,000, which she plans to use to implement a program called *Full S.T.E.A.M. Ahead in the LBC*. This new initiative will give families the opportunity to explore their Long Beach City community through the lens of Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math (S.T.E.A.M.), a curriculum framework that merges sciences and the arts. In this family engagement project, parents will attend regular workshops and plan five parent and child excursions in the community—exposing parents and children to a global educational approach while building a stronger workforce one family at a time.

“At the beginning of each year, I look at the new group of parents as my garden; I know that we all grow as a result of our experiences together,” says Blocker. “With family literacy as a foundation, parents become more confident, children become more prepared and families become more successful.”

“For more than twenty years, we have been a proud partner of the National Center for Family Literacy and we are so excited to honor Carolyn Blocker with the Toyota Teacher of the Year award,” said Patricia Salas Pineda, group vice president of National Philanthropy and the Toyota USA Foundation at Toyota Motor North America. “Her extraordinary work promoting family literacy in her community is a testament to the fact that when parents and children learn together great things can happen.”

“Carolyn's vision, wisdom and hard work are a testament to the ultimate goal of NCFL—engaging families in the pursuit of learning together,” says Sharon Darling, president & founder of NCFL.

Mary Ellen Lesniak, an English as a Second Language adult and family coordinator at the [Tolton Center](#) in Chicago, was named The Toyota Teacher of the Year runner-up. Lesniak will receive a \$2,500 grant, which she plans to use to purchase iPads for her classroom, as well as a scholarship to attend the conference.

Since 1991, Toyota and NCFL have forged successful programs to promote family literacy in the United States. Today, the Toyota/NCFL partnership accounts for 256 family literacy sites in 50 cities and 30 states. As part of this partnership, the Toyota Teacher of the Year award has been presented annually since 1997 and recognizes individual teachers' contributions to improving literacy among youth and adults. Additional information on

Toyota's commitment to improving education nationwide is available at www.toyota.com/about/our_commitment/philanthropy/education.