Frankfort, Ky – The Kentucky Association of School Administrators (KASA) named its finalists for the 2020 Fred Award.

1. Steve Thornsburg (Custodian, Bath County Schools)
2. Karen Ellison (Instructional Assistant, Casey County Schools)
3. Melvin Bell (Custodian, LaRue County Schools)

The Fred Award is a favorite for KASA members, drawing in nominations from school districts across the commonwealth each year. The award, inspired by Fred Shea, the postman who became the subject of Mark Sanborn’s national best seller, The Fred Factor, recognizes non-administrative staff statewide whose daily efforts are deemed extraordinary and integral to a positive learning atmosphere in their school communities. Finalists for this award must embody four guiding principles: makes a positive difference each day; has a heart for people; changes ordinary moments into memorable ones; and leads by example.

“Freds are change agents who help determine the culture in their schools,” said KASA Executive Director Dr. Rhonda Caldwell. “They freely share the gift of encouragement to those who need it most. They give immeasurably more often at personal expense and sacrifice. They are quiet leaders without official titles who unknowingly weave a legacy of greatness around them.”

A blue ribbon judging panel representing education leaders from school districts across the state chose three finalists for the 2020 award. The winner will be announced at KASA’s Annual Leadership Institute, July 31, 2020 at the Galt House Hotel in Louisville. Each finalist will receive a $250 check, overnight lodging at the Galt House Hotel, and a distinguished marble plaque detailing the award. The winner will receive a $500 check.

“The Fred Program, now in its 13th year, seeks to honor support staff who are the heart and soul of our public schools today. KASA is proud to partner with author Mark Sanborn and American Fidelity to recognize Freds across the state. This year’s awards will expand the program’s reach to 40 school districts statewide,” said Caldwell.

KASA is the largest school administrator group in Kentucky, representing more than 3,100 education leaders from across the commonwealth. Formed in 1969, KASA connects education leaders to policymakers, legislators, and other interest groups and provides numerous benefits and services to Kentucky’s school administrators.

See next page for a brief introduction of finalists.
Brief introduction of the finalists:

Steve Thornsburg, Custodian, Bath County Schools
Mr. Steve, as the students at CES call him, is the first person in the building each day. He waits at the door to greet every cook, teacher, and student who enters. Not only does he greet them, he knows each one by name. He has mentored countless students, teaching them the value of hard work and respect simply by asking them to be his helper. In many instances, you will also find him sitting in the hallway with a student reading a book. He visits classrooms around the building, sharing his expertise when teachers ask him to talk to students about the importance of conserving school resources and taking pride in your work. Younger students call Steve Papaw. It is not unusual to see him reaching out his hand to walk them safely into the building or see him leaning over to help them in the cafeteria.

Karen Ellison, Instructional Assistant, Casey County Schools
Miss KK, as the students at LES call her, can brighten the cloudiest day. She begins each day in the rain, sleet, drizzle, or sunshine to open car doors during student drop-offs. She greets each child by name with a big smile as she helps him or her out of the car. She loves the students as though they were her own. She understands not all students get hugs at home, so she makes sure they are loved big while at school. If you are having a bad day, Miss KK is the one who can make it better. Her energy is contagious and makes a huge impact on her school and the students she serves. Giving to others, investing in student achievement, and providing encouraging words are just a few of the ways she builds successful relationships.

Melvin Bell, Custodian, LaRue County Schools
Melvin Bell was an inspiration to everyone with whom he came into contact. He had a heart for kids and worked to build relationships with the students, particularly those who seemed to need love the most. He made them understand that no matter what happens in life, there is always a second chance. His work ethic was second to none. In addition to the endless hours he spent preparing the building for the next day, Melvin put even more time into building relationships with students and staff. Even the custodians who worked under him worked hard to emulate his example. Melvin had a way of making everyone around him want to be a better person and live up to the expectations he held for himself and everyone else. After a long battle with cancer, Melvin passed away in April - just prior to the finalists being named.

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