

## The William U. Harris Award of Excellence

The William U. Harris Award of Excellence recognizes an individual from a College Board member institution who has demonstrated extraordinary leadership in the field of education, has inspired, prepared and connected young people to college, and has shown a genuine commitment to mentoring education leaders in an environment that supports their development and growth.

### 2013 William U. Harris Award Recipient



# Michael Bell

Michael Bell is, without question, an accomplished artist and educator. His many achievements include recognition as the Maryland Art Education Association Teacher of the Year (2002) and Anne Arundel County Teacher of the Year (2005), and he has been commissioned to paint several notable portraits, including actors from *The Sopranos* and *CSI: Miami*. The most telling examples of his excellence, however, are the triumphs of his students and the growth and transformation, under his tenure, of Arts education at Southern High School.

When Michael Bell began working at Southern High in 1994, the Art department consisted of two full time teachers. Since then, the department has grown to five members, equivalent to the size of the Art department at the county's largest high school, with double the enrollment of Southern High. This progress is a direct result of the work that Mr. Bell has done to increase the influence of the arts in the school and community, and the soaring success of his students. In fact, Southern High School's Art program is so celebrated that the school is now proud to be locally known as "the arts school". Students at Southern have access to a variety of rigorous art courses, thanks largely to Mr. Bell's advocacy of the AP Art program, and they consistently excel in the classes and on the exams. In both 2010 and 2011, the National Art Education Association (NAEA) honored one of Mr. Bell's Southern High students with its National Rising Star award, given to only one student in the country each year. Art students at Southern have received numerous other awards and recognitions, and millions of dollars in college scholarships.

Mr. Bell is passionate about art, and paramount among his objectives is instilling that passion in his students and in other educators. Mr. Bell founded a showcase for his students' art called ArtQuest that has become a major event attended by thousands from the community. His students' art has also been featured at the NAEA 2012 National Convention. Mr. Bell works tirelessly to improve the state of arts education, and has written curriculum for the county's Gifted and Talented art program, presented at state and national conferences, and served as a mentor for college students majoring in art education as a part of Maryland's *Teachers of Promise Institute*. We are pleased to recognize Michael Bell's transformational efforts with the William U. Harris Award of Excellence.

Please join us in welcoming members of the **College Board's Enrollment Leadership Academy**, a cohort of emerging leaders in admissions and financial aid from colleges and universities across the Middle States Region.

MICHAEL BELL'S ACCEPTANCE SPEECH  
**WILLIAM U. HARRIS NATIONAL AWARD OF EXCELLENCE**  
FEBRUARY 15, 2013 BROOKLYN, NY



(from left) Dr. Kevin Maxwell, Marc Procaccini, Michael Bell, Chris Truffer, Dr. George Arlotto

"Good morning.

Thank you for the great honor of having me here today and presenting me with such a prestigious national award, one that both humbles and inspires me.

I'd like to first thank God for blessing me with this opportunity, my wife and son who are home and couldn't come to Brooklyn to share this moment with me but contribute greatly behind the scenes toward my success and help make me the man I am today.

I'd like to thank the College Board. And from the bottom of my heart, a HUGE THANK YOU to the entourage of *AMAZING EDUCATORS* who accompanied me here to Brooklyn, that I sincerely *LOOK UP TO*, am honored to be *working with* on a daily basis and am *INSPIRED* to simply say that I know them:

My Principal, Mr. Marc Procaccini, who is the single hardest working and most dedicated Principal I've ever had the pleasure of working with; our Anne Arundel County Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Kevin Maxwell, who has also done unparalleled things in the field of education along with being a passionate supporter of the Arts for many years; Dr. George Arlotto, our Associate Superintendent of School Performance; Mr. Chris Truffer, our Regional Assistant Superintendent of Schools, who has helped me champion a Vertical Teaming movement with other art teachers K – 12 throughout our county; our AP Coordinator Deb Curdts who did an incredible job with my submission for this prestigious award; my Coordinator of Art, Suzanne Owens, who also couldn't be here with us today, but who has been an advocate of mine and for the Arts in the State of Maryland for over a decade, and the amazing group of dedicated art teachers in my Art Department I've had the pleasure to work with.

Now, upon my Principal, Marc Procaccini, informing me that I was selected as a nominee for this award, the first thing I did was *LOOK IT UP* – see what this William U Harris Award was all about. See what it really means. As I did my research and saw attributes connected to Bill Harris, the man this award is modeled after, that I was honored to be associated with. Things like "integrity, gentle giant among his peers, someone who models fairness and nurtures leadership in others while *PASSIONATELY* providing opportunities and support to young people."

And then I saw the elite company I was being thrown in with, such as last year's winner – the Yonkers Public Schools Superintendent; and my own former Maryland State Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Nancy S. Grasmick, whom I've worked closely with after being awarded Teacher of the Year back in 2004 as a selected member of her leadership team, mentoring our State's Top College Seniors looking to pursue a career in Art Education. Incidentally, I also had the pleasure of painting Dr. Grasmick's portrait, which *DID* hang in the Nancy S. Grasmick Building of Education in Baltimore – but she liked it *so much* she took it home with her upon retiring last year.

Now, as an Artist in Education, I believe the most important job for an Artist is “***to draw a line from your life to your art that is straight and clear.***”

For me, early on, art became my opportunity to escape from the dark realities going on in my world – as a positive way for me to give form and meaningful expression to some of my life’s very difficult moments...As a way to do something “constructive” as opposed to “destructive” with what life threw my way. And I’m passionate about cultivating this in our youth.

It’s about creating art with purpose. It’s about truly knowing your students better than they know themselves. It’s about never having any “official work hours.” Never clocking out. It’s about knowing the first thing kids learn about you is whether you truly care or not. It’s about the paradox that shapes every human journey. The reality that our lives are shaped by the choices we make. And the thing that shapes our kids’ lives the most is the thing they have no control over – where they come from. How we enter the world. Who brings us here. How much bleakness or how much hope surrounds us and supports us. These are the origins that forever define us. These are the images that have shadowed every choice our kids have ever made.

Now Southern High is not a magnet school. We take the students that show up at our door. Each year the National Art Education Association picks one student in the United States to win the NAEA Rising Star Award honoring student excellence in art. My students have won this exclusive award three of the last four years in a row. The third I can’t take *FULL* credit for, but she was a student of mine in a Saturday Gifted & Talented Enrichment Program that I teach along with another esteemed colleague of mine, Marlene Kramer, so I was proud to share that moment with her when she received the award last spring in New York City.

And last year our students took more top honors in AP Studio Art courses, doubled our AP Art History course offerings and collectively earned 2 million two hundred fifty-six thousand in art scholarship offers, accounting for 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of our school’s total scholarship offers. We’ve done this for the past two years in a row, the year before earning 2 million 47 thousand in art scholarship offers. All the while, the real reason my students pursue art in school because they view it as an opportunity for a better life.

I'm happy to be a part of scripting this confidence onto their blank pages; provide them opportunities I was never given, and help guide their stories toward a happy ending. Thank you for this honor. It means a great deal and thank you again to the College Board and to our Superintendent Dr. Maxwell, for providing students in our county, State and at this National level, the numerous opportunities for success that all contribute greatly toward closing the achievement gap and help open new doors of possibilities for our young people. Thank you."

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