

Thank you from the bottom of our hearts. And thank you NCAEA for honoring us with this incredible award.

We prepared a brief speech to share with our friends and colleagues today.

The three of us started Hickory Playground as a 48 hour play festival when we were 19 years old as a way to invest back into the arts in our community.

We had no idea how quickly and ferociously our community would back us and allow our little play festival to become a full blown arts advocacy organization in Catawba County.

By the end of this year we will have donated \$40,000 to 12 local public schools—from Preschool to Highschool in both the performing and visual arts. Through our festival, we've produced 32 unique and original plays, and created opportunities for over 100 performers to practice their craft.

Now entering our fifth year, our mission and dedication to investing back into the arts in public schools is stronger than ever. I strongly encourage you all to go to [hickoryplayground.org](http://hickoryplayground.org) to learn more about how we are nurturing the next generation of artists, innovators, and leaders of tomorrow.

These are the moments in history that artists are made for, and for that very reason it is imperative that we give the next

generation of innovators the toolkit to create the changes that they seek in the world.

Our public schools are the incubators for the future, and it's our responsibility to nourish them with every bit of sustenance that we have to give.

Our arts teachers do this everyday. They sacrifice riches and glory because they care about our future. They care about their students' futures.

These are capable people exchanging their capabilities to ensure that we have brighter tomorrows.

They deserve our dedication, our admiration, our celebration. They deserve more.

They deserve better pay and better job security, and we are honored to support them as they fight tooth and nail to enrich the lives of our communities.

My best friends, and now colleagues, were raised by the arts and by our teachers. Who knows where we'd be without them.

The Hickory Playground gives what little we have in support of those who have changed our lives for the better. We hope to be a symbol that inspires communities around the country to do the same.

As individuals our voices are powerful, but as a united community our cause is unstoppable.

That's what's at the core of Hickory Playground. We are not simply three young guys donating money to schools. We are a unifying voice that is bringing the differences in our community together to create the change we hope to see in the world.

Again, our arts teachers do this everyday. And so can every single one of you.

Thank you to the NCAEA for giving us the platform to share our mission and hopefully inspire you to go back home and share our story with the innovators of tomorrow within your own communities.

Congratulations to our colleagues that are receiving awards today. You represent the change we need today more than ever.

We are incredibly humbled, and we are just getting started.

Thank you.