

# Meet our 2019 Young Leaders (GALLERY)

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By [Brent Schanding](#) – Associate editor, Louisville Business First  
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If the men and women honored as part of our 2019 Young Leaders program are any indication, Louisville has a bright future ahead.

Presented in partnership with the Young Professionals Association of Louisville (YPAL), this program was created to identify rising stars in the early stages of their careers who demonstrate excellence both in their workplace and in the Louisville community.

Think of it as a precursor to Louisville Business First’s long-standing Forty Under 40 program, which also highlights local young professionals.

Our 2019 Young Leaders were nominated by their peers and selected from more than 250 entrants by a panel of judges, based on their notable successes, community service and strong leadership.

They are attorneys, doctors, entrepreneurs, educators, musicians, nonprofit professionals and more. You can read Q&As with our finalists by clicking on the links in the attached slideshow.

All of our Young Leaders were recognized at a cocktail reception March 26 at the Ice House event center. Congratulations to them all!

Also, thanks to Kentucky International Convention Center for allowing our photographer, Christopher Fryer, to shoot portraits of our Young Leaders onsite.



# YOUNG LEADERS: Sara Meierding

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Click here to read a Q&A with Sara Meierding.  
CHRISTOPHER FRYER

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**Sara Meierding, Verizon Innovative Learning School coach, The Academy @ Shawnee Middle School, Jefferson County Public Schools**

**Age:** 26

**Hometown:** Humboldt, Iowa

**Resides:** Schnitzelburg

**Where do you take your out-of-town guests?** We like to stick to the local restaurants in Germantown: The Post, Monnik Beer Co., New Wave Burritos, Bean, The Pearl of Germantown and Check’s Cafe.

**Three attributes of a good leader:** Reliable, able to give and receive constructive feedback gracefully, passion for their work

**Why Louisville?** The local nonprofit organization Teach Kentucky brought me here – but these are the reasons why my husband and I stay in Louisville: I grew up in a small town and went to college in a larger city. Louisville is a nice mixture of both of these worlds in that we feel a strong sense of community and friendliness everywhere we go, but we can still have burritos delivered at 4 a.m. But actually, Louisville has so much to offer, from concerts, sports events, restaurants, parks. We love it here.

**What do you listen to in the car?** True crime podcasts (“My Favorite Murder,” “Up & Vanished,” “Last Seen,” currently listening to “Broken Harts”) or news podcasts (“The Daily”)

**What attributes have enabled you to advance professionally?** Passion and work ethic. I’m very passionate about my work, and I work extremely hard to improve as an educator and provide the best learning opportunities for my teachers and students.

**What’s your biggest passion?** My biggest passion is advocating for students who might not normally be exposed to the best possible opportunities. I graduated from a rural public high school and then went to Yale University for my undergraduate education. It wasn’t until I started talking to my peers at Yale that I realized my educational opportunities growing up were limited. I chose to become a public school teacher because I wanted to generate learning spaces where even the most disadvantaged students can have the highest quality education. As a Verizon Innovative Learning School coach, I get to continue to support this initiative by helping teachers create innovative, 21st-century learning environments in disadvantaged schools.

**Tell us about your first job? What did it teach you?** My first job was working on my family’s dairy farm in northern Iowa. From a young age, my three brothers and I were tasked with chores that we were to complete when we came home from school. These tasks gradually became more labor intensive.

I believe I started out by feeding barn cats and then progressed to bottle-feeding baby calves to finally taking care of a steer or heifer of my own. In exchange for our hard work, my dad would give us each a calf that we would care for. When the calf reached market weight, we would show it at the local county fair through our 4-H club and then sell the animal and keep the profits. Farm life taught me how to be responsible and that hard work and a strong work ethic can go a long way.

**What’s the most challenging part of your job? The most exciting?** I am somebody who addresses problems quickly, and when I see inefficiencies, I immediately think about how we can do things better. However, working within the education bureaucracy involves placing important decisions into the hands of people who do not fully understand the needs of our teachers and students.

When you work at the school level, you see how the negative side of bureaucracy can have a disastrous impact on student learning. Most teachers see these gaps in management and proceed to fill them with their own time, money and energy, so that their students can have the best opportunities possible. I have been one of those teachers.

I see those teachers in my role today, and it is a constant challenge to realize that we cannot quickly fix these large systemic issues in public education. With that being said, the most exciting part of my job is getting to work directly with teachers in the classroom. I love getting teachers excited about new projects, instructional strategies or mindsets, and then actually seeing them change and improve their instruction.

One great example is one of my older teachers who was very nervous about the integration of 1:1 devices. Through my coaching and his own initiative, he is now one of the leaders in tech integration. When I bring visitors into our school to see innovative instruction and unique learning opportunities, I take them to his classroom. In my current job, I get to see teacher growth and improvement. As teachers grow and improve, I am simultaneously seeing student engagement grow and student achievement improve.