

**PRESS RELEASE**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**REEL to Host Inaugural “Bright Minds, Big Laughs” Comedy Night Gala Honoring Neurodiversity Changemakers**

Palo Alto, CA [March 16, 2026] — REEL (Resilience & Engagement for Every Learner), a Silicon Valley–based nonprofit supporting neurodivergent and twice-exceptional (2e) students, will host its inaugural “[Bright Minds, Big Laughs](#)” Comedy Night Gala on May 1st, an evening celebrating leadership, lived experience, and a bold new chapter of growth for the organization.

The gala will feature neurodivergent comedians whose talent and personal stories spotlight the strengths that often go unseen. The gala will also mark the launch of the **REEL Catalyst Awards**, a new annual tradition honoring an individual or family and an educator who have helped shape REEL through generosity, thoughtful partnership, and a deep commitment to ensuring neurodivergent and 2e learners are recognized for their strengths.

This year’s inaugural honorees are **Carolyn and Stewart Putney** and **Dr. Jennifer Madigan**, recognized for their extraordinary contributions to REEL’s mission and to the broader community of families and educators committed to advancing strengths-based, neurodiversity-affirming education.

**Honoring Foundational Leadership**

Carolyn and Stewart Putney are being recognized for their foundational role in REEL’s formation. As early lead donors, their generosity helped establish REEL as a nonprofit and provided critical momentum at a pivotal moment in its development. Beyond their initial investment, they have remained deeply engaged—offering thoughtful guidance, strategic insight, and steady leadership shaped by their commitment to strengths-based education and to ensuring families and educators have the support they need to help students thrive.

*“Carolyn and Stewart are true catalysts in our community,” said Callie Turk, Co-Founder of REEL. “Their early belief in our mission gave REEL the foundation to grow, and their enduring partnership has strengthened our work in ways that extend far beyond philanthropy.”*

**Advancing Educator Preparation**

REEL will also honor **Dr. Jennifer Madigan** for her advocacy and visionary leadership in educator preparation. Through her work at San José State University, Dr. Madigan championed strengths-based, neurodiversity-affirming approaches within teacher training programs. By embedding these principles into core coursework, she ensured that future educators learn to recognize and nurture student strengths from the very start of their careers.

*“From the moment we met Jennifer, she saw the bridge that needed to be built between neurodiversity advocacy and educator preparation,” notes Abby Kirigin, Executive Director at REEL. “She recognized that she was in a position to make a difference and didn’t hesitate to act. Because of her leadership, we’ve reached more than 500 educators in training—and that ripple effect will impact countless students for years to come.”*

### **Why This Work Matters Now**

REEL’s mission is especially urgent today, and particularly in Silicon Valley, where academic pressure, high expectations, and rapid technological change can intensify challenges for neurodivergent students. In a region known for innovation and excellence, too many learners are still defined by what they struggle with in classrooms rather than what they do well.

Through philanthropy, advocacy, and systems-level leadership, this year’s honorees have played a key role in helping REEL bridge families, schools, and educator preparation programs, translating research into practical tools and shared language that build confidence, engagement, and long-term success.

### **An Evening of Laughter and Impact**

The gala’s **headlining comedian**, Nina G., brings the heart of REEL’s mission to the stage. A dyslexic comedian who also stutters, Nina G. uses humor and storytelling to demonstrate how embracing difference can build confidence, connection, and success – perfectly reflecting the evening’s focus on strengths.

**“Bright Minds, Big Laughs”** Comedy Night is both a celebration and a fundraiser, bringing the community together for an evening of laughter while raising critical funds to support REEL’s next phase of growth. Proceeds will help expand programs, deepen educator partnerships, and reach more families seeking affirming, strengths-based support.

### **Event details**

**“Bright Minds, Big Laughs”** Comedy Night Gala

Date: May 1st, 7-10pm

Location: Domenico’s Winery, San Carlos

Hosted by: REEL

**Tickets can be purchased at:** <https://www.reel2e.org/comedynight>

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## About REEL

REEL (Resilience and Engagement for Every Learner) is a community-driven non-profit organization that ensures Silicon Valley neurodivergent, twice-exceptional students thrive in school by raising parent and educator awareness and understanding of practical, research-based strategies to address their needs successfully.

Learn more at [www.reel2e.org](http://www.reel2e.org) or follow us on **Social Media** ([Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#), [YouTube](#))

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## Press Angles

1. **Local Community Press** (Palo Alto Weekly / The Almanac / Mountain View Voice)  
**Angle:** Local leadership, local families, local impact.  
**Headline:** Local Nonprofit REEL to Host Inaugural “Bright Minds, Big Laughs” Gala Honoring Community Leaders

### Draft Press Release:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1eTqBC0d-wfbdO7cjl8yWZCW5QE-zDYLQUdtyFC32Ys/edit?tab=t.0#heading=h.4wnvybe4d3g4>

2. **Education-Focused Outlets** (EdSource / Education Week Local / District Newsletters)  
**Angle:** Systems-level change, teacher preparation, measurable impact.  
**Headline:** REEL Gala to Highlight Advances in Neurodiversity-Affirming Educator Preparation

### Draft Press Release:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1HRklr97R2TRe3kBO4bGRJ352silWE6CRn-TDJlcmKhg/edit?tab=t.0#heading=h.hqjgh4niypq8>

3. **Philanthropy / Business Press** (Silicon Valley Business Journal)  
**Angle:** Leadership, philanthropy, nonprofit growth, strategic scaling.  
**Headline:** REEL Launches Inaugural Gala Celebrating Philanthropic Leadership and Regional Impact  
**Draft Press Release:**  
[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1JVGWLSXZvWNAqA4J4Pfdt9JhBEY6PW7C\\_KiCgJu-DYk/edit?tab=t.0](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1JVGWLSXZvWNAqA4J4Pfdt9JhBEY6PW7C_KiCgJu-DYk/edit?tab=t.0)
  
4. **Parenting / Family Publications** (Bay Area Parent, Parents Press)  
**Angle:** Hope, identity, family empowerment.  
**Headline:** An Evening of Laughter and Hope for Families Raising Neurodivergent Kids