



Fifth graders at Lincoln Academy in Lakeland, FL, busy at work testing the water quality in their school's "wetlands."



At John Stanford, in Seattle, WA, every child and teacher learns a language.

SEVEN SURPRISING AWARD-WINNING

There are many myths about award-winning schools. Most attribute outstanding school success to money or luck—generous state dollars, corporate sponsorships, that one-in-a-million principal who could run a small country in his spare time. Sure, these things help, but what we've found with the 20 schools that walked away with this year's Intel and Scholastic Schools of Distinction Awards (www.schoolsofdistinction.com) is that none are waiting around for luck to make a difference in the classroom. Schools of Distinction winners come from every type of community—the richest to the poorest. Their teachers are veterans, newbies, and

in between, but they all share a passion for reaching kids. You might be surprised by the lengths they'll go to, but you can't help but be inspired by the results.

1 AWARD-WINNING SCHOOLS... SPEND A DAY EACH WEEK TEACHING TEACHERS.
At St. Raphael the Archangel Elementary School in Louisville, Kentucky, every K-8 teacher has one full day out of the classroom each week to use for professional development. On their "Directed Learning" day, teacher teams hold meetings, work on grade-level goals, and collaborate on special projects. They participate in professional development workshops on

everything from technology to reading strategies and enjoy some individual planning time. Meanwhile, their students spend the day in "specials"—such as music, art, library, a second language, and physical education.

When Principal Paul DeZarn introduced this wild notion six years ago, he expected serious resistance. But it didn't take long for everyone to see the many benefits of the school's unique schedule. Teachers have an easier time meeting with parents. Mentors have more time to work with new teachers. Best of all, says second-grade teacher Stephanie Schrader, "for the first time, I really feel like I have a team. I can learn from them and they can learn from me."



At KIPP Gaston College Prep, in North Carolina, students and teachers have their eyes on the prize: college.

THINGS ABOUT SCHOOLS

This year's Intel and Scholastic Schools of Distinction Award winners are redefining "best practice." Take a look. **Pamela Wheaton Shorr**

2 AWARD-WINNING SCHOOLS... TEACH MATH ALL DAY.

At Fullerton Elementary School in Roseburg, Oregon, students eat, sleep, and breathe higher-order math. Throughout the day, teachers at this K-5 school teach a series of related 20 to 40 minute math "strands," covering topics such as algebraic relationships and number sense. Kindergartners in Tamara Rasmussen's class, for instance, start on patterns by working with blocks. Later in the day, Rasmussen will return to patterns by having students study the rings of a pineapple. Reading a rhyming book spurs a third strand. It is a chance to stretch the kids' thinking, and have them dig into early

math concepts. "I'm teaching how it all connects," says Rasmussen. "And one day, I hope they'll say, 'Hey, I did that in kindergarten.'"

The math strand approach may seem simple, but as Principal Mickey Garrison explains, it teaches problem-solving and critical thinking. "It isn't just about math. It's a way to get kids to think deeply," she explains, a skill that will help them in reading, writing, and everything they do.

3 AWARD-WINNING SCHOOLS... HARKEN BACK TO THE ONE-ROOM SCHOOLHOUSE.

Holly Flora has a hard time remembering how many first graders she has in her primary

learning center at Washington Elementary School in Kingsport, Tennessee. There are a hundred K-2 students in the multi-grade classroom she shares with three other teachers.

For each subject, students are grouped together in small learning teams based on ability level rather than grade or age. "We use a lot of the same concepts as they did in a one-room schoolhouse," says Flora. "But I think past teachers had a much harder job." The difference is teachers at Washington Elementary work as a team, sharing lesson plans, ideas, and responsibilities. They also enjoy technological tools that help engage and support the children at their exact skill level. >>



Students consult their principal at John Stanford International in Seattle, WA, a "Best of the Best" winner.



Still, like the children in Laura Ingalls Wilder's day, Washington Elementary kids rarely see a textbook. Instead, the children work their way through three-year themes and projects designed to cover state objectives. Day to day, teachers offer short lessons and model work, and children work their way independently through a daily outline of learning activities that must be completed.

Flora, who has taught at Washington for four of her ten years as a teacher, finds the learning center approach to be more than just an effective teaching strategy. "The school is a very pleasant place to be," she says.

4 AWARD-WINNING SCHOOLS... GET KIDS (AND PARENTS) TO COME TO SCHOOL ON SATURDAY.

In the 13 years Laura Monson has been at Cordova Middle School in Phoenix, Arizona, the instructional specialist has learned that one of the most important roles for schools in impoverished communities is to help children widen their life-expectations. At Cordova, many parents have only an eighth-grade education and previously wouldn't dare to dream of college for their children. Their teachers, however, knew that the first step to realizing a future is to plan for it, so together they created an innovative Saturday Academy.

These weekend classes are out of the ordinary. For instance, during a class called "Reality Check," students play characters with different occupations and salaries. They are sent from station to station paying for things they need or want—rent, food, and clothing. It doesn't take long before they see that they can earn more money with a college degree than without one. "There is nothing wrong with an honest blue-collar job," says Principal Karen Williams. "But, we want our children to see that they have choices."

That attitude goes for parents, too. Saturday programs for grown-ups include everything from parenting advice to GED classes. Williams says the programs are designed and implemented by her teachers, and she is thrilled at the leadership role they've taken in guiding the community toward a better future.

5 AWARD-WINNING SCHOOLS... LOOK TO HOLLYWOOD FOR INSPIRATION.

The language of this generation, believes Dr. Tim Tyson, principal of Mabry Middle School in Marietta, Georgia, is multimedia. That's why, back in 2001, Tyson went Hollywood, creating the Mabry Film Festival for student movies. The festival fulfilled two purposes: technology inte-

gration and kid motivation. Teachers broke their sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade classes into teams, and asked them to produce a two-minute film. The school didn't have a lot of equipment back then, so everybody had to share. "It was frightening at first," Tyson acknowledges. But over time, they worked out the difficulties and teachers were able to concentrate on developing the planning, thinking, and writing skills kids would need to make powerful multimedia statements.

Nature photographer and seventh-grade science teacher Chris Swanson can tell you firsthand. Swanson gave his students 10- to 40-second clips from footage that he'd shot in Botswana and Zimbabwe to use in their movies. Some of the shots included elephant families in the wild. One group of kids compared this footage to elephants at the Atlanta Zoo, many of whom suffer from skin diseases and other problems. The students then conducted phone interviews with an exotic animal expert at the University of Georgia about the diseased animals. Ultimately, students lobbied the Board of Education to stop all field trips to the Atlanta Zoo until the elephant situation was fixed. "Filmmaking broadens the way kids look at a topic," says Swanson. "They think like scientists instead of science students."

(Continued on page 51)



Morning at Lincoln Academy in Lakeland, FL. As we took photos, this young student snapped back! A future journalist?

Right: At Lee Elementary School in Tampa, FL, children endure school bus commutes of an hour or more for the quality of education.



SCHOOLS OF DISTINCTION: Inspiration in 10 Categories

Meet this year's winners of the Intel and Scholastic Schools of Distinction Awards. These outstanding schools—selected out of an initial pool of more than 3,000 schools—won \$10,000 from the Intel Foundation (\$25,000 for the two Best of the Best winners).

Plus, each school will receive \$200,000 in goods and services from these generous sponsors: Agilix, Blackboard, Dell, eInstruction, FutureKids, Gateway, Microsoft, Pitsco, Primedia, Riverdeep, SAS, Scantron, Scholastic, SchoolNet, and Smart Technologies.

To learn how your school can enter next year, see page 34, or visit www.schoolsofdistinction.com

BEST OF THE BEST

- John Stanford International (K–8), Seattle, WA
- Academy of Allied Health (9–12), Neptune, NJ

Academic Achievement

- KIPP Gaston College Prep (5–8), Gaston, NC
- El Magnet at Reagan Elem. (K–6), Odessa, TX

Collaboration (External)

- John Stanford International (K–8), Seattle, WA
- Academy of Allied Health, (9–12), Neptune, NJ

Leadership Excellence

- Cordova Middle School (4–8), Phoenix, AZ
- Northwest High School

(9–12), Justin, TX

Literary Achievement

- Auburn Early Education Center (K), Auburn, AL
- JP McConnell Middle School (6–8), Loganville, GA

Mathematics Achievement

- Fullerton IV Elementary (K–5), Roseburg, OR
- Rocky River High School (9–12), Rocky River, OH

Professional Development Excellence

- St. Raphael the Archangel (K–8), Louisville, KY
- Cresthill Middle School (7–8), Highlands Ranch, CO

Science Achievement

- Phelps Elementary School

(PreK–6), Phelps, KY

- West Hawaii Explorations Academy (7–12), Kailua-Kona, HI

Teamwork (Internal)

- Washington Elementary School (K–5), Kingsport, TN
- Middletown High School (9–12), Middletown, MD

Technology Excellence

- Lee Elementary School (K–5), Tampa, FL
- Advanced Technologies Academy (9–12), Las Vegas, NV

Technology Innovation

- Lincoln Academy (K–5), Lakeland, FL
- Mabry Middle School (6–8), Marietta, GA



Lincoln Academy teachers and administrators show their pride.

award-winning schools *(Continued from page 32)*

6 AWARD-WINNING SCHOOLS... LET KIDS SNORKEL AND CLIMB ACTIVE VOLCANOES.

When they say “project-based learning” at West Hawaii Explorations Academy (WHEA) in Kailua-Kona, Hawaii, they aren’t kidding. In fact, recently a student considering the charter school told his mom that the hands-on approach was way too hard, and he wanted to go instead to a school with worksheets. But for motivated kids who are interested in scientific exploration, WHEA is an academic wonderland. “We take kids on a journey, and teach them how to be self-learners,” says Heather Nakakura, director and teacher at this unique school for grades 7–12.

WHEA focuses on marine science, botany, agriculture and energy. Projects are created by students, who often work with outside mentors and experts on their projects. Recently, students worked with a researcher at the Mauna Loa Solar Observatory to collect and analyze volcanic smog (vog) from Kilauea Volcano. Another project had students collecting data on the health of the reefs at Kona beaches. Nakakura began teaching at the school 11 years ago. “Before, as a classroom teacher, I never knew if I made a difference,” she says. “Here, there are little miracles happening all the time.”

7 AWARD-WINNING SCHOOLS... HAVE KIDS AND TEACHERS LEARN A NEW LANGUAGE.

Karen Kodama, principal of The John Stanford International School of Seattle, Washington, believes that today’s children need a global perspective and should be immersed in foreign languages, world geography, culture, and economics. At John Stanford, everyone must learn a second language, either Spanish or Japanese. That means everyone, from teachers to the kindergartners. “We want to educate world citizens who respect and value all cultures,” says Kodama.

It’s much more than just language skills. The school is dedicated to creating global connections. After a plane crash killed a local minister who had been working with a poor Mexican

village, the school decided to get involved. They raised funds for the village children. Later, a group of staff members and parents flew down to see the needs of the village school firsthand. That’s when the philosophy of John Stanford really kicked in. School families and staff members flew down during their spring breaks to paint

rooms and build bookshelves and fill them with books.

Today, many John Stanford students attend their new Mexican sister school for a week each year, conversing in Spanish and learning about Mexican culture. “Our students have international friendships now,” says Kodama, “and it changes the way they see the world.” □

Island Right