



The John Stanford International School and the Academy of Allied Health and Science Set Their Sights on Excellence

The John Stanford International School in Seattle, Washington, is a medium-sized public K-5 school. Their program is centered around international education, foreign language immersion, and establishing partnerships which foster high achievement within the global community. Similarly, the Academy of Allied Health and Science in Neptune, New Jersey, a small, public vocational 9-12 high school, strives to engage their learners with the broader community through a wide variety of partnerships. Both schools have been selected as the Best of the Best for the 2005 Intel and Scholastic Schools of Distinction Award.

From their very beginning in 2000, the Stanford School began their existence founded on the idea of community-based collaboration. Their initial partnership was with the University of Washington Language Learning Center. In addition to the curricular support and assistance received from the university, the school quickly established other partnerships with the Seattle business community to accelerate their programs and meet the needs of their student body.

For the Academy of Allied Health and Science, involvement with the community has been a cornerstone since their inception. As a health and science vocational school, students are required to complete a variety of service learning projects as well as working in a series of internships to better prepare them for post-secondary education. The programs of the Academy of Allied Health engage students with a rigorous program of learning where work in the community helps them to both understand the needs of diverse communities as well as begin to work in the fields of health and medicine.

Case Study

Intel and Scholastic Schools of Distinction

John Stanford International School
Seattle, Washington

Academy of Allied Health and Science
Neptune, New Jersey

Overview

Two schools, the John Stanford International School and the Academy of Allied Health and Science are meeting the challenges of today by using technology, leadership and professional development to engage their community.

Effective Leadership

Central to the development of both schools has been leadership at all levels.

Sustained Professional Development

Teachers, staff, and administration spend time learning how to improve their practice.

Engaged Community of Learners

Students and staff alike benefit from the close relationship the schools maintain with their communities.

“ It is difficult to put into words how hard the teachers, staff, and students work to connect with the community. It is more than their job, it is their passion. ”

-Tim McCorkall, Assistant-Superintendent

Intel and Scholastic have teamed up to develop the Schools of Distinction Award program. This program highlights successes of the best schools in the United States, celebrates their effective use of technology, demonstrates the benefits of strong teamwork, and showcases the classroom practices of excellent teachers. All in all, schools were judged in ten categories including collaboration with the community. Over 3000 schools participated in the application process. Two schools from each category, one in elementary and one in secondary were selected as winners of the Intel and Scholastic Schools of Distinction. Each have received a grant for \$10,000 from the Intel Foundation and a prize package provided by additional sponsors worth over \$200,000 per school.

Situation

Two schools were selected for overall excellence by naming them the Best of the Best. Judges looked for excellence in the use of technology, involvement of parents and community, professional development, teamwork and high academic standards. The two Best of the Best schools each received a total grant of \$25,000 from the Intel Foundation.

Both schools typify the goals of the Intel and Scholastic Schools of Distinction Award – exceptional leadership, sustained, high-quality professional development, impressive technology integration, and a commitment to collaborating with their community. Both schools have won numerous awards for excellence in both academic achievement and community involvement. All of these traits and more help both schools to set their sights on nothing short of excellence.

This case study provides an in-depth look at the comprehensive approach taken by the two Best of the Best winners, the John Stanford International School in Seattle, Washington, and the Academy of Allied Health and Science in Neptune, New Jersey. At the end you will find some questions to consider, designed to spark discussions about what your school can learn from these exemplary practices.

Effective Leadership

Setting Goals and Developing Curriculum

Effective collaboration does not stand alone as something that just happens within a school. It has to be carefully planned for and developed with strategic goals and planning. Those goals must also include the ways in which partnerships are going to be leveraged within the curriculum of a school. The John Stanford International School has, from the outset, approached the process of goal setting and strategic planning as integral to their success.

Principal Karen Kodama believes “having my teachers work to set goals for incorporating technology into their curriculum has been a great first step.” This plan for integration, however, doesn't exist in a vacuum. “We see technology integration as a holistic plan – everyone from teacher, staff, and administration is responsible.” That attitude, of sharing responsibility is key, according to Kodama, to the success of the school's strategic planning. Kodama also insists that planning for success is much more than just determining how to best use technology. It is really an issue of how to best use what they have available and to build on her teachers' strengths.

“ My goal is to provide direction, open up avenues of responsibility, and then step aside. The great teachers we ’ve hired will run with it. ”

- Robert Cancro, Principal

At the Academy of Allied Health and Science, goal setting and planning are made by a strategic planning committee. The committee is tasked with a wide variety of school improvement assignments. Paramount throughout all of their planning work is the focus on integrating the partners they already have with the ones they hope to have. “We see strategic planning as something all parties can participate in – teachers, administration, students, and our constituency,” says Principal Robert Cancro.

Setting the Stage for Collaboration

Leaders within the school from the administrative office to the Principal and Vice-Principals all take seriously the goals, discussions, and practices of their staff. In order to effectively collaborate within the building and without, leaders have to be ready to monitor and adjust their implementation plans at the drop of a hat. “When a new opportunity to work with a local community comes along, we try hard to maximize their willingness to be involved,” Cancro contends.

Moreover, leaders have to be prepared to “stay out of the way ” of teachers who have great ideas which are aligned with the goals of the school and the expectations of parents. Teachers at both of these schools know their leadership has an open-door policy where new ideas will be listened to. Administrators have also set clear guidelines (via strategic planning committees) to move ideas from suggestion to reality.

Distributing Responsibility

At the Academy of Allied Health and Science, new Principal Robert Cancro was overwhelmed by the extent to which teachers were willing to take on new tasks to improve the school. “During my first summer, before classes began, I was blown away by the number of teachers who came in during the summer – on their own time – to work on curriculum and other planning committees. ” To Cancro, this behavior was based on the idea of distributed responsibility. “Give the teachers ownership of as much as you can and they will pick up the ball and run with it.”

At the Stanford International school, all of the classes spend half of their day immersed in either Spanish or Japanese. Classes have sister-school and sister-class relationships which are managed by the individual teachers. “ Teachers work with other classes to establish relationships with other schools that help further our goals, ” says Kodama. Without their own buy-in, none of this would be possible.

For teachers at both schools, their initiative and enthusiasm for teaching and for their subjects is never at odds with the goals of the school. The administration works hard to engender a sense of collaborative spirit and responsibility. The successes and recognition of those successes is shared by everyone not just one particular administrator or teacher.

Leaders on Special Assignment

Both schools have recognized how important it is to give teachers and other staff members more than just the allotted professional development hours. Of course, this desire has been moderated by the costs of taking teachers outside of the classroom.

To accomplish enhanced professional development, the John Stanford School appoints two teachers per year on special assignment as educational technologists. One of their classes is taken by another staff member so those particular teachers can devote that time to keeping abreast of the latest developments, applications, and tools. Each teacher routinely reports out (individually and in staff meetings) as to their findings.

“ Improving practices begins with a commitment from each member of my staff and the collaboration of experts from within my building and from without. ”

- Karen Kodama, Principal

The Academy of Allied Health and Science takes advantage of the fact that many of their instructors are already specialists within their field. A number of teachers are health care professionals or are working towards certification. Additionally, teachers are partnered up with doctors, nurses, researchers at local institutions like the Jersey Shore Medical Center to team-teach specific classes. This also helps to foster the collaborative spirit.

The vision of one leader has not been enough to make either of these schools a success. The vision for each has come from a mission-driven approach where everyone involved with the schools – beginning with students and parents while also connecting with the broader community – knows the goals for the school in the form of a clear and effective mission statement. Collaboration, leadership and professional development are integral to the day to day functions of the school.

Sustained Professional Development New Technologies and Enhanced Strategies

Effective professional development in both the John Stanford International School and the Academy of Allied Health and Science is founded on one simple principle: effective practice. Principal Karen Kodama notes, “ we have the great fortune to have a wealth of technological resources which we’ v e worked very hard to acquire. The struggle has really been to find effective ways to get our teachers and our students using them for the greatest benefit. ” At the Academy of Allied Health, they have similarly tried to build on the strategies that have worked for them to create new partnerships and to enhance learning outside of the walls of the classroom.

“ For our students to be successful, the teachers must take advantage of the latest technologies in health care and join them together with best practices, ” says Academy of Allied Health Assistant-Superintendent, Tim McCorkall. To do that, they have taken the approach of targeting many of their professional development hours to two areas: effective use of technology and enhancing relationships in the community.

Resources for effective implementation

Both Principals at these schools share a similar approach to fostering effective practice. Along with distributing responsibility to classroom teachers, they also build structures for reporting based on technology teams, strategic planning committees, and aiding teachers who are advanced adopters of technologies.

Most schools tend to have teachers who quickly take advantage of resources at their disposal. Whether it is laptops, wireless connections, handheld computers, or even digital projectors, the goal is to find the “ e arly adopting ” teachings and identify ways for them to share their learnings and best practices. Cancro notes, “ we see our best teachers as mentors to everyone else in the building. We both expect and reward these skilled practitioners as they help to forward our entire program. ”

As with just about any school, neither of these has all the resources they want to use within their old building. Both have established community partnerships to help students and teachers get access to experts and other technologies from willing business partners.

Community partnerships

The communities in the Neptune, New Jersey, area and Seattle, Washington, area both bring considerable knowledge and expertise which the schools use to their best advantage. What both schools have done is to build pathways for connecting to their broader community to make it as easy as possible for collaborations to take place.

At the Stanford School, they have established a regularly scheduled Business Breakfast where community leaders meet with staff, teachers, and students of the school to become better versed in both the needs but also the successes of the school. At their first breakfast, the Stanford school raised in excess of \$35,000, which was enough to help them make their first new computer purchase. This also set the stage – using their technical business partners – to help develop new trainings and professional development opportunities to best take advantage of their new purchases.

Since their founding, the Academy of Allied Health and Sciences has worked tirelessly with the Jersey Shore Medical Center and the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey as locations for placement of students for service learning and mentor projects. They have also worked closely with both institutions to help inform both their curriculum and pedagogy.

Teachers as learners

Carving out more time for professional development is a costly and difficult proposition. The Stanford school budgets 60 hours per year for teacher professional development while the Academy of Allied Health only has 36 hours per year. One of the ways they overcome these shortfalls of time is to encourage teachers as well as students to become life long learners within their disciplines.

“ We take advantage of the five professional development specialists within our district to maximize our learnings, ” says Allied Health Principal Robert Cancro. “ Moreover, whenever we conduct trainings for students, we also expect our staff to participate as appropriate. ” One example took place during a First Aid training for students, when some of the teachers took advantage to help further their own learnings in becoming a certified trainer.

Engaged Community of Learners

Reaching out to help all students connect and learn

For both the John Stanford International School in Seattle and the Academy of Allied Health and Science in New Jersey, collaboration with the communities in which they are located is paramount. The benefits in taking advantage of the interest, knowledge, and expertise that are present are so great that they make it well worth the investment of time and financial resources.

At the Stanford School, language immersion is one of the core principles of the school. All students spend half of their day in a Japanese or Spanish immersion program. Of course, that program is much more than simply learning and practicing the language. History, culture, and collaboration are all part of the curriculum. For example, students in the Japanese immersion program complete a series of joint projects with counterparts in a sister school in Japan. One project focuses on increasing empathy and understanding of the differing cultures. Students took home stuffed animals and created a “ day in the life ” journal of what his or her life was like at home. Then, using video conference tools, students presented to each other across the ocean detailing what that animal did and what their daily life is like. “ This was a great project for our youngest students to begin to understand daily life in another culture, ” says Principal Karen Kodama. “ It helps to encourage a sense of empathy for what life is like for a person very similar to themselves. ”

These processes which encourage collaboration with others start at the youngest levels. Students in kindergarten at the Stanford school are taught to use presentation software as a means to share bits of their life with others. One teacher said, “ it is a great way to begin integrating technology and it helps to spark interest in learning about themselves and about the world on the part of our students. ”

For the Academy of Allied Health and Science, one of the major emphases of their instruction is service learning internships. All students are mentored by health professionals from within the community to help them understand more about the practices of the health care industry. Not only does each student work with a particular mentor, but they also serve out a placement in a series of facilities. “ All of our students are exposed through their internship to a variety of health care environments. This includes everything from internships with surgeons, dentists, therapists, and general practitioners. “ T hese experiences have a tremendous impact on our students and what they are hoping to do after graduation. ”

Working closely with community partners

Along with creating programs for their students to collaborate outside the walls of the classroom, the administration of both schools also works closely to collaborate with all the interested parties in their area. For Kodama, at the Stanford school, the roots of their program are grounded in collaboration. From their inception they have been working with the University of Washington, whose Provost made the Stanford school one of their five major initiatives in education for 2000. “ T heir support has been invaluable in helping us to succeed. ”

In New Jersey, the Academy of Allied Health is a school where the focus is, in many ways, expressly vocational. According to many students, “ we are here because we are interested and committed to the world of health care and medicine. We want to get a head start on the careers we ’v e chosen and this school is the best way to do that. ” Such passion makes it easier for the staff and administration to tap into the interest of the community. “ T hey don ’t see our students as outsiders, ” says Principal Cancro, “ but rather as future workers and leaders. That is a big advantage. ”

Working with your community to engage your students, faculty, and administration is no longer an issue which can be put aside. It is a necessity. To be successful, it is essential for any school to collaborate and extend the learning well beyond school hours and the walls of the building.

Questions to Consider

Once you have read about the John Stanford International School and the Academy of Allied Health and Science, you may want to explore the strategies your own school is using to address similar challenges. Here are some questions to help spark discussions about effective practices within your school community. Recognizing your own strengths will help you to get ready to apply for the Intel and Scholastic Schools of Distinction Award.

Effective Leadership

What is your school doing to build buy-in for school improvement efforts from teachers, students, parents and the larger community?

What are the benefits of the John Stanford and Academy of Allied Health 's collaborative approaches to school leadership (e.g. distributed responsibility, tech teams, etc) ?

Would a similar strategy work in your school?

Sustained Professional Development

How does your school provide ongoing professional development to improve classroom practice?

How is your school taking advantage of the knowledge-base of parents, business and community leaders to aid in professional development?

What are the benefits of encouraging teachers to become instructional leaders?

Engaged Community of Learners

What has the John Stanford School and the Academy of Allied Health gained from reaching out to the broader community?

What is your school doing to build connections with students, parents, businesses, and other community members?

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