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Tucson schools named 'best in class'

By [MARY BUSTAMANTE](#)
Tucson Citizen

Live and breathe math.

Check students' progress at every corner.

Have high expectations and push critical thinking.

This is some of the advice representatives from three local schools will give at an Arizona Department of Education conference in Tempe today.

The event, "Determined to Succeed: Stories of School Improvement," highlights Arizona's 20 "best-in-class" schools.

The schools were determined by a recent study by Arizona State University, the Arizona Department of Education and Prism Decision Systems LLC.

The three local schools are Hollinger Elementary and Pueblo Garden Elementary, both in the Tucson Unified School District, and charter school Luz Academy of Tucson.

"Arizona educators want to know what higher-performing schools are doing so they can reproduce those effective practices in their schools," said state Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Horne.

Also, the schools with the highest performance for their levels of poverty and English language learners were considered benchmark, or "frontier," schools, said Pueblo Gardens Principal Marco Ramirez.

Benchmarking matches highly performing schools with peers of similar characteristics in order to replicate the same results.

additional information

Arizona's 20 "best-in-class" schools

Alhambra Traditional School, Alhambra Elementary District

Anasazi Elementary School, Scottsdale Unified

Arcadia High School, Scottsdale Unified

Arizona School For The Arts, Phoenix Charter

Balsz Elementary School, Balsz Elementary District

Big Park Community School, Sedona-Oak Creek Unified

Cheyenne Traditional School, Scottsdale Unified

Dateland Elementary School, Hyder Elementary District

Glendale High School, Glendale Union High School District

Hollinger Elementary School, Tucson Unified

Horizon Elementary School, Glendale Elementary District

John M. Anderson Elementary School, Chandler Unified

Larkspur Elementary School, Paradise Valley Unified

Luz Academy of Tucson, a Tucson charter

Pueblo Gardens, Tucson Unified

Silvestre S. Herrera, Phoenix Elementary

Stevenson Elementary School, Douglas Unified

Sunnyslope High School, Glendale Union High School District

Washington High School, Glendale Union High School District

Wilson Elementary School, Wilson Elementary District

Source: Arizona Department of Education

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How the schools achieved their successes varied.

"We assess children at every benchmark, and with other measures than the AIMS test," Hollinger Principal Kathy Bolles. "We always know where are children are academically. And there is a real community feeling. Parents are very supportive and always around."

The school also helps parents by offering them English classes and sending their students' homework instructions home in Spanish.

Math is a main focus at Pueblo Gardens, in its second year as a benchmark program. Ninety percent of all third-graders passed AIMS and 50 percent of third-graders received an "excelling" grade in AIMS math.

Ramirez said schools have to pull math to the forefront because: "You never hear of people going to bed with a good math problem or someone saying, 'Last night at dinner, we had the most interesting math conversation.' "

The table conversation, he said, more likely is "I read this great book" or "I have this great book for you."

Yet math is nearly equally as important as literacy when it comes to careers, he said.

"We do deal with skills, but there is a lot of emphasis on developing conceptual understanding," he said. "If they have a strong numbers sense and strong math skills, they will continue to do well in math."

Valerie Johnson, advanced placement coordinator of Luz Academy of Tucson, said the facility is an early college high school working with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Students are tested in the sophomore year to see if they are capable of taking Pima Community College classes their junior year.

Advanced placement classes are available for students, so by the time one graduates from Luz Academy, it's possible to have earned 28 college credits.

That would put the student immediately into his sophomore year in college, Johnson said.

The school also offers tutoring after school and on Saturdays to "beef up" skills so students will be able to get into college-level classes as early as possible.

"And we have schoolwide literacy classes to push their critical thinking," she said.

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1. *Comment by Jim D. (Fairfax) — March 26, 2007 @ 6:43AM*

Only 3 in Tucson ought to say something about the state of schools here, but then most parents don't care if their kids stay stupid as long as their taxes don't go up.

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