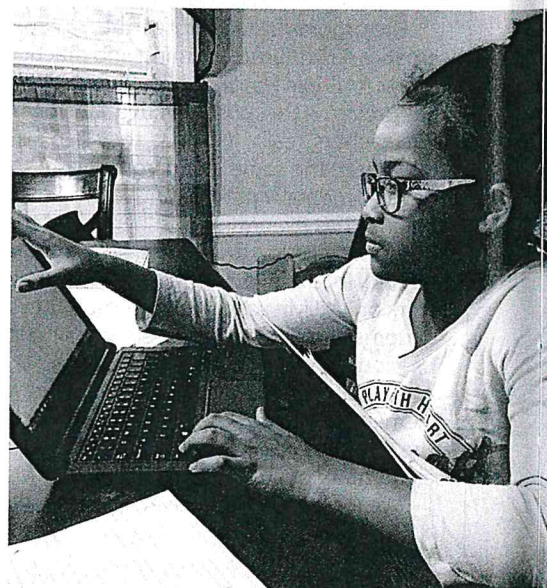
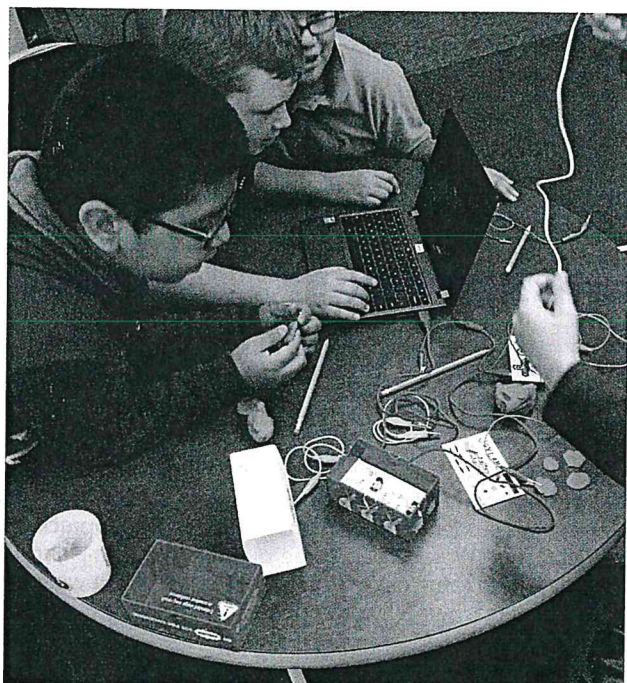
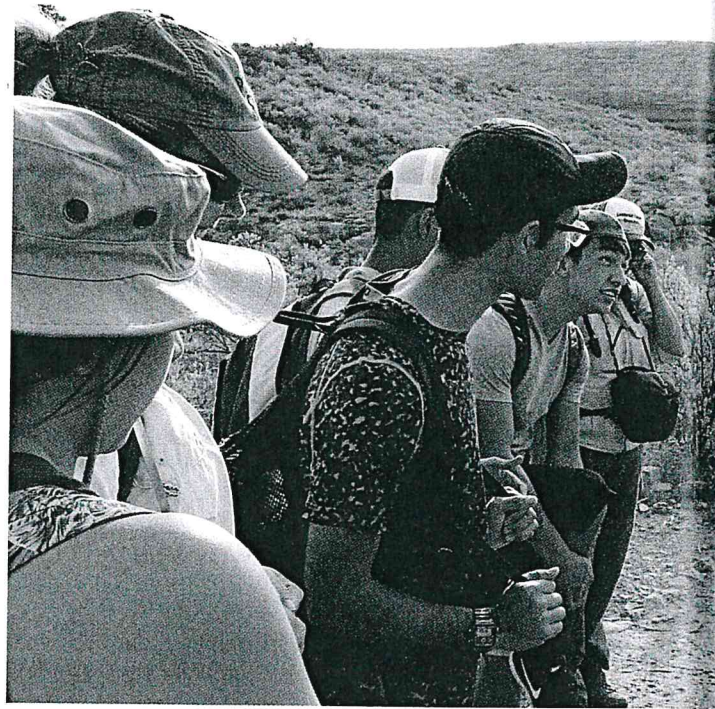
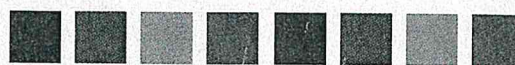


# DISTRICTS OF DISTINCTION







# Self-sufficiency solves problems

Supporting students in their lives outside school pays off in the classroom

Today's education leaders increasingly take it upon themselves to tackle the external challenges their students and teachers confront beyond school hours. These varied solutions also stretch back into classrooms to enhance instruction and increase achievement.

The 45 schools and systems recognized by this year's District of Distinction program have created home-grown initiatives to support students' social-emotional development, to provide powerful new opportunities for career-focused STEM learning and to improve the skills of educators.

Our most remote honoree (by far) serves students on Prince of Wales Island in southern Alaska, which can be reached only by boat or seaplane. Administrators in the Southeast Island School District connected learning with nutrition. To get once-scarce and expensive fresh fruit to students, educators there built greenhouses—powered by wood boilers and fertilized by a fish farm—for students to manage.

More districts have also made mental health a high priority. Ocean City School District in New Jersey and Hamburg Central School District in New York, for example, have engaged their communities and implemented professional development to ensure adults know how to respond when students are struggling emotionally. Rural districts, meanwhile, continue to provide advanced science instruction far away from college campuses, major corporations and other urban resources. In Texas, educators at tiny Comstock ISD near the Mexico border have teamed students with archaeologists to digitally map a local cemetery and to document cave paintings.

The solutions on the following pages serve as models for other districts, and cover the K12 spectrum, from English language learners to dropout prevention to data-driven decision-making to water conservation.

For more information about Districts of Distinction, including a list of current and past honorees, visit [districtadministration.com/dod](http://districtadministration.com/dod).

—Matt Zalaznick

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V+S+C

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**AN ISLAND OF SUSTAINABILITY**—Students in the remote Southeast Island School District in Alaska learn to grow their own produce.

## Health and Wellness

### Food Security and Local Employment

Southeast Island School District  
Prince of Wales Island, Alaska

**CHALLENGE:** Several of the district's communities are connected by only a boat or float plane, and only one has a grocery store. Fresh produce is hard to come by and expensive, so getting nutritious food to students is difficult.

**INITIATIVE:** Wood-fired boilers heat greenhouses that contain organic, aquaponic

systems relying on fish for fertilizer. Produce grown on-site feeds students and is also sold to the community. Many sites also now have chickens, raised-bed gardens, ducks, geese and rabbits. One site even has a 100-tree orchard. The greenhouses provide hands-on educational opportunities in subjects such as farming, water chemistry, pest

management and business management.

**IMPACT:** "No student will forget mean, median or mode when they learn it with chicken eggs," Superintendent Lauren Burch says. Students learn a variety of practical life skills, and two school sites have reduced fuel consumption to zero.

**ADVICE:** "Wood-fired boilers make sense here where fuel oil is so expensive and where there are a thousand miles of roads with few people and countless dead or down trees," says Burch. "Greenhouses make educational and nutritional sense in any school district." The program also better connects students with their island community.