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Keeping up with change and innovation to teach 'digital natives' earns educator national award

A teacher who describes children as 'digital natives' and is passionate about integrating ICT to engage, motivate and enhance 21st Century learners will receive an ASG National Excellence in Teaching Award (ASG NEiTA) on March 16 at a presentation ceremony in Melbourne.

"Students today are digital natives, they have been born into a highly technological world. They inhabit, navigate and communicate within a society which is both technologically and information-rich. I see ICT as one of many tools for learning and not something to be taught in isolation. I love seeing teachers come on board with embedding technology in their classrooms."

Athena Hammond is the ICT co-ordinator and lead teacher at Alawa Primary School in the Northern Territory. Almost 25 percent of students are Indigenous and another quarter speak English as a Second Language/Dialect. Athena will join 11 other outstanding educators from across Australia in receiving the top awards.

Selected from around 1450 nominations in 2017, the 12 national award recipients will be honoured for their inspiring and innovative contribution to teaching. Now in its 23rd year, the ASG NEiTA awards have contributed more than \$1 million in professional development grants to outstanding teachers in Australia and New Zealand.

The ICT team leader and instructional coach says she's stepped out of her comfort zone since joining the school.

"By immersing myself in an environment which encourages growth, change and innovation, this has made the last four years of my career extremely rewarding.

"As technology has grown I have grown with it and I've had the opportunity to share innovative practice and showcase effective strategies, software and applications, mentoring staff as they build their knowledge and competence in integrating ICT into their lessons.

"I am an advocate for Google Classroom, multi devices and the power of using different apps with the classroom environment. As a school we will strive to expose students to skills needed to prepare them with knowledge for the future."

Athena also mentors students who form a student leadership group called Tek Ninjas. Together they create, communicate and collaborate on 21st Century ICT skills.

Athena was nominated by a parent whose son is 'lucky enough' to be on the team.

"Athena prepares for and runs this group, provides breakfast and washes their Tek Ninja shirts each week. These students are given opportunities and responsibilities to improve

their own IT skills as well as help and support and classmates and staff at the school. My son loves this and is very proud to be part of the team.”

She also assisted in introducing the Meaningful Maths program, embedding new teaching strategies and adopting a whole school approach.

“It did take a significant rethinking for students and parents to get them fully immersed in the program as it was a big change to how maths was taught especially with a focus on problem solving, using hands-on resources and student voice. ”

Through her leadership students have improved their NAPLAN Numeracy results by 20 percent. Athena says the Meaningful Maths program has helped close the gap between the national NAPLAN mean and the mean for students at the school.”

Athena has taken the success of the program, leading professional development sessions to new teachers and schools across a network of 15 schools throughout Darwin and Katherine.

The national recipients are selected by a panel of seven judges comprising Director of Early Learning, Ruyton Grammar School, Sarah Denholm; Director of Collegiate Institute, Julie Rimes; Zig Zag Public School and previous ASG NEiTA national recipient, Tiffany Sirisavath; Principal, Saddleworth Primary School and previous ASG NEiTA national recipient, Sheree Mader; Director of Leadership, The Southport School and 2016 ASG NEiTA national recipient, Keith Fennell; Emmanuel Christian School, previous ASG NEiTA national recipient and Space Camp leader, Drew Roberts and ASG NEiTA Chairman Allen Blewitt.

The selection process is rigorous, including a comprehensive nomination outline, a written paper and video presentation by the nominated teacher.

Parents, grandparents, secondary student councils, school boards, councils, parent associations, committees of management and community organisations throughout Australia nominated the 12 deserving and inspirational recipients.

ASG NEiTA Chairman Allen Blewitt says the national recipients have made their mark in local communities throughout Australia.

“It’s so wonderful to see teachers being singled out by members of the community for their personal contribution to education. It’s in local townships, villages and indeed larger, city centres where our ASG NEiTA recipients can be the heartbeat of these communities. For every student they teach, they could be impacting multiple lives as they establish relationships with parents, grandparents and connect the home and school life, creating an eco-system of continued and shared learning and support networks.

“The thread that ties our 12 ASG NEiTA recipients and brings communities together are their common values and educational aspirations. Motivating students to push themselves, creating inclusive spaces, identifying specific developmental and communication needs,

and letting students take charge of their learning are the key drivers behind teaching strategies and innovative approaches happening every day in schools.

"I thank our ASG NEiTA recipients for their passion and persistence in teaching today's young people and for the communities who nominated them, in recognising their outstanding and inspirational qualities."

ASG CEO Tim Mitchell-Adams says the ASG NEiTA recipients are passing on one of the most valuable gifts a young person can receive.

"I congratulate the ASG NEiTA recipients for their significant and personal contribution in achieving better education outcomes for Australian school children. Teachers have an enormous responsibility and right from early childhood education, our ASG NEiTA recipients are putting the building blocks together so that young people are equipped to become confident and competent lifelong learners.

"As students navigate their educational and life journey, our ASG NEiTA recipients are going on a journey of their own. A journey of excitement and wonder as they see their students achieve, through taking risks, accepting challenges and breaking down barriers. Some of these teachers have seen students blossom on the world stage and have careers they love. Our ASG NEiTA recipients are a huge part of these success stories, encouraging, mentoring and leading students to map out their future and reach their full potential, regardless of what that looks like. This is why ASG NEiTA has thrived for the last 21 years. The community thanks and applauds you for the countless hours and dedication you put into teaching their children."

The 12 national recipients will each receive \$5000 professional development grants. For more information and to view their ASG NEiTA profiles go to: www.asg.com.au/neita

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Editor's notes:

The Australian Scholarships Group (ASG) is a member owned organisation, helping to create educational opportunities for children. ASG has been helping families and their children for more than 40 years. During this time, more than 540,000 children have been enrolled with ASG and more than \$2.8 billion in education benefits and scholarship payments returned to members.

The ASG National Excellence in Teaching Awards (NEiTA) started in 1994 in Australia and 1996 in New Zealand. Since inception, more than 35,500 teachers have been nominated by the community in the two countries. More than 1000 teachers have received \$1,000,000 in professional development grants, prizes and endowments.

For more information visit: www.asg.com.au