

2024

AMERICA'S BEST SCHOOLS

AWARD APPLICATION



DUE DATE: NOVEMBER 30, 2023

NATIONAL CENTER FOR URBAN SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION



National Center for Urban School Transformation
3910 University Avenue San Diego, CA 92105



619-594-7905



ncust.com



ncust@sdsu.edu



TABLE OF CONTENTS

OVERVIEW OF THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR URBAN SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION'S AMERICA'S BEST SCHOOLS

AWARD PROGRAM..... I

Purpose of the award program..... I

Who should apply?..... I

How to apply?..... I

How are applications processed?..... II

Awards..... II

Questions..... II

2024 AMERICA'S BEST SCHOOLS INTENT-TO-APPLY FORM..... III

APPLICATION COVER PAGE..... 1

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE HIGH-PERFORMING SCHOOL..... 2

APPLICATION QUESTIONS..... 3

1. Does the school use selective admissions criteria?..... 3

2. Did the school maintain a high rate of attendance and a low rate of chronic absenteeism?" 3

3. Do a large percentage of students qualify for free- or reduced-price lunch or meet other low-income criteria used by your state education agency?..... 3

4. Did the percentage of the school's students demonstrating proficiency on state assessments exceed the statewide average at each grade level?..... 4

5. For each demographic group served at the school, did the percentage of students who demonstrated proficient or advanced performance in each subject exceed the statewide average for all students?..... 5

6. What evidence indicates high and growing achievement among English learners?..... 6

7. Were suspensions rare for each demographic group of students?..... 6

8. Were rates of teacher absenteeism low?..... 7

9. Did a high-percentage of the school's first-year students meet all criteria to be considered second-year students?..... 7

10. Did a high percentage of the school's students graduate in four years?..... 7

11. Did a high percentage of the school's students earn college credit, complete AP or IB courses or pass AP tests?..... 7

12. What happens to make students feel cared for, valued, respected, and capable of school success? What happens to make parents, teachers, and other staff members feel valued and respected?" 8

13. How does the school ensure that all students (at grade level, below grade level, above grade level, special needs, English learners, etc.) have access to rigorous, challenging curricula?" 9

14. What happens to ensure that lessons are improved continuously so students are engaged and likely to learn challenging content?" 10

15. What accomplishments or distinctions have been earned by the school?..... 11

REQUIRED FORMS..... 12

AMERICA'S BEST SCHOOLS AWARD CERTIFICATION PAGE..... 12

AMERICA'S BEST SCHOOLS PHOTOGRAPH PERMISSION FORM..... 13



OVERVIEW OF THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR URBAN SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION'S AMERICA'S BEST SCHOOLS AWARD PROGRAM

Thanks for considering applying for the 2024 America's Best Schools Award. This page provides a general overview of the program.

Purpose of the Award Program

The America's Best Schools Award is designed to identify and celebrate schools possessing many indicators of both educational equity and excellence. America needs to know that there are elementary, middle, and high schools, dual-language schools, and alternative schools where every demographic group served achieves impressive academic results. We recognize that there are many impressive private schools; however, our award program recognizes public schools and public charter schools only. Similarly, we realize that some outstanding public and public charter schools maintain admission policies that exclude typical students; however, our award program is designed specifically to recognize schools that enroll students without regard to their academic strengths.

As we identify and award amazing, high-performing schools, we try to learn about their attributes and the factors that have contributed to their successes. By sharing our findings through our books, articles, webinars, symposia, courses, and district partnerships, we hope to support schools and districts as they strive to improve. Ultimately, we hope to influence increases in the number of schools that achieve outstanding results for every demographic group they serve.

Who Should Apply?

Each potential applicant should review the application items and pay particular attention to the items marked with **bold type**. The items **in bold** describe non-negotiable criteria. **A school should apply only if they meet the criteria specified in every item in bold type**. A school district may submit applications for no more than five schools.

How to Apply?

1. Please prepare and submit the Intent-to-Apply Form (page IV) by Tuesday, November 1, 2023. Submission of the form is not required but is strongly encouraged.

3. Complete the application and submit it to NCUST. To ensure consideration, NCUST must receive the application by 5:00 p.m. Pacific Standard Time on Wednesday, November 30, 2023. Please send:
 - a. Application Cover Page (page 1)
 - b. Completed application
 - c. Certification page with original signatures (page 12)
 - d. Photograph Permission Form (page 13)
 - e. Photographs (see description on page 13)



All of the above items can be mailed to:

National Center for Urban School Transformation
3910 University Avenue
San Diego, CA 92105

Or send electronically to ncust@sdsu.edu.

How are the Applications Processed?

1. When applications are received, NCUST will send a confirmation email to the applicant.
2. NCUST will review all non-negotiable items (those marked with an asterisk) to determine if the application meets all required criteria. If all criteria are met, the school will be identified as a 2024 America's Best School, Honor Roll School. Notification will appear on ncust.com by January 13, 2024.
3. NCUST will review and compare all applications to determine which Honor Roll Schools will be finalists for the America's Best Schools Award. Applicants that present the greatest evidence of academic accomplishment for the demographic groups they serve will be identified as 2024 award finalists. By January 13, 2024, applicants will be notified if they are award finalists.
4. Each finalist school will receive an on-site visit from a team of NCUST personnel; former award-winning principals, administrators, and teachers; and other outstanding educators. The on-site visits will occur during February and March 2024. During each on-site visit, the team will validate the information presented in the school's application; observe classrooms, teacher planning meetings, and student interactions; and interview students, parents, teachers, and support personnel. Based upon all the information acquired, NCUST will identify the schools with the greatest strengths as 2024 America's Best School award winners. Winners will be notified by April 14, 2024.

Awards

Each winning school will receive an expense-paid trip for two people to the America's Best Schools Symposium. At the symposium, the school will be featured in a breakout session and honored at an award luncheon. Additionally, each winning school will receive a large banner, a certificate, a profile on the NCUST website, and an opportunity for students to win cash prizes in a speech contest. Additionally, schools will be designated as bronze, silver, or gold-level winners and receive cash prizes of \$1,000, \$2,500, or \$5,000 respectively.

Questions

Please email questions to ncust@sdsu.edu or call 619-594-7905.



2023 AMERICA'S BEST SCHOOLS INTENT-TO-APPLY FORM

Please submit this one-page form to NCUST by **Tuesday, November 1, 2023**. By submitting this form, you help ensure that NCUST will receive and review your school's application in a timely manner. If a school does not submit the Intent-to-Apply form by November 1st, it may still apply; however, NCUST strongly encourages the submission of the Intent-to-Apply.

We believe our school meets the criteria for the America's Best Schools Award, and we intend to submit a complete application by Wednesday, November 30, 2023.

Name of school: _____

We intend to submit an application in the following category (Choose only one.)

Elementary Middle School High School Dual Language School Alternative

Name of school district: _____

City: _____ State: _____

Grades served in 2023-24: _____

School's website: _____

State education agency (or State Department of Education) website URL where school-level achievement data can be verified: _____

School's phone number: _____

Name of contact person: _____

Position of contact person: _____

Email of contact person: _____

Phone number of contact person: _____

Please send a copy of this form via email to ncust@sdsu.edu



AMERICA'S BEST SCHOOLS AWARD APPLICATION
APPLICATION COVER PAGE



NAME OF SCHOOL DISTRICT:	
NAME OF SCHOOL BEING NOMINATED:	
SCHOOL ADDRESS:	
CITY:	
STATE:	
ZIP CODE:	
SCHOOL OFFICE HOURS:	
MAIN SCHOOL TELEPHONE:	
NAME AND POSITION OF MAIN CONTACT PERSON:	
CONTACT'S E-MAIL ADDRESS:	
PRINCIPAL'S NAME: (IF OTHER THAN CONTACT PERSON)	
PRINCIPAL'S PHONE:	
PRINCIPAL'S E-MAIL ADDRESS:	
SUPERINTENDENT'S NAME:	
SUPERINTENDENT'S PHONE:	
SUPERINTENDENT'S EMAIL:	
PRINCIPAL'S SUPERVISOR (IF OTHER THAN SUPT.) NAME AND POSITION:	
PRINCIPAL'S SUPERVISOR PHONE:	
PRINCIPAL'S SUPERVISOR EMAIL:	



AMERICA'S BEST SCHOOLS AWARD APPLICATION
 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE HIGH-PERFORMING SCHOOL



1. IS THE NOMINATED SCHOOL A CHARTER SCHOOL? YES NO

2. TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS ENROLLED FOR THE PRESENT YEAR AND EACH OF THE PAST TWO YEARS

2021-22: _____ 2022-23: _____ 2023-24: _____

3. GRADES SERVED DURING THE PRESENT YEAR AND EACH OF THE PAST TWO YEARS

2021-22: _____ 2022-23: _____ 2023-24: _____

4. CURRENT STUDENT ENROLLMENT IN 2022-23:

Please rename, add, or omit categories to fit your district or state.	Number	Percentage
ASIAN		
PACIFIC ISLANDER		
BLACK OR AFRICAN AMERICAN		
LATINO/Av OR HISPANIC		
MULTI-RACIAL		
NATIVE AMERICAN		
WHITE OR CAUCASIAN		
OTHER: (PLEASE SPECIFY)		
TOTAL ENROLLMENT		
ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS		
STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES		
STUDENTS MEETING LOW-INCOME CRITERIA		

5. HOW DID YOU LEARN ABOUT AMERICA'S BEST SCHOOLS AWARD COMPETITION?

ATTENDANCE AT NCUST SYMPOSIUM NCUST FLYER NOMINATION FROM DISTRICT

LETTER FROM NCUST NCUST WEBSITE NOMINATION FROM STATE

OTHER: _____



APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. Does the school use selective admissions criteria?

Check which enrollment criteria determine which students can attend your school?

- A. Address (Does the student live in the district boundary or attendance zone boundary?)
- B. Age and/or Grade (Is the student old enough or young enough to enroll at the school or is the student's grade level served at the school?)
- C. First come-First served (Are students admitted until the grade/school is filled?)
- D. **Academic criteria (Are students' prior grades, test scores, or other academic criteria considered in determining enrollment?) If academic criteria are used for a choice/magnet program, what percentage of the school population is served by the choice/magnet program? _____ %**
- E. Other criteria (Please describe:) _____

If D is checked, the school does not qualify for this award competition UNLESS the academic criteria are used for a choice/magnet program that serves less than 10% of the school's students. If E is checked, the school may not qualify for this award competition if the criteria used inhibit the attendance of students with greater academic needs.

- F. **Students are denied continued enrollment if their academic performance falls below certain levels**

If box F is checked the school does not qualify for this award competition.

2. Did the school maintain a high rate of attendance and a low rate of chronic absenteeism?

- A. What was the average daily attendance of students in 2022-23? _____ %
- B. In 2022-23, what percentage of students missed a total of 15 days or more of school? _____ %
No absolute criteria have been set for 2A or 2B. Data from applicants will be compared.

3. Do a large percentage of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, or meet other low-income criteria used by your state education agency?

What number/percentage of students meet free- or reduced-price lunch or state low- income criteria?

- A. Based on 2023-24 enrollment data? NUMBER _____ PERCENTAGE _____ %
- B. Based on 2022-23 enrollment data? NUMBER _____ PERCENTAGE _____ %
- C. Based on 2021-22 enrollment data? NUMBER _____ PERCENTAGE _____ %

Each percentage listed in a, b, and c must be equal to or greater than 60 for Elementary schools, equal to or greater than 50 for middle schools, equal to or greater than 40 for high schools. If for any year, the percentage falls under this threshold, the school does not qualify.



APPLICATION QUESTIONS

4. Did the percentage of the school's students demonstrating proficiency on state assessments exceed the statewide average at each grade level?

- A. What percent of enrolled students in tested grades participated in the state assessment? _____
- B. For each grade tested, list the combined percentage of students who performed at the proficient or advanced levels for your school and the corresponding state-wide percentage who performed at the proficient or advanced levels in 2022-23.

TABLE A: STATE ASSESSMENT PERFORMANCE FOR 2022-23

GRADE % AND STATE %	% PROFICIENT OR ADVANCED ON STATE ASSESSMENT	% PROFICIENT OR ADVANCED ON STATE ASSESSMENT	% PROFICIENT OR ADVANCED ON STATE ASSESSMENT	% PROFICIENT OR ADVANCED ON STATE ASSESSMENT	% PROFICIENT OR ADVANCED ON STATE ASSESSMENT	% PROFICIENT OR ADVANCED ON STATE ASSESSMENT	% PROFICIENT OR ADVANCED ON STATE ASSESSMENT	% PROFICIENT OR ADVANCED ON STATE ASSESSMENT
Your School's Grade 3 %								
State Grade 3 %								
Your School's Grade 4 %								
State Grade 4 %								
Your School's Grade 5 %								
State Grade 5 %								
Your School's Grade 6 %								
State Grade 6 %								
Your School's Grade 7 %								
State Grade 7 %								
Your School's Grade 8 %								
State Grade 8 %								
Your School's Grade 9 %								
State Grade 9 %								
Your School's Grade 10 %								
State Grade 10 %								
Your School's Grade 11 %								
State Grade 11 %								
Your School's Grade 12 %								
State Grade 12 %								



APPLICATION QUESTIONS

Please state the source of your data and the URL: _____

If in at least half the cells in Table A, the percentage of your school's students who scored proficient or advanced was at least equal to the statewide percentage of students who scored proficient or advanced (on the same grade-level assessment), your school meets this eligibility requirement.

Exception: Alternative schools are required to report these data; however, no absolute criteria have been established for alternative schools. Data from alternative school applicants will be compared.

5. For each demographic group served at the school, did the percentage of students who demonstrated proficient or advanced performance in each subject meet or exceed the statewide average for all students in at least one subject area?"

List the official state assessments administered for accountability across the top of Table B. For each assessment administered to at least 20 students in the demographic group listed, list the total number tested and the percentage that scored proficient or advanced in 2022-23.

TABLE B: Disaggregated State Assessment Data for Demographic Groups for 2022-23

Table with 7 columns: (Please list state assessments administered to your students.), Total # Tested, % PROF. OR ADV. ON, % PROF. OR ADV. ON, % PROF. OR ADV. ON, % PROF. OR ADV. ON, % PROF. OR ADV. ON. Rows include ASIAN, PACIFIC ISLANDER, BLACK /AFRICAN AMERICAN, LATINO OR HISPANIC, MULTI-RACIAL, NATIVE AMERICAN, WHITE OR CAUCASIAN, STUDENTS MEETING LOW-INCOME CRITERIA, ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS, STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES, OTHER: (PLEASE SPECIFY), STATE AVERAGE FOR ALL STUDENTS.

For every group with more than 20 students tested, NCUST compares the percentage of students achieving at the proficient and advanced levels with the statewide averages for ALL students. Each demographic group must exceed statewide averages for ALL students in at least one subject area. If one or more demographic groups listed above did not exceed statewide averages in at least one subject area, the school does not qualify for this award competition.

Exceptions: The achievement results for English language learners and students with disabilities will be compared across applicant schools and need not meet the criteria specified above. Alternative schools are required to report these data; however, no absolute criteria have been established for alternative schools. Data from alternative school applicants will be compared.



APPLICATION QUESTIONS

6. What evidence indicates high and growing achievement among English learners?

A. Number of English language learners: _____

What percent of English language learners advanced to a higher level of proficiency on the most recent state English language development assessment? _____ %

No absolute criteria have been set for this question. Data from applicants will be compared.

7. Were suspensions rare for each demographic group of students?

In Table C, list in Column A the total number of students in each demographic group. In Column B, list the number of students in each demographic group who were suspended or expelled from your school at least once in 2022-23. In Column C, list the percentage of students in each demographic group who were suspended or expelled from your school at least once. Then, in Column D, list the total number of days students in the demographic group missed school because of suspensions/expulsions in 2022-23. For example, if during the year, three students with disabilities were suspended for two days each and one student with disabilities was suspended for five days, the number in Column D for students with disabilities would be 11 [(3x2)+(1x5)].

Table C: Out-of-School Suspensions in 2023-24

(Please rename, add, or omit categories below to fit your district or state.)	A NUMBER OF STUDENTS ENROLLED IN THE SCHOOL	B NUMBER SUSPENDED/ EXPELLED AT LEAST ONCE	C PERCENT SUSPENDED/ EXPELLED AT LEAST ONCE	D TOTAL NUMBER OF DAYS STUDENTS IN THE GROUP DID NOT ATTEND SCHOOL BECAUSE OF SUSPENSION
ASIAN				
PACIFIC ISLANDER				
BLACK /AFRICAN AMERICAN				
LATINO/Av OR HISPANIC				
MULTI-RACIAL				
NATIVE AMERICAN				
WHITE OR CAUCASIAN				
STUDENTS MEETING LOW-INCOME CRITERIA				
ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS				
STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES				
OTHER: (PLEASE SPECIFY)				
STUDENTS STATEWIDE				

***For every demographic group listed with an enrollment greater than 20, if the total number of student days lost to suspensions (Column D) is equal to or less than the total number of students enrolled (Column A), the school meets this eligibility requirement. Also, for each row, the percent suspended/expelled at least once (Column C), must be equal to or less than the percentage of students suspended statewide (as noted in the bottom row, Column C)."

Exception: Alternative schools are required to report these data; however, no absolute criteria have been established for alternative schools. Data from alternative school applicants will be compared.



APPLICATION QUESTIONS

8. Were rates of teacher absenteeism low?

In 2022-23, what percentage of teachers was absent for more than a total of 15 school days? _____ %

No absolute criteria have been established for this item. Data from applications will be compared.

****HIGH SCHOOL ONLY****

9. Did a high-percentage of the school's first-year students meet all criteria to be considered second-year students?

A. In 2023-24, how many students started the year as first-year students? _____
(9th graders in most high schools)

B. In 2023-24, how many students started the year as second-year students? _____
(10th graders in most high schools)?

No absolute criteria have been set for 9A and 9B. Data from applicants will be compared.

10. Did a high percentage of the school's students graduate in four years?

A. How many students were enrolled as 9th grade students at the beginning of the 2020-21 academic year? _____

B. How many students graduated by the end of the 2023-24 academic year? _____

C. What is the school's official current 4-year graduation rate? _____

No absolute criteria have been set for 10A, 10B, and 10C. Data from applicants will be compared.

11. Did a high percentage of the school's students earn college credit, complete AP or IB courses, or pass AP tests?

A. How many students were enrolled as 11th or 12th grade students during the 2022-23 academic year? _____

B. How many students earned at least one college credit through concurrent enrollment or dual-enrollment courses? _____

C. How many students completed at least one Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate course during the 2022-23 academic year? _____

D. How many students earned a passing score on at least one Advanced Placement test during the 2022-23 academic year? _____

No absolute criteria have been set for 11A, 11B, 11C, and 11D. Data from applicants will be compared.



APPLICATION QUESTIONS

12. What happens to make students feel cared for, valued, respected, and capable of school success?
What happens to make parents, teachers, and other staff members feel valued and respected?"

Please answer in one page or less. Please write out acronyms and describe programs that might not be common to all schools across the nation.

PROMOTING A POSITIVE, TRANSFORMATIONAL SCHOOL CULTURE:



APPLICATION QUESTIONS

13. How does the school ensure that all students (at grade level, below grade level, above grade level, special needs, English learners, etc.) have access to rigorous, challenging curricula?"

Please answer in one page or less. Please write out acronyms and describe programs that might not be common to all schools across the nation.

ENSURING ALL STUDENTS ACCESS TO RIGOROUS CURRICULA



APPLICATION QUESTIONS

14. What happens to ensure that lessons are improved continuously so students are engaged and likely to learn challenging content?

Please answer in one page or less. Please write out acronyms and describe programs that might not be common to all schools across the nation.

PROVIDING ENGAGING, EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION:



APPLICATION QUESTIONS

15. What accomplishments or distinctions have been earned by the school?

Provide a bulleted list. Examples might include awards, growth data from state assessments, percentages of students completing rigorous courses of study, awards for teaching excellence, or awards earned for school-wide excellence in academic disciplines, art, music, drama, career and technical education, or physical education.

Please answer in one page or less. Please write out acronyms and describe programs that might not be common to all schools across the nation.

OTHER EVIDENCE OF EXCELLENCE:



REQUIRED FORMS

SCHOOL NAME: _____ DISTRICT NAME: _____

America's Best Schools Award Certification Page

NAME OF SCHOOL BEING NOMINATED:	
NAME OF SCHOOL DISTRICT:	
SCHOOL ADDRESS:	
CITY:	
STATE:	
ZIP CODE:	

Collectively, we, the undersigned, nominate the above-named school for the NCUST America's Best Schools Award. We affirm that, to the best of our knowledge, the school meets all of the required eligibility criteria specified in the application form and all of the information contained in this application is accurate. We believe that this school is transforming teaching and learning in a manner that is leading to excellent results for all of the students served.

PLEASE PROVIDE ORIGINAL SIGNATURES OF THE INDIVIDUALS LISTED BELOW.

CONTACT PERSON FOR APPLICATION:		DATE:
PRINCIPAL:		DATE:
PARENT ORGANIZATION PRESIDENT:		DATE:
SUPERINTENDENT:		DATE:
SCHOOL BOARD PRESIDENT:		DATE:
TEACHER:		DATE:
TEACHER:		DATE:
TEACHER:		DATE:
PARENT:		DATE:
PARENT:		DATE:
PARENT:		DATE:



REQUIRED FORMS

America's Best Urban Schools Award Photograph Permission Form

Please send NCUST 15-20 digital photos that represent various activities (including students engaged in instruction) at your school. Photos must be in .jpg format with the highest resolution possible. Please do not create presentations from photos or add graphics or text to photos. Please send images and this signed permission form to NCUST, along with a complete copy of the application by 11/30/2023.

<p>Please find enclosed the required 15-20 high-resolution .jpg digital photos taken for</p> <hr/> <p>I verify that the National Center for Urban School Transformation (NCUST) has permission to use any of the photographs transmitted by our school.</p> <p>NCUST may use these pictures on its website, at its national symposium, in promotional materials, or in other ways it deems appropriate and consistent with the Center's mission.</p> <p>Parents have given permission for the use of any photographs that include images of their children.</p> <p>Adults (including faculty, staff, volunteers, and parents) have given permission for the use of any photographs that include their images.</p> <p>By signing below, I agree to the above stated criteria.</p>

PRINCIPAL'S PRINTED NAME:		
PRINCIPAL'S SIGNATURE:		DATE: