Sharing best practices is integral to the teaching profession. Through the Golden Apple Recognition Program, teachers with engaging and innovative classroom strategies are given the opportunity to share them with the community and with each other, knowing that this is part of the learning and refining process.

The 2017-18 Teachers of Distinction have already been networking with each other and will continue to build the framework to share their best practices with other educators throughout Collier County and beyond.
THE TOOLS OF TECHNOLOGY

Technology integration is a huge part of our lives today, in the classroom and beyond. Through a variety of projects and practices, these teachers are making sure students properly utilize technology as a tool to expand and enhance their learning.

Ian Sharp
Barron Collier High
**Student Created Videos on DNA and Protein Synthesis**
To engage and inspire the students in his biology classes, Mr. Sharp encourages them to create short videos in which they explain and teach each other the scientific concepts. Students post these videos on Twitter, which provides an added avenue for communication among the students, with parents, and with Mr. Sharp.

Jessica Stricker
Corkscrew Elementary
**Teaching Motivated by History, Powered by Technology**
Using technology applications, and activities that incorporate technology, Ms. Stricker is creating a platform that allows students to complete critical thinking tasks, be creative, become innovators, collaborate with each other, and reflect on their ideas. These skills build confidence and enthusiasm for learning.

Joseph Merrill and Kristin Merrill
Lake Park Elementary
**Digital InteGRADEtion: Task Before Apps**
In this 1st grade and 4th grade partnership, the Merrills are infusing technology into standards-based lessons, resulting in full engagement and mastery of content. Within this program, 4th grade students mentor 1st grade students in the proper use of technology, as they have already been taught through the Merrills’ lessons.

Tara L. Barr
Lorenzo Walker Technical High
**Teaching and Learning in a Digital World**
Through the creation of a digital notebook, Ms. Barr has streamlined classwork, homework and grading throughout her science department and beyond. Students learn how to compile all of their work for a certain period of time into a PDF document that is uploaded for easy access by the teachers, who then use an on-line rubric to grade the work. The process is simple and efficient for students, who can keep track of all their work, and for teachers, who have a concise grading rubric across the department and don’t have to manage mounds of paper.

Carol Nichols
Pine Ridge Middle
**Let’s Get Inspired with TI-Nspire!**
With the ultimate goal of student mastery through building a growth mindset, Ms. Nichols creates innovative activities to engage her students in math. One such activity is “TI Nspire,” which allows students to make cross-curricular connections by creating a graphic image of something they are learning about in Social Studies or Language Arts.

Dylan Richard Opper
Pinecrest Elementary
**Digital Literacy in Math Instruction**
In a school where the majority of families do not speak English at home, math is a language that all can understand. Mr. Opper’s practice of using technology as a tool to work collaboratively, communicate effectively, and solve problems has had a profound effect. As the students build their confidence, they solve problems on their own, use multiple approaches to reach a solution, and can provide evidence for their answers.

Mabel Peña
Tommie Barfield Elementary
**Let’s Grow with Technology**
“Failure is how we learn the most” and the growth mindset encourages students to persevere in their learning. Collaboration is a key element in Ms. Peña’s classroom, stimulating communication and teamwork, pushing students to accomplish a difficult task. Combined with the use of technology and movement to reinforce concepts, the Growth Mindset leads to individual empowerment for these 5th graders.

Suela Spahiu
Vineyards Elementary
**Technology: The Mindset that Fuels Digital Learning**
In this kindergarten classroom, Ms. Spahiu’s use of targeted technology is leading to endless possibilities of creation and collaboration. Students are using specific apps to reinforce the content, and the rigor of the curriculum is enhanced through higher order thinking skills, problem solving, and group work, preparing them for the future.

Golden Apple recipient

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Kacee L. Farrar  
Avalon Elementary  
**Building Vocabulary Every Day, in All Ways**

In this 3rd grade classroom, learning new vocabulary is what it’s all about! “Enter”, “Come in”, “Move in”, “Insert yourself” are just some of the phrases these students might hear as their teacher invites them into the classroom. In order to build up their vocabularies, Ms. Farrar utilizes activities that inspire her students to be creative learners.

Theresa Rodriguez Sweigart  
Cypress Palm Middle  
**Reading Makes You Wonder and Lets You Wander**

This teacher knows that the key to learning is still reading. Through a variety of activities like Book Chats, the 40 Book Challenge, and Gallery Walks, Ms. Sweigart is challenging students to step out of their comfort zone, read new books, and share what they learn with others.

Susan M. Felt  
Eden Park Elementary  
**Inclusion That Works**

In this unique classroom, Ms. Felt is one of three teachers making sure that all students are on track and learning the standards. This inclusion classroom provides whole group instruction for the core topics, then splits into three groups, giving teachers the ability to focus on specific needs of the exceptional students, who are encouraged to advocate for themselves. This structure allows all students to feel valued, supported and leads to high achievement.

Gail Pirics  
Golden Gate Middle  
**Building Community and Routines for Language Acquisition**

By teaching the English language through the lens of U.S. History, Ms. Pirics is creating meaningful experiences for her students. Using hands-on tools such as flashcards and interactive notebooks and other multi-sensory routines, students are learning together as a cohesive community, encouraging risk-taking and celebrating success.

Ann Marie Morgiewicz  
Immokalee Community School (RCMA)  
**Pen Pals Transpire from Sandy Hook Tragedy**

“There is nothing like a letter” to lift spirits and encourage others — a lesson Ms. Morgiewicz is teaching through this pen pal project that began in the aftermath of the Sandy Hook tragedy. Elementary school students in Immokalee are sharing life with elementary students in Connecticut each school year. Through this process, they are paying attention to current events, learning how to find their voice through writing, and learning how to connect with children who may be very different than themselves.

Tania Palafax  
Immokalee High  
**Student-Led Harkness Whole Group Discussion**

Using the Harkness Whole Group discussion method, discussions in Ms. Palafax’s 10th grade classroom are student-initiated, student-led and student-focused. In this practice, students take charge of their learning with roles such as facilitator, note-taker and charter, making sure that all students participate and are engaged. Expectations are clear and students rise to the challenge of citing evidence to support their claims, elaborating on their responses, and making connections to the world outside the classroom.

LaTeeya Toombs  
Immokalee Middle  
**Flipping the Classroom**

In this middle school math classroom of English Language Learners, Ms. Toombs makes sure to connect with all the learning styles by “flipping” her class. One half of the students are working on individualized programs on the computer, while the other half is working with her in small group settings with direct instruction, then they switch. With a variety of strategies such as interactive notebooks, foldables, and the computer programs, students are becoming more proficient not only in math, but in the language and culture of the U.S.

Lori H. Galiana  
Marco Island Academy  
**Confident Public Speaking Lessons**

In order to “ace” their AICE Global Perspectives speech presentation, these students are working hard on their public speaking skills. Ms. Galiana uses a variety of strategies, such as theatre techniques to improve stage presence, as well as “get to know you” activities designed to improve their ability to gauge reactions to arguments and discern others’ feelings about various topics.

Jenna L. Zimmer  
Poinciana Elementary  
**Writing with a Real World Purpose**

To instill a love a writing, as well as practical skills, this practice covers three phases. In the Grammar Boot Camp, students spend 21 intense days learning proper grammar. From there, students participate in various Writers’ Workshops throughout the year to learn and refine their writing technique. The final phase is to publish their writing, all the while connecting their topics to real-world places, events, and people.
Florence Rowley
Alternative Schools

**Self-Efficacy and the Effect on Student Performance**

Teamwork, persistence, and positive feedback are the foundations for success in this classroom. Ms. Rowley creates a team atmosphere in which her students play, practice, and learn together and she is their biggest cheerleader. Within her class, students discuss the harmful effects of negative criticism and learn how to encourage instead. As students struggle and achieve together, they learn that they are capable of great things.

Staci Haralson Barretta
Big Cypress Elementary

**“We Got Grit”**

In her classroom, Ms. Barretta focuses on the growth mindset, helping students to understand that the power to achieve is tied to what they believe about themselves. By studying the brain and participating in activities that use different parts of the brain (such as Wordless Videos), students are empowered to conquer challenges. She provides attainable challenges and opportunities to face obstacles, models how to view failure as learning, teaches perseverance and celebrates success.

Tammy L. Miller
Estates Elementary

**Work. Sweat. Achieve. Repeat.**

In a world filled with instant gratification, Ms. Miller’s PE program teaches students to relish the process through goal setting, developing grit, and embracing the sweat that comes from hard work. This is embodied in the challenge to run 1 mile. Students build their skills and endurance as they progress from small running goals to larger goals, then celebrating success when they complete that mile!

Kristen A. Favaro and Andrea Clawson
Palmetto Ridge High

**Student Centered Learning: Stations and Motivation**

This teaching team has turned Intensive Reading around for their struggling students. By establishing student-led centers on various skills, they have promoted a new dynamic that has led to cooperative learning and leadership. The result goes beyond the increased testing scores to skills these students will use throughout life.

Tiffany Wind
Pelican Marsh Elementary

**Expectations of Excellence Every Day**

As a reading coach and intervention specialist, Ms. Wind is focused every day on building relationships with the students and teachers. By working with each teacher to evaluate data, and creating a specific plan for each student, she is able to establish high expectations which encourages the students to work hard and reach their learning goals.

Teresa Gomes
Shadowlawn Elementary

**Differentiated Learning through Strategic Groups and Centers**

Creating stability though practice and procedure is central to learning in this 2nd grade classroom, especially for math. Ms. Gomes creates groups in which students can learn from and be encouraged by each other, then they get to work learning what math workshops look like, sound like and feel like. This process sets students up for success all year long.

Mary Ann Torres Arroyo
Village Oaks Elementary

**Learning Goals and Scales for Student Self-Efficacy**

Knowing where you are headed, and the steps needed to get there are the foundation of this practice. Ms. Arroyo makes sure students know their learning goals for reading and work through the scales (steps) necessary to achieve those goals. This enables students to take ownership of their learning and work alongside their teacher to make sure they attain each goal they have set.

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ChampionsForLearning.org/CWACGrants

👩‍🏫 = Golden Apple recipient
CONNECTING TO THE WORK WORLD

How many times have teachers heard, “When will I ever use this in life?” These teachers are making sure that their students are learning from people working in a trade or business, allowing them to see the connections from the classroom to the work world.

Yolanda Sohn
Calusa Park Elementary
Build, Design and Program a Computer
In this real-world opportunity, students are taught how to think by designing, building, and programming a computer. At each grade level, Ms. Sohn introduces students to various concepts related to coding and computer programming, so that by 5th grade these students are thinking critically to solve problems, working collaboratively, and breaking big tasks into bite-size pieces. Through this project, students are taught not only how to succeed in computer programming, but will also have learned the foundational skills for almost any career.

Delia Lozano
Immokalee Technical College
Future
In this post-secondary program, Ms. Lozano is preparing her students for a career and a lifestyle. She has created an innovative learning environment that addresses both the clinical and theory sides of Cosmetology. One element of her practice encourages students to find the beauty in their own emotions and translate that into an incredible design.

Adam Peterson
Lely High
Local Community Members Helping Future Business Leaders
In Mr. Peterson’s Business Ownership class, high school students work from concept to business pitch on a real project to be developed over the course of the year. They hear from local business owners on all aspects of establishing and managing a business. Through this process, the students learn about networking, public speaking, product development, and market research, in order to be a knowledgeable business owner from the start.

BUILDING COMMUNITY

A productive and caring community is built by people who understand how to value and respect others, and who can work together to create a positive environment. Through the various practices of these teachers, students exercise the skills that are molding them into the leaders of tomorrow.

James Paul Tribble
Everglades City School
Teaching Art Through Love and Kindness
In this small K – 12th grade school, relationships are key. Students in Mr. Tribble’s art class are not only learning techniques and attitudes related to art, but they are learning what it means to respect and be respected, to love and be loved. By encouraging students to address what is happening in their lives through their art, Mr. Tribble creates an atmosphere of trust that is cultivated year after year, and the artist in each student emerges.

Venlesia Samuels
Golden Gate Elementary
Community, Culture, and Humans, First
Through Ms. Samuels’ morning meeting, students learn that character matters most. During this 20-minute activity, students greet each other, offer positive encouragement, and share personal stories so that the class truly gets to know one another. This fosters a caring class that in turn promotes relationships, leadership, and a sense of belonging that will stay with these students well into the future.
Kelly E. Viana  
Golden Terrace Elementary  
**Classroom Environment**
Students thrive in environments that exude safety and kindness. Teachers and students alike know they will find both in Ms. Viana’s classroom, making it a place where one finds celebration for success and support to fix mistakes. One element of her best practice is “the power of 3” – doing something nice for 3 people each day. This habit goes far beyond the classroom and will impact these students well into their futures.

Kim Rutila  
Gulfview Middle  
**Safe Space Environment to Share and Grow**
In this multifaceted approach to learning respect, Ms. Rutila is providing students with the skills and habits to become engaged community members. Through Socratic seminars, students practice thoughtful, polite and evidence-based discussions. During the school year, students participate in a variety of activities that connect them to the larger community, such as visiting an assisted living facility and interviewing local military veterans. All of these experiences provide the foundation for positive citizenship.

Mary B. Eckard  
Highlands Elementary  
**Learning Through Student Leadership and Collaboration**
With her two-fold practice, Ms. Eckard promotes student leadership and collaborative learning. By adapting and building upon the foundational principles of the Leader in Me and Whole Brain Teaching models (using movement to emphasize concepts), teacher and student work together to create an environment in which active learning is evident every day.

Scarlett McDonald  
Lake Trafford Elementary  
**Students Who Work Together, Succeed Together**
In this classroom, students are up and moving and working together constantly. After a short lesson to set things in motion, Ms. McDonald’s students participate in hands-on activities that promote teamwork, build up their vocabulary, and allows them to celebrate success together. Increased engagement with student-driven learning leads to an active and exciting classroom!

Mary Sweetland  
Lely Elementary  
**Children First**
Being an advocate for her kindergarten students is Ms. Sweetland’s top priority. Hers is a classroom that fosters motivation and perseverance, while providing appropriate and differentiated learning opportunities, such as connecting lessons to the “outside world”. Starting in kindergarten, her students understand the connections from the classroom to the real world, setting the stage for lifelong learning.

Rachel Robitzer Castilla  
Manatee Elementary  
**Student Engagement Through Whole Brain Teaching**
The positive impact of Whole Brain Teaching is shown by improvement in student behavior and engagement in learning. In Ms. Castilla’s class, each student participates in seeing, hearing, doing, speaking, feeling and laughing throughout the daily lessons. As the students “mirror” the teacher and teach each other, they are also building the foundation to become confident, successful, and positive leaders.

Cynthia Gregory  
Naples High  
**Building an Inclusive Community For All Learners**
In Ms. Gregory’s comprehensive program for special needs students, the focus is inclusion through real activities, real life, real rules. The curriculum addresses Mind – Body – Soul (health, knowledge, and engagement) in such a way as to promote self-esteem and problem solving. Special needs students are included in the Scholar Bowl, Science Fair, and the Unity Project Field Day, which brings together over 500 students of all abilities from across Collier County.

Chandra Cox  
Naples Park Elementary  
**Growing Roots and Developing Wings**
The ultimate goal in this 5th grade classroom is for students to take ownership of their own learning. Ms. Cox employs four principles to reach this goal: standards of excellence, a classroom culture of “family”, authentic learning where mistakes lead to growth, and a holistic, integrated approach to all content.

D. Tyler Patnode  
Osceola Elementary  
**Patnode’s Positive Pillars for Success**
The four pillars of success in this classroom include a positive culture, motivational practice, collaboration with other educators, and parent engagement. Throughout the school year, Mr. Patnode focuses on these elements to make sure his students succeed not only in the classroom, but also to have the tools to succeed in life.

Hope Cliff  
Sea Gate Elementary  
**Positive Classroom Culture**
Equality and acceptance are the hallmarks of this positive classroom culture. Through activities designed to build connections with each other and the teacher, such as “I wish my teacher knew…”, Ms. Cliff provides opportunities for meaningful reflection that allows students to thrive and develop a true love for learning.

Marge Cox  
Veterans Memorial Elementary  
**Compassionate Leaders and Makers Make a Difference**
Through the expansion of her media center’s Makerspaces, Ms. Cox is motivating students to use their creative skills to encourage others. Whether creating chew toys for animals at the Humane Society, artwork for senior citizens, or bracelets for students displaced from their homes, these students are learning the value of compassion and its impact on individuals and in the community.
LEARNING HOW TO LEARN

With the variety of learning styles and environments in our schools today, students must become an active participant in their own learning. These teachers are challenging their students to understand how best they take in and process information, which will be a tool that will serve them not only in school, but also into the work world.

Tara Domiano
Corkscrew Middle
Offering Choice to Honor Multiple Intelligences
By addressing the various ways students learn and retain knowledge, they are more likely to succeed in school and in life. In Ms. Domiano’s class, students select an avenue to learn the day’s concept, making sure to sometimes make that choice that takes them out of their comfort zone. To assess student gains, three elements are used: grading, reflection and sharing. Allowing for a degree of autonomy in the process helps students find out the best way they learn, which will be a skill that will serve them far into the future.

Lisa Hicks
East Naples Middle
Student as Self-Directed Decision Maker
Ms. Hick’s students “begin with the end in mind” as they help create their own path to success in math. By mapping out their own individual strategies, students take ownership of their learning, guided by their teacher. Success is celebrated and set-backs are examined to make sure each student can stay on track for his/her goals.

John Krupp
Golden Gate High
Collaborative Teaching with a Purpose
Within this practice, students become the teachers to each other. By breaking an overarching topic into smaller elements, students are charged with researching and teaching their element to their peers in rotation. Students are able to use any method to put the information into their own words – poems, songs, etc. By going over the material in a variety of ways, students find more personal connections with the information, leading to deeper learning and understanding.

Anna Braun
Gulf Coast Charter Academy South
Hands On Equals Minds On!
"If they don't touch it, feel it, experiment on it, they can't understand it!" is the motto of this classroom. Fridays are Lab Days, and the lab is where science (specifically rocks!) come to life. Through a variety of experiments that build on what is learned all week, students connect with the physical world all around them, ensuring that what is learned in the classroom stays with them as they journey through life.

Heather Thornton
Gulf Coast High
Promoting Active Learning Through Student Engagement
Rising to the challenge of motivating and inspiring her students, Ms. Thornton formed the concept of student-designed lab experiments which guide students to think critically, improve problem-solving skills and experience real-world science in a tangible way. Combined with her Study Documentation process which requires students to examine how they learn, this practice will support students in their learning both now and in the future.

Nicole Sponseller
Laurel Oak Elementary
Bounce, Wiggle and Move While You Learn
With engagement and participation as the goal, Ms. Sponseller has embraced movement in her classroom. By employing flexible seating and making sure students understand these are tools for learning, the end result has been improved concentration, focus and comprehension.

Mary Crowley
Lorenzo Walker Technical College
Digging Deeper with PUGS
Ms. Crowley’s “Power Up Groups” strategy was developed to help students reflect on their learning and communicate the information back to the teacher based on their understanding. Utilizing the comments and questions from the Learning Exit Ticket, new questions are constructed that will form the basis for the next day’s conversation. Students work in their “PUGS” to research, review and discuss the information, cementing their new knowledge.

Stephen Detjen
Manatee Middle
Bridging the Gap – Full STEAM Ahead
Mr. Detjen has created a quality music program that motivates and inspires students to be involved in music throughout their school years. A key element of engagement is his "Instrument Petting Zoo", which provides the opportunity for every incoming student at his school to touch and test several instruments. The result of this practice has been a consistent increase in student enrollment for his 6th – 8th grade music classes, creating a sense of pride for his school and community.

Kathy Albanese
Marco Island Charter Middle
Mathematical Practice, Reinforcement and Mastery
A guided practice approach has led to success in Ms. Albanese’s middle school Algebra class. Moving from practice (teacher lesson and modeling) to reinforcement (class directed examples) to mastery (students working on a variety of problems) creates the foundation for these students to not only succeed in math class, but also as young adults.
Kylee R. Fiorante
Mike Davis Elementary
Engaging Student Learning Using Strategies/Best Practices
Since day one of teaching, Ms. Fiorante has made a commitment to tap into each student’s potential and to never compare them to anyone else. Working collaboratively with other educators and school staff, she has continued to approach each new class, and student, with creativity and flexibility, in order to maximize their opportunity to learn.

Andrew A. Ward
North Naples Middle
Metacognition for Now…and Forever
Although there have been shifts and trends in education, the constant is how students develop the ability to think. Through his practice, Mr. Ward encourages his students to analyze the challenge, identify possible strategies, and consider all possible outcomes. In “thinking about thinking,” these middle school students learn how to handle any challenge that comes their way.

Andrea Polanco
Oakridge Middle
Stations/Choice Menu Using UDL Framework
By using the Universal Design for Learning framework, Ms. Polanco is optimizing the engagement of her students. In building the “menu”, she makes sure that the choices will stimulate interest, allow for presenting content in a variety of formats, and differentiate the way students can express what they know.

Kathleen Wasmer
Parkside Elementary
Magic Box and Betty Brainiac
Every lesson has a beginning, middle, and end. In Ms. Wasmer’s class, she often begins with the “magic box” containing items related to the lessons. Once students have made the connections, the lesson gets underway. To conclude the lesson, students write what they know on Styrofoam and feed it to “Betty Brainiac” and watch in amazement as she gains new knowledge.

Miriam Aravena
Sabal Palm Elementary
Science: Always Question, Always Wonder!
In this classroom, you will find first graders actively engaged with their peers, participating in science labs that stretch their imagination, focus on logic, and foster open-mindedness. Ms. Aravena’s students know that her creativity and enthusiasm will inspire the budding scientist in each of them!