

# 2011

EXCELLENCE IN CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING

— And the —  
WINNERS are ...

MEET FIVE EDUCATORS  
CHOSEN FOR THE FIRST-EVER  
TEACHING TOLERANCE AWARDS

THOUSANDS OF TEACHERS each day help students from diverse racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. What if you could honor the best of these talented educators and help spotlight what they do?

That is what the **Teaching Tolerance Award for Excellence in Culturally Responsive Teaching** is all about. The first of these awards were presented at a special ceremony in December in Washington, D.C. Five honored teachers were awarded \$1,000 apiece. More importantly, they were videotaped in their classrooms to help educators across the nation learn from their techniques.

“Quite simply, it’s easier to understand how to do something when you can see it being done by others,” said Teaching Tolerance Director Maureen Costello. “We hope this award not only recognizes the talented teachers reaching students from diverse backgrounds but also provides many other teachers with the tools to enhance their expertise.”

The winners of the first Teaching Tolerance Award are as diverse as their schools and their students. But all of them maximize learning by creating supportive teams of educators, students and families. They look beyond the standard touchstones in choosing learning materials. They push aside cultural stereotypes to foster strategies that work. And they take advantage of what students bring to the classroom.

#### IN THE PORTFOLIO

Profiles of each of the five Teaching Tolerance Award winners  
[tolerance.org/tt-awards](http://tolerance.org/tt-awards)



**Sylvestre Arcos**  
*Laboratory School of Finance and Technology,*  
*(Middle School 223), Bronx, N.Y.*

Five years ago, Arcos helped set up a new, dual-language program at this school that emphasizes cross-cultural learning and the development of Spanish-language as well as English skills. As a result, there is a renewed respect for both languages and proficiency has improved. “We do not see them coming in with zero knowledge,” says Arcos of Spanish-dominant students. “We see them coming in with a wealth of knowledge. They are just adding a second language to their repertoire.”



**Tracy Oliver-Gary**  
*Paint Branch High School,*  
*Burtonsville, Md.*

Oliver-Gary teaches open-enrollment AP history classes. Her classes are a diverse mix of Asian, African, Latino, black and white students. She says any teacher in that situation faces a learning curve. “One thing I had to learn is that just because I’m black doesn’t mean I know how to teach black kids,” she says. And Oliver-Gary often finds herself teaching study skills as well as the curriculum. But she has learned how to access her talent for teaching in new ways. Giving her students a voice, she says, also allows her to “paint a picture of their future.”



**Amber Makaiau**

*Kailua High School, Oahu, Hawaii*  
What does it mean to be Hawaiian? It's not an easy question in this multicultural state. In 2004, Makaiau helped to write the curriculum for an innovative course in ethnic studies. Now mandatory for Hawaii ninth-graders, the course has been successful in reducing school violence and violence-related suspensions. Students see it as a success as well. In a recent essay, one student wrote, "Racism lives off the racist remarks we make toward others. I am still living and still learning. I have much ahead of me to ... experience. [But] I blossomed into something more [in this class]; my growth increases every day. ... I am a girl who honors all of my family names; I am a proud leader and I am Hawaiian."



**Soñia Galaviz**

*Endeavor Elementary School, Nampa, Idaho*

Galaviz's school serves families with the lowest socioeconomic status and the highest English-language learning needs in her district. "Building relationships," she says, "is at the heart of my pedagogy." She starts by visiting the homes of each of her students during the first two weeks before school to learn more about each student's hidden strengths and how to work best with each family. In class, Galaviz supplements the curriculum with authentic materials and experiences that reflect the cultures of her Mexican-American, Asian, American Indian and white students.

### Checklist for Awardees

- + Builds relationships with students
- + Ensures all students are included in the curriculum
- + Uses flexible and heterogeneous grouping
- + Gets to know students' families
- + Learns about students' cultural backgrounds
- + Varies instructional strategies

**Katy LaCroix (not pictured)**

*Logan Elementary School, Ann Arbor, Mich.*

LaCroix heads up her school's "equity team," a group of faculty that meets throughout the year to share culturally inclusive teaching practices. One of her key strategies is to learn as much as she can about her students. She does this in part by going to lunch with them and, when she's invited, attending important events, like church services and basketball games. "This strategy is at the heart of culturally relevant teaching," she says. "Using what I know about my students, I can incorporate their interests, hopes and aspirations into my classroom."