

2 LI schools win national honors for academics

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Two Long Island schools with [Ivy League](#)-trained principals and high rates of student poverty won national honors Tuesday for their "breakthrough" academic performances.

Amityville Memorial High School and Robert M. Finley Middle School in Glen Cove were among 10 schools nationwide cited for scholastic success by the National Association of Secondary School Principals. All winners of the 2011 Breakthrough Schools awards receive \$5,000 prizes from the [MetLife](#) Foundation.

The Breakthrough program honors secondary schools with high rates of student poverty that manage, nonetheless, to boost English and math achievement for three years running. The annual competition also recognizes dynamic, academically oriented principals.

Scott Andrews, 44, now in his seventh year as principal at Amityville, earned a bachelor's degree in political science at [Brown University](#) and a doctorate in psychology from [Hofstra University](#). Andrews also played semipro rugby in [Ireland](#) for a year.

"For the staff and the kids, I'm very excited about this," Andrews said Tuesday. "It's great for them to be able to enjoy this recognition after working so hard."

Anael Alston, 39, in his sixth year as Finley's principal, is completing work on a doctorate in curriculum and teaching at [Columbia University's Teachers College](#), after earning other

degrees at Columbia, Hofstra and the College of New Rochelle. Alston also is a former Golden Gloves super-heavyweight boxing champion.

Alston sees his role as that of an instructional leader, and many staffers agree.

"I have to tell you, it's an honor to be a part of this school, because we've made so much progress," said Jennifer Beauchamp, who teaches English as a Second Language. "And we hope to keep it going."

Achievement at this year's winning schools reflect their principals' sense of direction.

Alston points to the more than 80 percent of African-American eighth-graders at his school who pass state English tests - a rate nearly equal to white students - thus closing a persistent gap in achievement among racial groups at the school. Andrews points to growing numbers of students who take college courses while still enrolled at his school, and to increasing visits by college recruiters.

Michael Cohen, a Hofstra math professor and former school administrator who helped recruit Andrews to Amityville, says there's a message for school districts in the recent successes of both Andrews and Alston. Cohen says districts need to work harder to attract outstanding job candidates from wherever they can be found - including [Ivy League](#) campuses.

"If you want kids to shoot for the highest levels, then you need role models from the highest levels," he said.

Other academic experts note, however, that such awards also carry an implicit warning for schools that try to rest on their laurels. Earlier this month, Brentwood High School was placed on the state's academic "needs improvement" list, despite having won a national "breakthrough" prize a year ago.

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