



Christopher Columbus Awards: Changing Lives, Changing Communities

Impact on Lives Across America

The Christopher Columbus Awards program has touched the lives of over 18,000 students and 1,900 teachers and coaches during the past 14 years. Some of these students have gone on to study science or another technical field, have obtained or filed for United States Patents for their projects, and have brought their ideas to life in their communities. Many of them have continued to be “everyday” kids, the kind who never thought they could enter, much less win, a national academic competition, but who nonetheless did, and were forever changed by the experience.

Perhaps the most profound thing these thousands of students have done over the years is touch the lives of thousands of other students, teachers, parents, superintendents and community leaders by their determination and energy, and their enthusiasm for making positive change in their communities.

Through this program, students have managed to reach people all over the country, in their classrooms, in their hometowns, and they have inspired many others to take notice. For example:

- President George W. Bush sent congratulatory letters to the finalists to commend them as examples of community volunteering that could inspire others to get involved.
- President Bill Clinton invited one of the winners to sit next to First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton during a State of the Union Address.
- Oprah Winfrey awarded a winning team of Native American girls a matching \$25,000 grant to help build their study hall on the Crow Indian Reservation in Montana; she also hosted this team on her show in 2002.
- Governors of many States including Pennsylvania, New York, Wisconsin and Ohio and Iowa, have made personal visits with the students and held them up as examples of what is right with education and kids these days.
- Teachers have committed hundreds of hours year after year to enter this program, which has guidelines more rigorous than many other academic competitions.
- Parents and whole communities have gotten involved in the students’ projects as volunteers and encouraged others to do the same. The community of Addison, Illinois, used the statistical information gathered by a team of four girls to obtain a \$90,000 State grant for recycling bins for the community.
- Parents have gotten involved in their children’s education. After participating as a finalist in the competition, a young Mennonite boy from Whiteface, Texas was allowed to attend high school instead of dropping out of school after eighth grade to work on the family farm.
- It has become a family affair. We have seen a rise in family participation since the competition’s inception. Younger siblings of past participants look forward to the age when they too may participate.
- Perhaps most profoundly, a 12-year-old boy who was a member of the second-place team awarded in Florida in June 2002, died of cancer early the next year. He was buried wearing his medal from the competition because it had been, according to him, the best experience of his life.

The return on this competition reaches far beyond the thousands of kids that enter each year—it touches the whole nation in so many compelling ways.

Sustained Growth

Through the partnership of a committed sponsor and contractors, the awards have grown over the years, with more than 18,000 students entering the competition to date. A loyal following of coaches has gained momentum over the years as well with a nearly 23 percent return rate each year.

Under-Reached Girls Are the Majority Here

The diversity of the entrants is unparalleled in science-based competitions—more than half of the entrants are girls, and nearly a quarter of them are from minority populations, including African Americans, Pacific Islanders, Hispanics and Native Americans.

Highlights

The following summary highlights how the program has changed the lives of thousands of students, coaches, teachers, parents and communities. In many cases, these are not changes that last a brief week, a month or a year. For most, the experience has been a transition that will last a lifetime.

Some highlights from the competition’s 14-year history:

- One of the few competitions that encourages teamwork and has students apply the scientific method to everyday problems. The competition is open to and attracts all types of middle school students, not just top-performing science students.
- Has routinely attracted a high percentage of female participants. Since its founding, the competition has attracted and maintained a 59 percent female participation rate.
- Ideas and projects developed by these middle school students are significant and meaningful, with teams to date securing six United States Patents and two provisional Patents, plus one Patent application is in progress.
- The number of Hispanic and Asian participants increases yearly— 8 percent of all past participants are Hispanic and/or Asian.
- Consistent urban and rural participation each year. In the current competition year, urban and rural schools make up 35 percent of the schools that participate.
- Strong loyalty and following among the coaches (usually teachers) who have implemented the program—23 percent return rate.

Media Reach

Each year, through print, broadcast and online media, the competition reaches tens of millions of people across the U.S., typically parents, teachers and students. National media coverage of this program has been substantial and includes “**The Today Show**,” “**The Oprah Winfrey Show**,” *Time Magazine/Time for Kids* magazine and *National Geographic*, among others.