We believe successful teachers and supportive school administrators go hand-in-hand.

Can you help us spread the word and put a $20,000 prize in those hands?

The Scandal

Jaime Escalante, found himself in a national scandal 33 years ago when the College Board accused his students of cheating on the famously difficult Advanced Placement Calculus exam. Twelve of the fourteen students who retook the proctored test passed.

The true scandal was not the possibility of a dozen students cheating but that these particular students were expected to fail without cheating. Nobody dreamed this handful of Hispanic students from a low-income school would study – let alone master – one of the most rigorous subjects in U.S. secondary education.

Hunting cheaters, we overlooked success. That is, until the inspirational film Stand and Deliver dramatized the event, cementing Escalante's reputation as the best teacher of his generation.

What's Missing

But something was missing from the film's narrative. As noted in a TBS-exclusive interview, without Escalante's principal, Henry Gradillas, Garfield High's AP program might never have succeeded. In Gradillas's first year as Garfield's principal, Escalante's program nearly fell apart. Apart from the AP Calculus scandal, the school continued experiencing poor reading levels, low performance on standardized tests, ongoing dropout problems, and diminished but still-present campus violence. However, after four years of Gradillas's support in creating a culture of learning at Garfield, the school's AP program grew over 600% in six years, boasting numerous graduate success stories.
the height of Garfield's program, the AP subjects had expanded to include art, biology, chemistry, English, European history, physics, Spanish, Spanish literature, and U.S. history as well as calculus.

As an unfortunate testament to how a supportive administrator catalyzes success, Jaime Escalante's second AP program at a Sacramento high school never achieved the success it did at Garfield. The reason? Parents and Escalante's own administration failed to back him in maintaining results-oriented standards.

Excellent administrators like Henry Gradillas are not mere supervisors, they are force multipliers, helping others accomplish more together than ever could be done alone.

The $20,000 Prize

Inspired by the synergy Escalante and Gradillas created, we at TheBestSchools.org have established an annual prize to be awarded to worthy teachers and school administrators in alternating years. With the $20,000 Escalante-Gradillas Prize for Best in Education, we are proud to join the history and legacy of other national award programs like the National Teacher of the Year Program, the Milken Educator Awards, the National Teachers Hall of Fame, and the prestigious Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching.

The Escalante-Gradillas Prize for Best in Education consists of two parts. First, the winning nominee will be awarded $10,000 to do with as he or she pleases. Second, another $10,000 will be awarded to the winner's school or school district as an educational grant.

What sets this award apart, though, is our desire to honor and celebrate educators serving in front of classes as well as those whose work behind the scenes usually goes unheralded. We want to reward educators and administrators who exemplify the spirit and passion of Jaime Escalante and Henry Gradillas: people who do more with less, people who teach the why and not just the how, people who ignite the spark of ganas — the desire to succeed — in kids facing difficult circumstances.

The founding recipients of the Escalante-Gradillas Prize are the late Jaime Escalante (awarded posthumously to his widow, Fabiola Escalante) and
Henry Gradillas. A third prize also went to Angelo Villavicencio, a protégé of Mr. Escalante's. In 2015, the first year for outside nominees, the prize went to principal Lisa Kaplan of Andrew Jackson School in Philadelphia.

This year's prize will go to an outstanding, active K-12 teacher: perhaps a high school chemistry teacher who doubles as a football coach, an innovative middle school art teacher who inspires a student to pursue art in college, or a kindergarten teacher who is now teaching her third generation of students. Or perhaps a teacher who has the admiration of parents, even when students have labeled him "really tough."

We're looking for teachers who give their all all the time, teachers who inspire a culture of learning, teachers who create an atmosphere of scholarship that stays with students long after class is over. We want to find teachers who go beyond just managing a classroom. We're looking for men and women who are aspirational leaders, coaches, mentors, and team builders. We want to find teachers who dramatically alter the trajectory of students' lives for the better.

Open nominations end June 1, 2016 for this year's prize. Finalist selection is set for early September, with the winner chosen in early October 2016.

Would You Help Spread the Word?

In its second full year of soliciting nominees, the Escalante–Gradillas Prize is not yet very well known. The success of our prize depends upon finding nominees.

We need more nominees! And we need your help telling this story.

Teachers you know and support often labor with little outside recognition. The Escalante–Gradillas Prize can serve as a way to show them how much you prize how they better the lives of the many people they touch each day.

Please let me know if you have any questions or want to follow-up.

Thank you for partnering with TheBestSchools.org.

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About The Potential Recipient

In awarding the prize, our watchword is "more from less." As with Jaime Escalante and Henry Gradillas, the namesakes of this prize, we seek educators who face stiff challenges but are still able to elevate their students to the highest levels of academic achievement. Just what challenges an Escalante-Gradillas Prize winner must overcome we leave open. Poverty, drugs, and family breakdown are common challenges; but so are complacency, mediocrity, and indiscipline. Prize winners must prove resourceful, making the most of what they have. They must exhibit practical wisdom, introducing innovations where they help, but remaining "old school" where good sense requires. Above all, they must show results, with students demonstrating marked improvement in academic abilities."

More About The Prize

- Escalante-Gradillas Prize for Best in Education
- Jaime Escalante in the 21st Century: Still Standing and Delivering
- Henry Gradillas Interview
- The Prize Panel
- Lisa Kaplan, the 2015 Winner
About The Best Schools

TBS is a leading resource for campus and online education. Our aim is to empower learners with the knowledge, skills, and credentials needed to achieve personal happiness and career success. For those still deciding on the right career, we are here to provide guidance through our career articles. For those who know what they want to do, we are here to help them find the best school and degree program through our ranking, feature, and resource articles.

TheBestSchools.org is an independent organization. Our editors know the academic world inside out, with some holding Ph.D.s and having extensive experience in teaching, research, and publishing at the university-level.

The general editor of TheBestSchools.org is James Barham, a Texas native, who received his B.A. in Classics from the University of Texas at Austin, his M.A. in the history of science from Harvard University, and his Ph.D. in the history and philosophy of science from the University of Notre Dame.