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More than 200 Hawaii students competed over the weekend at the national Student Television Network in Long Beach, Calif.

## ‘Amazing comeback’ for Hawaii schools at national media contest

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Hawaii's massive contingent at the annual national Student Television Network media competition over the weekend was again a dominant force, breaking its own record by scooping up 47 awards — seven more than in 2022.

The Student Television Network conference is one of the most prestigious competitions in youth multimedia journalism and filmmaking in the United States. The strong showing this year by the 202 students from 16 Hawaii schools at the conference in Long Beach, Calif., was made extra special by the fact that it was the first year that island participants were able to return to full in-person participation since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

“It's a pretty amazing comeback,” said Robert Pennybacker, vice president of learning initiatives at PBS Hawaii, which includes the “Hiki No” student journalism initiative, which supports scores of local schools’ media programs.

In March 2020 the descending pandemic caused the abrupt cancellation of the STN conference, which stranded dozens of Hawaii students and teachers for days in Washington, D.C. In 2021 the competition was held exclusively online. In 2022, Hawaii students participated via a virtual “hub” of STN in Waikiki, and the

local contingent still earned 40 national awards.

In fact, Hawaii's schools as a group typically have captured roughly 20% of the STN awards in recent years, Pennybacker said.

“It's always exciting to see our students participating in this rigorous national competition,” state schools Superintendent Keith Hayashi said by email. “It's an authentic learning experience that allows them to explore their creative passions, hone ... their digital media skills, and compete with other students across the country. The record number of awards for Hawaii public schools this year shows how our students and staff continue to excel even on a national stage. Congratulations to all of the Hawaii participants — we are so proud of how each and every one of you represented your schools and our state.”

That local schools tend to count their STN awards as a group total is a telling sign of the statewide, year-round cooperation among media teachers and programs that keeps Hawaii students winning big.

The high-pressure STN conference draws thousands of students each year from across the States to compete in timed contests to create video stories similar in style and quality to content commonly found on professional TV, movies and online.

Contest categories range

from news and weather reports to anchoring, commentary, promotion, short-form film and documentary. The students use state-of-the-art camera and editing equipment and technology, interviewing and writing skills, planning, time management and teamwork. And during conference competition they must work without help from the teachers who've trained them up to that point.

While schools within most other states often see each other primarily as competitors, the schools from Hawaii tend to work together. Several dozen media teachers and programs across the islands regularly pool their collective wisdom, sharing curriculum and teaching tips, and coordinating group trainings and conferences. “We are very willing to share with each other. That's kind of rare in teaching,” said Kevin Matsunaga, media teacher at Chiefess Kamakahelei Middle School.

For the awards ceremony on Sunday at the Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center, the Hawaii students, teachers and chaperones showed up in matching green shirts with a shaka illustration and the word “Aloha” on the front. They sat together on the left side of the auditorium and shrieked their approval for every Hawaii school that placed, even when they were pitted against each other in a category.

“If any Hawaii school goes up on the (awards) screen, the whole Hawaii section goes bananas,” Matsunaga said.

Schools with teams that earned at least one award in on-site deadline competitions were Chiefess Kamakahelei Middle School, Hawaii Technology Academy, Highlands Intermediate School, Honolulu Middle School, Kauai High School, Kalaheo High School, Kamehameha Schools-Maui, Kapaa High School, Maui Waena Intermediate School, Moanalua High School, Pomaikai Elementary School, Waianae Intermediate School and Waianae High School.

Teams from Lahaina Intermediate School, McKinley High School and Waiakea High School also participated.

Seven Excellence Awards, for categories that called for submissions in advance of the convention, went to teams from Chiefess Kamakahelei Middle School, Kauai High School, Maui Waena Intermediate School, Moanalua High School and Waianae High School.

Pomaikai Elementary School got extra kudos for winning three awards in middle school categories. Maui Waena Intermediate School was the local school with the most honors: 12.

The STN awards ceremony, including brief clips of the Hawaii students' projects, can be viewed at [stnconvention.com](http://stnconvention.com).