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Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals honors Simley High School with the Star of Innovation Award.

Simley High School was named the recipient of the Star of Innovation Award from the Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals (MASSP) for the implementation of its groundbreaking Alternative Learning Program (ALP). Programs nominated for the award must be effective, innovative and demonstrate a positive impact on education.

Before the 2010-11 school year, Simley's ALP had a reputation of relying heavily on paper and pencil. Heading into the 2010-2011 school year, the ALP was redesigned with an emphasis on technology integration and collaboration - two key components that drive Apple's Challenge Based Learning approach to teaching and learning.

Injecting technology into the classroom sparked interest in students and created an environment where students can excel towards reaching their maximum potential. Engaging tools such as iPods, laptops and a video conferencing system allowed students the opportunity to expand their horizons.

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The physical setup of the classroom also received some “fresh paint” that helped transform the program’s identity. Two classrooms became one when a wall was torn down to open up space so that students could work together more efficiently. This meant ditching the desks in favor of large, user-friendly tables that comfortably fit study materials such as laptops and iPods.

“It was important that we create a comfortable setting that could emulate the environment students are accustomed to learning in while away from the classroom,” said Simley High School Principal Gerald Sakala.

Simley was one of only three high schools in the state to receive the Star of Innovation Award.

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