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**iNACOL Announces Online Learning Innovator Award Winners at Virtual School Symposium**

Austin, TX, November 16, 2009 – The International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL) is pleased to announce the winners of the first annual iNACOL Online Innovator Awards. The three Online Innovator Awards recognize: 1) best and most innovative learning practice, 2) important new research, and 3) most innovative individual achievement.

The winner of the award for Best and Most Innovative Online Learning Practice was the “Fire and Ice” program, managed by Elluminate, Inc. of Calgary, Alberta, Canada. “Fire and Ice” was created as a non-profit initiative to connect K-12 schools in the Northern Hemisphere (the “Ice”) with those in the Southern Hemisphere (mainly rural areas of developing countries – the “Fire”), to engage students in highly collaborative projects, using *live* and *non-live* communications technologies, on universal themes such as climate change and poverty reduction. Since 2006, “Fire and Ice” has resulted in the creation of creative international content and generated unforgettable learning experiences for thousands of students in more than 25 countries.

The winner of the award for Important Research Furthering the Advancement of K-12 eLearning was Dr. Cathy Cavanaugh, a widely recognized leader in online learning research from the University of Florida. She has published numerous articles, reports and books on virtual schools. Her edited book, *Development and Management of Virtual Schools*, represents one of the first scholarly books about virtual schooling. Her publications and studies are ground-breaking and she has provided an important contribution to understanding the emerging realm of virtual schools. Cavanaugh served as the Chair of the iNACOL Research Committee from 2006-2008, coordinating the publication of original research briefs as collaborations across the K-12 and higher education community. She is regularly invited to national and international events to speak to education leaders about virtual schools research.

The winner of the Outstanding Individual Contribution to K-12 Online Learning was Keith Oelrich, CEO of Insight Schools. Keith is a true pioneer of new models of supplemental and full-time virtual education to serve a diverse population of students. He is dedicated to advancing the cause and benefits of online education through successful organizational pursuits, thought leadership efforts, and expert consultation that has shaped legislative efforts both locally and nationally. He served as President and CEO of Apex Learning from 2000-2002 and President and CEO of KC Distance Learning from 2002-2005. In 2005, Oelrich founded Insight Schools, a national network of online, accredited, public high schools designed to serve at-risk students, where he serves as CEO.

Susan Patrick, President and CEO of iNACOL, says, “Identifying the most creative programs and people leading the research and leadership of the growing field of K-12 online learning was a very difficult process – as so many of the virtual school leaders are ground-breaking pioneers and true innovators. I congratulate the winners of these three awards for their outstanding achievements in the field. As online learning continues in the creative disruption of old education models, students are provided with more high-quality educational opportunities – now more than ever.”

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#### About iNACOL

iNACOL is the International Association for K-12 Online Learning, a non-profit 501(c)(3) membership association based in the Washington, DC area with more than 3,400 members. iNACOL is unique in that its members represent a diverse cross-section of K-12 education from school districts, charter schools, state education agencies, non-profit organizations, colleges, universities and research institutions, corporate entities and other content and technology providers ([www.inacol.org](http://www.inacol.org)). iNACOL hosts the annual Virtual School Symposium (VSS). VSS 2009 is being held Nov. 15 – 17, 2009 in Austin, TX ([www.virtualschoolsymposium.org](http://www.virtualschoolsymposium.org)).