



U.S. News Media Group Names 2009 America's Best High Schools

-With more than 21,000 high schools evaluated, 11 percent more schools achieve top performance distinction-

WASHINGTON, DC, December 5, 2008 — U.S. News Media Group today released its second annual survey of America's Best High Schools, available online at www.usnews.com/highschools and on newsstands December 8, 2008. Based on an in-depth methodology by School Evaluation Services (www.schoolmatters.com), the list recognizes more than 1,900 schools in 48 states*, up from the 1,600 schools in 40 states recognized by *U.S. News* in 2007. The high schools listed fall into one of four categories of distinction: Gold, Silver, Bronze, or Honorable Mention.

This year's ranking criteria include increased measures of college readiness, and the 2009 list demonstrated an 11-percent increase in the number of top-performing schools (Gold and Silver medal). This increase shows that a greater number of schools are providing students with access to college-level coursework and, more importantly, that these same students are demonstrating mastery of the coursework, which will benefit their work towards higher education.

"In just its second year, America's Best High Schools has proven to be a trusted source for educators, students, and especially parents making important decisions about their children's educational future," said Brian Kelly, editor *U.S. News & World Report*. "Not only do our rankings highlight schools succeeding at the highest national level, but the Best High School package also allows communities and states to compare schools at a local level and measure why some are doing so well. This is the most comprehensive and inclusive information on hundreds of high schools nationwide."

Kelly noted the significant increase in the number of states providing information for the rankings and *U.S. News*' role in fostering transparency among America's most important institutions, saying, "Just as *U.S. News* has increased transparency in the health sector through its rankings of hospitals and health plans, and in the higher education sector through its rankings of colleges and graduate schools, its participation in the evaluation of America's high schools are helping to shine a light on how these schools prepare our children for college, and for life."

Since the release of the 2008 high school rankings, *U.S. News* and School Evaluation Services have developed the methodology to include the International Baccalaureate program as a measure of college readiness. In addition, an honorable mention distinction has been added to recognize schools that were able to achieve high levels of college readiness but only partially met state test performance criteria.

A high school is recognized as a top school if it:

- 1) Attains performance levels that exceed statistical expectations given the school's student body, as measured by state accountability test scores for all the school's students in the core subjects of reading and math;
- 1) Achieves **proficiency rates** on state tests for their **least advantaged student groups** that **exceed state averages**; and
- 2) Prepares its students for college, as measured by student **participation in and performance on Advanced Placement (AP) and/or International Baccalaureate (IB) exams**.

The 100 top-performing high schools were given a distinction of “Gold” and are listed numerically. The remaining 504 schools meeting all three criteria have been designated “Silver” high schools.

Additionally, 1,321 high schools were identified as “Bronze” schools for their performance on state tests. These Bronze high schools met the first two criteria of this methodology but did not meet the college-readiness criteria based on AP or IB exams. While AP and IB are by far the most widely used college-level programs in the country, there are schools that focus on providing students with access to alternative college-level programs.

Finally, 17 schools received honorable mentions. As previously described, the “honorable mention” distinction recognizes schools that were able to achieve high levels of college readiness but only partially met state test performance criteria.

Using this methodology, more than 21,000 high schools were analyzed for inclusion in the 2009 edition. Highlights of analytical findings include:

- 604 high schools met all three of the demanding top schools criteria (Gold and Silver categories)
- Nearly 10 percent of top schools have minority populations of 75 percent or greater
- Five percent of the top schools are charter schools
- More than 75 percent of the top schools have open admissions
- 20 percent of the top schools are located in large cities (populations of 250,000 or more)

For a complete list of America’s Best High Schools, visit www.usnews.com/highschools. To learn more about a specific school or to compare schools side-by-side, visit www.schoolmatters.com.

***Note:** The states of Nebraska and Oklahoma, as well as the District of Columbia, did not have sufficient data available for analysis. Schools in these states were considered for honorable mention but none of them met the criteria.

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About School Evaluation Services

Since 2001, School Evaluation Services has served as an independent, analytical resource for parents of school-aged children, state and national policymakers, and educators. Today, it provides parents with an easily-searchable collection of important education data on www.schoolmatters.com.

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