

Magazine passes over region for nation's top 100 high schools

By John Caniglia, The Plain Dealer

December 11, 2009, 6:00AM



Plain Dealer file
CLEVELAND, Ohio -- **U.S. News & World Report's listing of the nation's 100 best high schools** passed over Northeast Ohio this year. And only eight public schools from the region, including four from Cleveland, made it into the rankings of a larger pool of about 1,500.

The magazine analyzed 21,786 schools, choosing Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology in Alexandria, Va., as the best school in the country for the third year in a row.

A year ago, Chagrin Falls was the 98th best school in the nation. In 2007, it ranked 92nd in the nation. This year, it wasn't on any of the magazine's lists. "I really don't know what the reasoning is," said Kert Boedicker, the principal of Chagrin Falls. "It's peculiar to go from the top 100 to not anywhere in the report. But do I think we are a top 100 school? Absolutely."

The only school in Ohio this year to be listed in the top 100 -- which the magazine classified as its gold rating -- was Walnut Hills, near Cincinnati. It was ranked 65th. The **Cleveland School of the Arts** earned a silver rating, the second highest rating. It also was honored the past two years.

"I'm excited," said Barbara Walton, the school's principal. "Our teachers are doing a good job, and our students are excelling. This is good for Cleveland schools."

The Northeast Ohio schools rated as bronze were: Garrett Morgan Middle School of Science, serving has students in grades six to 12; John Hay; Whitney Young; **Horizon Science Academy, a charter school**; Kent Roosevelt; and Wadsworth. To many teachers and principals, the lists offer a mark of excellence. To some parents who wrote on the magazine's Web site, it offers a fickle reminder about the worth of ratings. Others have stronger feelings.

"How do you value an education?" asked Jon Reider, an outspoken critic of the lists and the director of college counseling at San Francisco University High School in California. "You talk to students, teachers and parents. But the makers of these lists don't spent 5 minutes on a campus. It has a very damaging effect on how people make choices."

The rankings, released this week, are markedly different than those released five months ago by another magazine, **Newsweek, which listed the 1,500 top-rated public high schools.**

In that survey, Chagrin Falls, Solon, Orange, Shaker Heights, Hudson and Bay were listed among the top public high schools. The survey was based on the number of all students taking advanced placement and similar tests, divided by the number of graduating seniors.

By contrast, the analysis by U.S. News & World Report focused on three areas: test-score performance, how low-income and minorities did in school and college readiness.

If a school district do well on test scores, the magazine looks at the other two issues. The magazine said in a statement that it seeks to determine how the school meets the needs of all its students, not just those headed for top colleges.

"The thing that we noticed the most when we did this is how much our schools are struggling," said Kenneth Terrell of the magazine. "Ninety percent of the schools that we look at don't even make it past that first point."

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