



INFORMATION CAPSULE

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U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT'S BEST HIGH SCHOOLS: METHODOLOGY AND MIAMI-DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS RANKINGS

In December 2009, *U.S. News & World Report* published its list of the nation's top 100 high schools. The magazine awarded an additional 1,687 high schools it judged to be deserving of special recognition with silver medals, bronze medals, and honorable mentions. High schools receiving awards demonstrated an ability to provide all students, including the least advantaged student groups, with a quality education and access to a college-level curriculum. The top 100 schools serving the greatest numbers of economically disadvantaged students were also recognized by the magazine as Top Economically Disadvantaged Schools. In 2011, *U.S. News & World Report* published two additional lists: its list of Best High Schools for Math and Science in September, followed by its list of Most Connected Classrooms in October. This Information Capsule provides a brief description of the methodology used to calculate the four rankings and summarizes the awards received by Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS).

BEST HIGH SCHOOLS

U.S. News & World Report's high school rankings were based on a methodology developed by School Evaluation Services, an education data research unit of Standard & Poor's. Analysts from School Evaluation Services included all public high schools in the U.S. that had twelfth grade enrollment and sufficient data, primarily from the 2007-08 school year. Data were compiled on 21,786 public high schools in 48 states plus the District of Columbia (Nebraska and Oklahoma were not included in the analyses due to a lack of sufficient data). Private schools were not included in the analyses because in most cases they did not administer state-wide accountability tests.

Data sources used to calculate the Best High School rankings included:

- The U.S. Department of Education's Common Core Data, which includes enrollment, ethnicity, and other profile information on all public high schools in the country.
- College Board Advanced Placement test data for each public high school.
- International Baccalaureate test data for each public high school.
- State-wide accountability test results for each high school, obtained from each state's Department of Education.

The methodology was based on the principles that the best high schools serve all of their students well and that they produce measurable academic outcomes that indicate they are successfully educating their students across a range of performance indicators.

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A three-step process was used to calculate the nation's top high schools:

1. The first step determined whether each school's students were performing better than statistically expected for the average student in the state on the state-wide reading and math accountability tests. (Analyses of Florida high schools were based on Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test scores.) The percentage of economically disadvantaged students enrolled at each school was also factored into the analyses.
2. For those schools that passed the first step, the second step determined whether the school's least-advantaged students (Black, Hispanic, and low-income) were performing better than average compared to similar students in the state on state-wide reading and math accountability tests.
3. Schools that passed the first two steps became eligible to be judged on the final step, college readiness performance. Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) test data were used as benchmarks for success, depending on which program was largest at the school. A college readiness index was computed for each school, based on its AP or IB participation rate and how well its students performed on those tests.

The top 100 high schools nationwide with the highest college readiness scores were ranked numerically and awarded gold medals. The next 461 top-performing high schools nationwide (based on their college readiness scores) were awarded silver medals. An additional 1,189 high schools that passed the first two steps (but not the college readiness step) were awarded bronze medals. Finally, 37 high schools received an honorable mention if they would have scored high enough on the college readiness index to earn a gold medal but didn't fully meet Step 1 and Step 2.

No monetary award was associated with being named a Best High School, but each gold medal school was mentioned in both the online and print versions of *U.S. News & World Report*. All schools that received a silver medal, bronze medal, or honorable mention have their data posted online. In addition, all medal winners and honorable mention schools are eligible to use the Best High School badge on their schools' Web site, or in print or broadcast advertising.

Four M-DCPS high schools were ranked in the nation's top 100 high schools and earned gold medals:

- Design and Architecture Senior High School (DASH) (ranked #15)
- Maritime and Science Technology Academy (MAST) (ranked #66)
- New World School of the Arts (ranked #82)
- Coral Reef Senior High School (ranked #95)

Five other M-DCPS high schools were also recognized: Mater Academy Charter Middle-High School earned a silver medal; William H. Turner Technical Arts High School earned a bronze medal; and three M-DCPS campuses of the School for Advanced Studies - North, South, and Wolfson - received honorable mentions.

TOP ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED SCHOOLS

Gold medal schools serving the greatest numbers of economically disadvantaged students were also named as Top Economically Disadvantaged Schools. The list included 45 of the 100 Best High Schools, based on their high proportions of students receiving free or reduced-price lunch. All of M-DCPS' four gold medal schools were named as Top Economically Disadvantaged Schools.

BEST HIGH SCHOOLS FOR MATH AND SCIENCE

In September 2011, *U.S. News & World Report* published its first-ever Best High Schools for Math and Science list. In order to be included on the list, a school had to have received either a gold medal, silver medal, or honorable mention in the magazine's most recent (2009) ranking of Best High Schools. Based on this criterion, 598 high schools were eligible to be ranked, using data from 2008 graduates. The ranking was based on the number of students taking and passing college-level STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) courses. *U.S. News & World Report* ranked 208 schools as Best High Schools for Math and Science.

Specifically, the Best High Schools for Math and Science were determined by computing a Math and Science Achievement Index for each school, based on the proportions of students taking and passing math and science Advanced Placement (AP) courses. The percentage of twelfth graders *taking* at least one STEM math and science AP course was weighted at 25 percent, while the percentage of twelfth graders *passing* at least one STEM math and science AP course was weighted at 75 percent. The higher a school scored on the Math and Science Achievement Index, the higher it placed on the Best High Schools for Math and Science rankings. The 208 high schools that received an index score indicating that a "critical mass" of their students had gained access to and succeeded in their STEM courses at the AP level were placed on the list.

Three M-DCPS high schools were ranked as Best High Schools for Math and Science:

- Maritime and Science Technology Academy (MAST) (ranked #78)
- School for Advanced Studies - North (ranked #124)
- School for Advanced Studies - South (ranked #147)

MOST CONNECTED CLASSROOMS

The Most Connected Classrooms rankings measure the modernity and sophistication of high schools' online infrastructures, and the access students, faculty, and parents have to them at school and home. All public high schools ranked in *U.S. News & World Report's* most recent (2009) list of Best High Schools were eligible for inclusion in these rankings. *U.S. News & World Report* contacted administrators at 1,690 schools and asked them to complete an online survey. The survey requested information regarding schools' online and computer offerings, including Internet speed and wireless access; student and teacher access to computers; additional technological resources; and school-home connectivity. In total, 301 schools (or 18 percent of those who received surveys) submitted complete survey data.

The rankings methodology and survey questions were both created by *U.S. News & World Report*. They are based on the magazine's research, discussion with education professionals, and survey pilot testing. *U.S. News & World Report* created a Connectivity Index based on point values awarded to schools for responses to survey questions. The more points a school received, the higher its Connectivity Index. One hundred eighty-five high schools were numerically ranked as having the Most Connected Classrooms.

One school in Miami-Dade County was ranked as having Most Connected Classrooms: Mater Academy Charter Middle-High School. The school was ranked at 155 of the 185 schools.

Additional information on *U.S. News & World Report's* high school rankings is available at <http://education.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-high-schools>.

SUMMARY OF M-DCPS BEST HIGH SCHOOL RANKINGS

Gold Medal High Schools

Design and Architecture Senior High School (DASH)
Maritime and Science Technology Academy (MAST)
New World School of the Arts
Coral Reef Senior High School

Silver Medal, Bronze Medal, and Honorable Mention Schools

Mater Academy Charter Middle-Senior High School (silver medal)
William H. Turner Technical Arts High School (bronze medal)
School for Advanced Studies - North (honorable mention)
School for Advanced Studies - South (honorable mention)
School for Advanced Studies - Wolfson (honorable mention)

Top Economically Disadvantaged Schools

Design and Architecture Senior High School (DASH)
Maritime and Science Technology Academy (MAST)
New World School of the Arts
Coral Reef Senior High School

Best High Schools for Math and Science

Maritime and Science Technology Academy (MAST)
School for Advanced Studies - North
School for Advanced Studies - South

Most Connected Classrooms

Mater Academy Charter Middle-High School