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The Top of the Class

The complete list of the 1,300 top U.S. high schools

Newsweek Web Exclusive

Public schools are ranked according to a ratio devised by [Jay Mathews](#): the number of Advanced Placement, Intl. Baccalaureate and/or [Cambridge](#) tests taken by all students at a school in 2007 divided by the number of graduating seniors. All of the schools on the list have an index of at least 1.000; they are in the top 5 percent of public schools measured this way.

If you have questions about the list, please contact challenge@washpost.com. Note: Subs. Lunch % is the percentage of students receiving federally subsidized meals. E and E % stands for equity and excellence percentage: the portion of all graduating seniors at a school that had at least one passing grade on one AP or IB test. For more information on methodology, see our [FAQ](#); please leave your comments on the list in the comments box below.

Showing 1 to 12 of 12 Schools in Kentucky from 2008

<u>RANK</u>	<u>SCHOOL</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>STATE</u>	<u>INDEX</u>	<u>SUBS. LUNCH</u>	<u>E&E</u>
120	DuPont Manual	Louisville	Ky.	3.382	13	63.8
534	Ballard	Louisville	Ky.	1.972	21.9	32.2
654	Beechwood	Fort Mitchell	Ky.	1.779	6	26.5
704	Henry Clay	Lexington	Ky.	1.721	24	26.8
735	Highlands	Fort Thomas	Ky.	1.684	5	29.1
759	Dunbar	Lexington	Ky.	1.645	22	26.8
789	Eastern	Louisville	Ky.	1.616	25	28.9
796	Holmes **	Covington	Ky.	1.604	76	17
899	Bowling Green	Bowling Green	Ky.	1.488	46	30
904	Woodford County	Versailles	Ky.	1.486	20.6	22.3
1341	Ryle	Union	Ky.	1.087	13	25.1
1375	Oldham County	Buckner	Ky.	1.048	18.5	24.1

Showing 1 to 1 of 1 Schools in Buckner, KY from 2008

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PAST YEARS	RANK	SCHOOL	LOCATION	STATE	INDEX	SUBS.	LUNCH	E&E
	1375	Oldham County		Buckner	Ky.	1.048	18.5	24.1
2007	1263					1.069	18	28.1

1. How does the Challenge Index work?

We take the total number of Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate or [Cambridge](#) tests given at a school in May, and divide by the number of seniors graduating in May or June. All public schools that NEWSWEEK researchers Dan Brillman and Gina Pace found that achieved a ratio of at least 1.000, meaning they had as many tests in 2007 as they had graduates, are put on the list on NEWSWEEK Website, and the 100 schools with the highest ratios are named in NEWSWEEK magazine.

NEWSWEEK published national lists based on this formula in 1998, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2006 and 2007. In the Washington Post, I have reported the Challenge Index ratings for every public school in the Washington area every year since 1998. I think 1.000 is a modest standard. A school can reach that level if only half of its students take one AP, IB or Cambridge test in their junior year and one in their senior year. But this year only about five percent of the approximately 27,000 U.S. public high schools managed to reach that standard.

2. Why does the number of schools on the list get larger after the magazine comes out?

We invite all qualifying schools we may have missed to email us their data. There is no national database that has the number of AP, IB and Cambridge tests and number of graduates for each public high school, so we have had to build our own. We are happy to capture the few schools we missed by using the publicity generated by publication of a

3. Why do you count only the number of tests given, and not how well the students do on the tests?

In the past, schools have usually reported their passing rates on AP or IB as a sign of how well their programs were doing. When I say passing rate, I mean the percentage of students who scored 3, 4 or 5 on the 5-point AP test or 4, 5, 6 or 7 on the 7-point IB test. (The Cambridge tests, although similar to AP and IB, are used in very few schools, and rarely appear in school assessments.) Passing AP or IB scores are the rough equivalent of a C or C-plus in a college course and make the student eligible for credit at most colleges.

I decided not to count passing rates because I found that most American high schools kept those rates artificially high by allowing only top students to take the courses. In other instances, they opened the courses to all but encouraged only the best students to take the tests.

AP, IB and Cambridge are important because they give average students a chance to experience the trauma of heavy college reading lists and long, analytical college examinations. Studies by U.S. Department of Education senior researcher Clifford Adelman in 1999 and 2005 showed that the best predictors of college graduation were not good high-school grades or test scores, but whether or not a student had an intense academic experience in high school. Such experiences were produced by taking higher-level math and English courses and struggling with the demands of college-level courses like AP or IB. Two other studies looked at more than 150,000 students in California and Texas and found if they had passing scores on AP exams they were more likely to do well academically in college.

To send a student off to college without having had an AP, IB or Cambridge course and test is like insisting that a child learn to ride a bike without ever taking off the training wheels until the day you send the kid out onto the city streets alone. It is dumb, and in my view a form of educational malpractice. But most American high schools still do it. I don't think such schools should be rewarded because they have artificially high AP or IB passing rates achieved by making certain just their best students take the tests.

NEWSWEEK and The Washington Post have added a new statistic developed by the College Board that indicates how well students are doing on the exams at each school while still recognizing the importance of increasing student participation. It is the Equity and Excellence rate, the percentage of ALL graduating seniors, including those who never got near an AP course, who had at least one score of 3 or above on at least one AP test sometime in high school. That is the "E&E" on our list. "Subs. Lunch" on the list stands for the percentage of students who qualify for federally subsidized lunches, the best measure of the percentage of low-income students at each school.

The average Equity and Excellence rate in 2007 for all schools, including those that lacked AP programs, was 15.2 percent. On the 2008 NEWSWEEK list, we give the Equity and Excellence percentage for those schools that have the necessary data. We ask IB schools to calculate their IB, or combined AP-IB, Equity and Excellence rate, using a 4 on the 7-point IB test as the equivalent of a 3 on the AP.

Total of 1422 ranked schools in 2008