

Flagler high schools make magazine's 'best' list

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BUNNELL — Flagler County's traditional public high schools earned spots on a list of the nation's top high schools.

Flagler Palm Coast and Matanzas were the only schools in the area that were ranked on U.S. News and World Report's Best High Schools list, which was released Tuesday.

The rankings are based on statewide assessments and participation and passing rates on Advanced Placement tests and International Baccalaureate tests, with an emphasis on low-income and minority students.

Matanzas placed 1,523rd and

FPC placed 2,242nd out of 21,035 public schools in 49 states and Washington, D.C. No Nebraska schools were included in the rankings because the state did not report enough data.

The 2013 U.S. News and World Report rankings are based on data from the 2010-2011 school year.

Flagler has focused on beefing up its college-level offerings, said Shawn Schmidli, the district's coordinator for assessment and accountability, because performance in those courses is one of the biggest indicators for success after high school.

"By exposing them to AP and IB programs, that's what we're

doing," Schmidli said during a press conference Tuesday. "We're exposing them to rigor and preparing them for college."

U.S. News and World Report is one of many organizations that attempts to rank high schools across the country. The Washington Post recently released its annual list of "America's Most Challenging High Schools," which ranks schools based on the number of AP, IB and Advanced International Certificate of Education tests given at a school, divided by the number of graduating seniors.

Spruce Creek High in Port Orange was the area's top-scoring school on that list, ranking

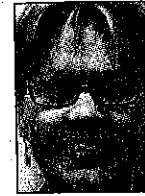
126th nationally.

In the U.S. News and World Report rankings, the top 500 schools earned a "gold" designation, the next 1,790 schools earned a "silver" designation. Gold and silver schools, including 89 in Florida, were ranked against others across the country. An additional 2,515 schools received "bronze" ratings.

This is the first time the Flagler schools have scored well enough to be ranked on the U.S. News and World Report list, officials said.

"We're proud of our schools and of our teachers and our support staff," Superintendent Janet Valentine said Tuesday.

There's a three-step formula to determine the rankings. The



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first part determines which schools performed better on statewide reading and math assessments than would be expected with the percentage of students identified as economically disadvantaged.

The second part identified schools where black, Hispanic or economically-disadvantaged students performed at least as

well on assessments as the statewide averages for those subgroups. Finally, researchers looked at the percentage of 12th-graders who took and passed an AP or IB exam at some point during high school.

The American Institutes for Research, a nonprofit and nonpartisan behavioral and social science research organization based in Washington, D.C., created the rankings. The organization also helped Florida develop its value-added model for evaluating teachers.

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