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**CHALLENGED INDEX:**

Why Newsweek's List of America's 100 Best High Schools Doesn't Make The Grade

By Andrew J. Rotherham and Sara Mead

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## About the Authors

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Americans love rankings, and one has to look no further than the local newsstand for evidence. Every week, it seems, a magazine or newspaper runs a headline about the number one way to lose weight, the five hottest new soul singers or the top ten most powerful dishwashers. Education has not been spared from this national obsession, and *U.S. News and World Report's* annual ranking of colleges and universities shows just how influential such ratings can be: Some colleges have altered their admissions practices in order to boost their scores in the newsmagazine's rankings.

While there is no national ranking of the country's elementary and secondary schools, *Newsweek* publishes a list of the top 100 American high schools. The annual list has become increasingly influential since its inception in 1998, and now some newspapers, such as the *Journal News* in suburban New York City, have begun to cover the release as if it were a horserace, detailing the ups and downs of individual schools and publishing tables on which schools did and did not make the grade.<sup>1</sup>

The highly regarded *Washington Post* education writer Jay Mathews developed the *Newsweek* formula. (The Washington Post Company publishes *Newsweek*).<sup>2</sup> He calls it the Challenge Index, and it is a simple measure: Divide the number of Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) tests taken by students at a high school by the number of graduating seniors.

how effectively a high school prepares its students for post-secondary success.<sup>3</sup> Further, because the same AP and IB tests are given to students nationally, the Challenge Index allows Mathews to compare schools from different states.

While the number of students taking AP and IB tests is one key indicator of a good high school, we believe that the Challenge Index is a seriously flawed measure of overall quality. A successful high school should show high levels of student achievement, graduate almost all of its students and not let any demographic subgroup suffer at the expense of others. Most national and local experts and policymakers share these values. To be sure, graduation rates and student achievement are hardly the only indicators of a school's quality. At a minimum, however, America's best high schools should be expected to meet these basic criteria.

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**The Challenge Index =**

$$\frac{\text{AP and IB Tests Taken}}{\text{Number of Graduating Seniors}}$$

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Mathews focuses on AP and IB because the courses are supposed to give students an opportunity to experience challenging, college-level work while still in high school. And, according to Mathews, the percent of students taking the exams is better than other measures at gauging

Yet our analysis shows that many schools on *Newsweek's* list do not meet these minimum standards. Using publicly available student performance data, we found that many schools on *Newsweek's* 2005 ranking have glaring achievement gaps and high dropout rates. By presenting them as America's best, *Newsweek* is misleading readers and slighting other schools that may in fact be better than those on Mathews' list. For example, the magazine ranks Eastside High School in Gainesville, Fla., as the third best high school in the nation, but only 12 percent of Eastside's black students were reading at grade-level in 2004.<sup>4</sup> And *Newsweek* ranks Hillsborough High School in Tampa, Fla., as America's 10th best high school, but only 17 percent of black students

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and 26 percent of Hispanic students met the state's modest grade-level standards in 2004. While some students at Eastside or Hillsborough may be receiving a challenging education, it's clear that many are not. And Eastside and Hillsborough are not outliers. In fact, schools with substantial inequities in student achievement make up a significant proportion of *Newsweek's* list of best high schools.

Our research shows that *Newsweek's* methodology is far too focused on one discrete indicator of school quality and that many schools that fail to make the *Newsweek* list may be doing a better job educating *all* of their students.

Certainly, ensuring that more students take rigorous courses is important, and *Newsweek's* emphasis on the practice is commendable. However, the inclusion of schools with significant achievements gaps and very low performance for some student groups raises two important questions:

- Is Mathews' methodology the best way to find out which high schools are America's best, in light of the increasing public availability of school data?
- Is this list fair to other non-selective public high schools?

We think the answer to both questions is no.

## Method

Our analysis is straightforward. We collected student performance data for the 100 schools in *Newsweek's* 2005 "America's 100 Best High Schools" issue.<sup>5</sup> The data was available on Standard and Poor's Web site, [www.schoolmatters.com](http://www.schoolmatters.com), and came from state assessments and accountability systems. When information was not available through this site, we went to the Web sites of state departments of education. Most of the data we obtained reflect student performance on state tests administered in spring 2004. In a minority of cases, the available data was from 2003 or 2005.<sup>6</sup>

To try to get a better understanding of how schools on *Newsweek's* list are serving different populations of students, we looked at disaggregated student performance data on state assessments

and calculated the achievement gaps for three student populations that are often underserved: black students, Hispanic students and students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. For each group, we examined the proficiency gaps: the difference between the percent of proficient students from one subgroup, according to the standards defined by their state, and the percent of those proficient from another group. We compared the percent of black and Hispanic students proficient in reading/language arts and math with the percent of white students, and the percent of economically disadvantaged students with the school-wide average.<sup>7</sup> We also collected the graduation rates of schools on *Newsweek's* list and, when available, graduation rate data disaggregated by race, ethnicity and family income.

Of the 95 schools on *Newsweek's* list for which we were able to find data, 73 reported data on at least one of these three subgroups: students who are black, Hispanic or economically disadvantaged.<sup>8</sup> Of the other 22 schools, six reported no disaggregated data, and 16 had disaggregated data for white students only.

## Findings

### Black-White Test Score Gaps

Sixty-one schools on *Newsweek's* list reported data for both black and white students in reading, and the average difference between the percentages of white and black students who were proficient was 26 points. The achievement gaps ranged from 67 percentage points at Florida's Eastside High School to a negative 5.1 percentage points (meaning more black than white students were proficient) at Brighton High School in Rochester, N.Y., with a median gap of 25.5 points. Forty schools on *Newsweek's* list had black-white reading achievement gaps of greater than 20 percentage points.

In math, 56 schools reported data for both black and white student subgroups, and the average gap between the percentages of white and black students who scored proficient was 31 points. Differences ranged from 61 points, again at Eastside, to negative 3.8 points at Great Neck South in Great Neck, N.Y., with a median gap of 32.5 points. Thirty-nine schools on *Newsweek's* list had a black-white

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math achievement gap of 20 percentage points or greater.

### Hispanic-White Test Score Gaps

In the 58 schools with disaggregated data for white and Hispanic students in reading, the average gap between the percentages of white and Hispanic students who scored proficient was 19 points. Gaps ranged from 57 points at Chapel Hill High School, in Chapel Hill, N.C., to negative 10 at Clarke County High School in Berryville, Va., with a median gap of 19 points. Twenty-seven schools on *Newsweek's* list had a Hispanic-white reading achievement gap of 20 percentage points or greater.

In math, 54 schools reported data for both white and Hispanic students, and the average difference between the percentages of white and Hispanic students proficient in math was 18 points. Differences ranged from 53 points at Gunn High School in Palo Alto, Calif., to negative 4 points at Rochester's Brighton, with a median gap of 17 points. Twenty-six schools on *Newsweek's* list had Hispanic-white math achievement gaps of 20 percentage points or greater.

### Gaps By Income

In the 60 schools with disaggregated data for economically disadvantaged students in reading, the average difference between the percentages of economically disadvantaged students proficient and the school-wide average was 19 points. Differences ranged from 56 points at Palo Alto's Gunn to negative 2 points at Pittsford Mendon High School in Pittsford, N.Y., with a median gap of 13 points. Twenty-seven schools on *Newsweek's* list had achievement gaps in reading of greater than 20 points between their economically disadvantaged students and school-wide averages.

In math, 55 schools reported data for economically disadvantaged students, and the average difference between the percentages of economically disadvantaged students proficient and school-wide averages was 20 points. Differences ranged from 68 points at East Chapel Hill in Chapel Hill, N.C., to negative 2 points at the Science Academy in Mercedes, Texas, with a median gap of 19 points. Twenty-five schools on *Newsweek's* list had achievement gaps in math greater than 20

points between their economically disadvantaged students and school-wide averages.

### Graduation Rate Gaps

We examined the graduation rates of *Newsweek's* top high schools for two reasons. First, graduation is an important indicator of school performance. Second, graduation rates are particularly important in considering the accuracy of the Challenge Index, because the denominator in the Challenge Index is the number of *graduates*, rather than the number of students who should have graduated in a given year.

We found graduation rates for 84 schools, and the average graduation rate for these schools was 91 percent.<sup>9</sup> Although this average rate seems quite high, researchers have extensively documented methodological flaws in the graduation rate data reported by many schools and states.<sup>10</sup> The tendency is for schools to *underreport* dropouts, so these graduation rates should be approached cautiously. Still, some schools on *Newsweek's* list reported graduation rates that are disturbingly low. While 77 schools report graduation rates of 90 percent or higher, nine schools on *Newsweek's* list had graduation rates of less than 75 percent.

Nevertheless, it is possible to compare gaps in graduation rates within each high school because the same method is used to calculate the graduation rate for each group in the school. The results were disappointing. Only 26 schools reported graduation rates for black students as a separate subgroup, and the average rate was only 71 percent. The graduation rates for blacks ranged widely from 43 percent at St. Petersburg High School in St. Petersburg, Fla., to 100 percent at both Science/Engineering Magnet in Dallas and Grapevine High School in Grapevine, Texas. The median black graduation rate was 65 percent. All but one of these schools also reported graduation rates for both black and white students, and the average gap between the graduation rates was 15 percentage points, with a median gap of 18 points.

Nineteen schools reported graduation rates for Hispanic students, and the average rate was 81 percent. These graduation rates also ranged widely, from 50 percent at Florida's Hillsborough High School to 100 percent at Newport High

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School in Newport, Wash., and Bellevue High School in Bellevue, Wash. The median Hispanic graduation rate was 85 percent. Seventeen schools reported graduation rates for both white and Hispanic student subgroups, and the average graduation gap between the two groups was 10 percentage points, with a median gap of 9 points.

Twenty-one schools reported data for economically disadvantaged students, and the average graduation rate was 63 percent. Again, these numbers were all over the map. Interlake High School in Bellevue, Wash., reported that none of its economically disadvantaged students graduated, while Science/Engineering Magnet in Dallas graduated all of its low-income students. The median graduation rate for economically disadvantaged students was 61 percent. The average gap in graduation rates between economically disadvantaged students and school-wide averages was 17 percentage points, with a median gap of 19 points.

## Implications

While some schools on *Newsweek's* list may be among the best in the nation, a closer look at the data reveals that many do not meet a reasonable definition of a good high school. Indeed, some of the schools on the list have such significant achievement gaps that they should be on a list of schools needing improvement rather than on one for best schools.<sup>11</sup> And it is not merely the case of a few outliers. In fact, so many of the schools on the list have such significant gaps in achievement among their student subgroups that it calls into question the entire *Newsweek* enterprise.

First, we should explain why it's possible that so many schools that score well on the Challenge Index could still have substantial achievement gaps:

- The Challenge Index does not reflect how AP and IB tests are distributed. If a school has more students taking AP or IB tests than the number of graduates, it does not mean that every student in the school is taking an AP or IB test. In fact, a school with a small number of students taking many tests will receive a high Challenge Index score even if it is providing a lousy education to the rest of its students.
- Similarly, some of the schools on the *Newsweek* list may have selective school-within-a-school-type programs in which a few students take a lot of tests, and, again, make the whole school look good. While the *Newsweek* index only lists schools where at least half the students are admitted on an open-enrollment basis, this filter is not sufficient.
- The design of the Challenge Index does not account for schools that have high dropout rates. Non-completion is an enormous problem among minority students. Based on the most commonly accepted methodology for calculating completion rates, only 56 percent of black students and 52 percent of Hispanic students finish high school with a degree.<sup>12</sup> Because the Challenge Index uses the number of students who graduated in a given year as the denominator, rather than the number of those who should have done so, it fails to account for the large number of students who drop out.
- The achievement gaps detailed in these schools are not that different from those in other schools. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, minority students lag behind their white peers by about four-grade levels by the end of high school.<sup>13</sup> However, if these *Newsweek* schools are going to be held up as the gold standard, they should not have such large achievement gaps.

In *Newsweek's* defense, it is very difficult to measure the quality of a high school. For one, state assessment practices and procedures are far from uniform. Some states test students at the end of courses, while others use graduation exams. State accountability systems are also often not sophisticated enough to rank schools. Moreover, by the time students reach high school they have often suffered from years of educational neglect, and it's extremely difficult to measure how much a high school has helped each student improve.

We hope our research produces two results:

***First, Newsweek should characterize its rankings more precisely, and thus more accurately.*** Certainly, there is value in AP and IB course-taking, and schools that encourage more students to take such advanced classes should be lauded. However,

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the current *Newsweek* approach gives readers the wrong impression about the overall achievement of these schools. These schools score highly on one very narrow measure that ignores many other important aspects of school quality. At the very least, *Newsweek* should change the language surrounding the release of the list to make it clear what these 100 high schools are actually best in: having students take AP and IB exams. The *Newsweek* list also slightes the work of other excellent open-enrollment public high schools that are striving to provide an excellent and equitable education to their students but may have fewer AP and IB test-takers.

**Second, *Newsweek* should use more sophisticated measures.** Despite the shortcomings of the adequate yearly progress (AYP) requirements in No Child Left Behind, AYP is a more comprehensive measure of school performance than the *Newsweek* ranking, because it looks at how well different student subgroups are performing. To be sure, AYP could not be used to measure the best schools in the country; while the approach helps policymakers root out low-performing schools, it is too limited to serve as a ranking mechanism for the country's best schools.

*Newsweek* could, however, take some simple steps to improve their ranking. One option is to tighten the definition of what constitutes an open-enrollment school. They could also include disaggregated data and graduation rates in their rankings and reward schools that do well with students from diverse backgrounds. As state data systems become more developed, information about course-taking patterns and other measures of college preparation—as well as longitudinal data about performance—could also be included.

A second option is to develop a more elaborate metric for determining school quality and couple it with professional judgment. The Broad Foundation's selection process for the Broad Prize for Urban Education is one model. Each year, the Broad Foundation convenes a review board to examine the achievement of the nation's largest school districts.<sup>14</sup> As part of the process, the review board examines copious amounts of data, but the members base their final decision on both subjective and objective observations.<sup>15</sup> This method is obviously more

laborious than simply using the Challenge Index. But adding more indicators to the Challenge Index would produce a much more accurate ranking.

Jay Mathews claims that he would broaden the ranking to include other school characteristics such as teacher quality if those factors could be accurately measured.<sup>16</sup> In the past, this was a reasonable point.<sup>17</sup> Today, however, there is a wealth of publicly available data on schools, including data about teacher quality. All the data in this report, for instance, came from publicly available sources, and much more data than what appears here could be used to rate the nation's schools.

## Conclusion

*Newsweek's* Challenge Index measures exactly what it purports to: the number of AP and IB tests taken by students in a school. In doing so, the newsmagazine provides a comparative measure of one aspect of high school quality. Unfortunately, the magazine also uses the formula to compile a list that it hails as the nation's best schools. But a closer examination of these schools shows that some grossly shortchange disadvantaged groups and have a significant number of drop outs.

A rating of America's high schools that examines how schools prepare students for a broad range of post-secondary opportunities has tremendous value, especially as educators and policymakers seek to improve high school curricula. For a national magazine with the reputation and stature of *Newsweek* to engage in such an effort is something that the education community should welcome, not shun. But *Newsweek* must take steps to improve their approach. Because, as the magazine knows as well as anyone, everyone wants a top-rated ranking.

## Appendix I

**Table 1: Reading and Math Achievement Gaps Between White and Black Students**

Rank	School	% Reading Proficient			% Math Proficient		
		White	Black	Gap	White	Black	Gap
3	Stanton College Prep (Jacksonville, Fla.)	92	68	24	n.a.	88	n.a.
4	Eastside (Gainesville, Fla.)	79	12	67	89	28	61
6	Science/Engineering Magnet** (Dallas, Texas)	93	97	-4	99	97	2
7	Paxon (Jacksonville, Fla.)	81	56	25	n.a.	89	n.a.
8	Pensacola (Pensacola, Fla.)	63	14	49	80	26	54
10	Hillsborough (Tampa, Fla.)	65	17	48	84	41	43
11	Richard Montgomery (Rockville, Md.)	93.4	65.8	27.6	78.2	30.8	47.4
13	Coral Reef (Miami, Fla.)	69	46	23	91	71	20
15	McNair Academic (Jersey City, N.J.)	100	100	0	100	100	0
17	Wootton (Rockville, Md.)	96	72	24	88	46.2	41.8
18	Atlantic Community (Delray Beach, Fla.)	71	12	59	89	33	56
20	Dreyfoos School of the Arts (West Palm Beach, Fla.)	82	54	28	n.a.	82	n.a.
22	Great Neck South (Great Neck, N.Y.)	98.7	100	-1.3	96.2	100	-3.8
23	George Mason** (Falls Church, Va.)	95.7	80	15.7	97.6	100	-2.4
25	Harding University* (Charlotte, N.C.)	90.8	61.3	29.5	92	64.2	27.8
27	Wilson Magnet (Rochester, N.Y.)	82	63.5	18.5	86	61.5	24.5
28	LA Center for Enriched Studies** (Los Angeles, Calif.)	85.9	57.9	28	69.9	38.9	31
29	Bethesda-Chevy Chase (Bethesda, Md.)	92.1	56.7	35.4	88.4	39.5	48.9
30	Manhasset (Manhasset, N.Y.)	97.1	72.7	24.4	96.4	54.5	41.9
31	Lincoln Park (Chicago, Ill.)	84.4	37.9	46.5	81.1	31.3	49.8
33	Design and Architecture (Miami, Fla.)	83	50	33	n.a.	91	n.a.
34	W.T. Woodson** (Fairfax, Va.)	97	68.2	28.8	94.1	77.8	16.3
35	St. Petersburg (St. Petersburg, Fla.)	57	16	41	75	21	54
36	King (Tampa, Fla.)	59	18	41	84	39	45
37	Myers Park* (Charlotte, N.C.)	95	39.1	55.9	95	46.5	48.5
38	East Chapel Hill* (Chapel Hill, N.C.)	93.4	61.5	31.9	92.4	52.4	40
41	Bellevue (Bellevue, Wash.)	91.3	90	1.3	76.3	40	36.3
43	Great Neck North (Great Neck, N.Y.)	97.8	100	-2.2	98.4	80	18.4
44	Washington-Lee** (Arlington, Va.)	98.2	85.4	12.8	94.5	77.3	17.2
45	South Side (Rockville Centre, N.Y.)	97.6	84.6	13	98.1	84.6	13.5
46	Banneker** (Washington, D.C.)	n.a.	86.41	n.a.	n.a.	96.12	n.a.
47	Brighton (Rochester, N.Y.)	94.9	100	-5.1	95.8	93.3	2.5
50	Langley** (McClean, Va.)	98.1	92.3	5.8	95.5	73.7	21.8
51	Yorktown** (Arlington, Va.)	97	92.3	4.7	93	60.5	32.5
52	Enloe* (Raleigh, N.C.)	95	54.7	40.3	95	52.1	42.9
53	Miami Palmetto (Miami, Fla.)	61	13	48	85	33	52

All data is from 2004 unless denoted.

\* Data from 2003

\*\* Data from 2005



## Reading and Math Achievement Gaps Between White and Black Students *(continued)*

Rank	School	% Reading Proficient			% Math Proficient		
		White	Black	Gap	White	Black	Gap
54	Spruce Creek (Port Orange, Fla.)	55	10	45	79	31	48
55	Wyoming (Wyoming, Ohio)	100	100	0	97.9	72.2	25.7
56	North Mecklenburg* (Huntersville, N.C.)	88.9	52.9	36	89.4	52.9	36.5
59	Mills University Studies* (Little Rock, Ark.)	63.2	19.8	43.4	28	7.3	20.7
60	Oxnard** (Oxnard, Calif.)	60.7	37.5	23.2	51.4	34.4	17
62	Warwick** (Newport News, Va.)	91.5	72	19.5	84.3	64.8	19.5
63	Fort Myers (Fort Myers, Fla.)	79	23	56	93	40	53
66	Marine and Science Tech (Miami, Fla.)	82	70	12	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
67	Grimsley* (Greensboro, N.C.)	92.6	47.6	45	93.3	54.5	38.8
69	Plant (Tampa, Fla.)	66	28	38	88	48	40
71	Churchill (Potomac, Md.)	97.5	72	25.5	90.8	42.4	48.4
74	Chapel Hill* (Chapel Hill, N.C.)	94.1	42.2	51.9	93.5	40	53.5
75	Sumner Academy (Kansas City, Kan.)	88.1	75.3	12.8	69.2	61.4	7.8
76	Westwood** (Austin, Texas)	85	73	12	95	59	36
77	W.T. White** (Dallas, Texas)	92	80	12	84	51	33
78	Pittsford Sutherland (Pittsford, N.Y.)	98.1	100	-1.9	96.7	100	-3.3
79	Lake Brantley (Altamonte Springs, Fla.)	56	25	31	81	53	28
80	Walter Johnson (Bethesda, Md.)	90.7	69.4	21.3	82.6	37.1	45.5
83	Palm Harbor University (Palm Harbor, Fla.)	70	47	23	87	71	16
84	Robinson** (Fairfax, Va.)	96	72.5	23.5	94.6	82.9	11.7
87	Clarke County** (Berryville, Va.)	90.2	75	15.2	76	45	31
88	Butler* (Matthews, N.C.)	80.2	58.2	22	84.4	56.1	28.3
89	Cocoa Beach (Cocoa Beach, Fla.)	68	36	32	83	65	18
94	Chantilly** (Chantilly, Va.)	94.6	79.6	15	91.7	63.1	28.6
99	Pikesville (Baltimore, Md.)	87	56.3	30.7	67.8	25.5	42.3
100	Grapevine** (Grapevine, Texas)	83	57	26	86	46	40

All data is from 2004 unless denoted.

\* Data from 2003

\*\* Data from 2005

Source: [www.schoolmatters.com](http://www.schoolmatters.com), New York State Department of Education, California Department of Education

**Table 2: Reading and Math Achievement Gaps Between White and Hispanic Students**

Rank	School	% Reading Proficient			% Math Proficient		
		White	Hispanic	Gap	White	Hispanic	Gap
6	Science/Engineering Magnet** (Dallas, Texas)	93	97	-4	99	99	0
10	Hillsborough (Tampa, Fla.)	65	26	39	84	59	25
11	Richard Montgomery (Rockville, Md.)	93.4	68.3	25.1	78.2	37.3	40.9
12	Highland Park** (Dallas, Texas)	94	93	1	97	99	-2
13	Coral Reef (Miami, Fla.)	69	63	6	91	87	4
15	McNair Academic (Jersey City, N.J.)	100	100	0	100	100	0
17	Wootton (Rockville, Md.)	96	77.3	18.7	88	73.1	14.9
18	Atlantic Community (Delray Beach, Fla.)	71	49	22	89	72	17
20	Dreyfoos School of the Arts (West Palm Beach, Fla.)	82	66	16	n.a.	88	n.a.
21	Troy** (Fullerton, Calif.)	86.2	60	26.2	87.2	58.6	28.6
22	Great Neck South (Great Neck, N.Y.)	98.7	86.7	12	96.2	93.3	2.9
23	George Mason** (Falls Church, Va.)	95.7	66.7	29	97.6	89.7	7.9
24	Interlake (Bellevue, Wash.)	79.2	48	31.2	57.4	23.1	34.3
27	Wilson Magnet (Rochester, N.Y.)	82	84	-2	86	64	22
28	LA Center for Enriched Studies** (Los Angeles, Calif.)	85.9	52.3	33.6	69.9	44.2	25.7
29	Bethesda-Chevy Chase (Bethesda, Md.)	92.1	57.1	35	88.4	42.6	45.8
30	Manhasset (Manhasset, N.Y.)	97.1	63.6	33.5	96.4	72.7	23.7
31	Lincoln Park (Chicago, Ill.)	84.4	58.4	26	81.1	44.9	36.2
33	Design and Architecture (Miami, Fla.)	83	63	20	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
34	W.T. Woodson** (Fairfax, Va.)	97	87.5	9.5	94.1	78.3	15.8
35	St. Petersburg (St. Petersburg, Fla.)	57	22	35	75	46	29
36	King (Tampa, Fla.)	59	32	27	84	63	21
37	Myers Park* (Charlotte, N.C.)	95	54.5	40.5	95	72.7	22.3
38	East Chapel Hill* (Chapel Hill, N.C.)	93.4	66.7	26.7	92.4	60	32.4
40	The Science Academy* (Mercedes, Texas)	n.a.	91.1	n.a.	n.a.	90.9	n.a.
43	Great Neck North (Great Neck, N.Y.)	97.8	75	22.8	98.4	66.7	31.7
44	Washington-Lee** (Arlington, Va.)	98.2	82.2	16	94.5	77.5	17
45	South Side (Rockville Centre, N.Y.)	97.6	88.9	8.7	98.1	96.3	1.8
47	Brighton (Rochester, N.Y.)	94.9	85.7	9.2	95.8	100	-4.2
50	Langley** (McLean, Va.)	98.1	72.2	25.9	95.5	84.9	10.6
51	Yorktown** (Arlington, Va.)	97	83.9	13.1	93	78.3	14.7
52	Enloe* (Raleigh, N.C.)	95	75	20	95	87.5	7.5
53	Miami Palmetto (Miami, Fla.)	61	40	21	85	63	22
54	Spruce Creek (Port Orange, Fla.)	55	56	-1	79	83	-4
56	North Mecklenburg* (Huntersville, N.C.)	88.9	41.7	47.2	89.4	50	39.4
60	Oxnard** (Oxnard, Calif.)	60.7	41.8	18.9	51.4	39.1	12.3
62	Warwick** (Newport News, Va.)	91.5	77.3	14.2	84.3	83.7	0.6
63	Fort Myers (Fort Myers, Fla.)	79	55	24	93	69	24

All data is from 2004 unless denoted.

\* Data from 2003

\*\* Data from 2005

## Reading and Math Achievement Gaps Between White and Hispanic Students *(continued)*

Rank	School	% Reading Proficient			% Math Proficient		
		White	Hispanic	Gap	White	Hispanic	Gap
66	Marine and Science Tech (Miami, Fla.)	82	72	10	n.a.	94	n.a.
67	Grimsley* (Greensboro, N.C.)	92.6	55.6	37	93.3	62.5	30.8
69	Plant (Tampa, Fla.)	66	47	19	88	78	10
70	Gunn** (Palo Alto, Calif.)	91.3	47.6	43.7	89.3	36.8	52.5
71	Churchill (Potomac, Md.)	97.5	82.8	14.7	90.8	75	15.8
72	Westlake* (Austin, Texas)	88.5	90.9	-2.4	n.a.	91.4	n.a.
74	Chapel Hill* (Chapel Hill, N.C.)	94.1	37.5	56.6	93.5	62.5	31
75	Sumner Academy (Kansas City, Kan.)	88.1	56.3	31.8	69.2	66.7	2.5
76	Westwood (Austin, Texas)	85	78	7	95	75	20
77	W.T. White** (Dallas, Texas)	92	74	18	84	61	23
79	Lake Brantley (Altamonte Springs, Fla.)	56	30	26	81	58	23
80	Walter Johnson* (Bethesda, Md.)	90.7	52.5	38.2	82.6	47.5	35.1
82	Torrey Pines** (San Diego, Calif.)	90.6	49.3	41.3	86.9	47.1	39.8
83	Palm Harbor University (Palm Harbor, Fla.)	70	59	11	87	88	-1
84	Robinson** (Fairfax, Va.)	96	88.9	7.1	94.6	88.9	5.7
87	Clarke County** (Berryville, Va.)	90.2	100	-9.8	76	75	1
88	Butler* (Matthews, N.C.)	80.2	80	0.2	84.4	85	-0.6
89	Cocoa Beach (Cocoa Beach, Fla.)	68	74	-6	83	79	4
94	Chantilly** (Chantilly, Va.)	94.6	82.9	11.7	91.7	85.1	6.6
97	Rye Neck (Mamaronek, N.Y.)	100	100	0	94.4	86.7	7.7
100	Grapevine** (Grapevine, Texas)	83	70	13	86	61	25

All data is from 2004 unless denoted.

\* Data from 2003

\*\* Data from 2005

Source: [www.schoolmatters.com](http://www.schoolmatters.com), New York State Department of Education, California Department of Education

**Table 3: Reading and Math Achievement Gaps for Economically Disadvantaged Students**

Rank	School Name	% Reading Proficient			% Math Proficient		
		All Students	Economic	Gap	All Students	Economic	Gap
3	Stanton College Prep (Jacksonville, Fla.)	86	72	14	n.a.	91	n.a.
4	Eastside (Gainesville, Fla.)	43	11	32	58	28	30
6	Science/Engineering Magnet** (Dallas, Texas)	96	96	0	99	98	1
7	Paxon (Jacksonville, Fla.)	72	61	11	94	88	6
8	Pensacola (Pensacola, Fla.)	35	17	18	50	35	15
10	Hillsborough (Tampa, Fla.)	39	19	20	64	47	17
11	Richard Montgomery (Rockville, Md.)	83.3	68.1	15.2	65.3	45.6	19.7
13	Coral Reef (Miami, Fla.)	62	53	9	85	74	11
15	McNair Academic (Jersey City, N.J.)	100	100	0	100	100	0
17	Wootton (Rockville, Md.)	92.4	76.2	16.2	86.9	70	16.9
18	Atlantic Community (Delray Beach, Fla.)	45	13	32	65	38	27
20	Dreyfoos School of the Arts (West Palm Beach, Fla.)	76	40	36	93	74	19
21	Troy** (Fullerton, Calif.)	85.8	57.1	28.7	87.1	60.7	26.4
22	Great Neck South (Great Neck, N.Y.)	96.6	90.9	5.7	96.6	90.9	5.7
24	Interlake (Bellevue, Wash.)	72.9	63.9	9	48.5	29.5	19
25	Harding University* (Charlotte, N.C.)	69.9	44.2	25.7	73.6	50	23.6
27	Wilson Magnet (Rochester, N.Y.)	70.4	70.9	-0.5	68.4	65.8	2.6
28	LA Center for Enriched Studies** (Los Angeles, CA)	68.2	55	13.2	55.7	47.6	8.1
29	Bethesda-Chevy Chase (Bethesda, Md.)	82.1	41.2	40.9	70.6	29.7	40.9
31	Lincoln Park (Chicago, Ill.)	63.4	54.3	9.1	59.8	52	7.8
32	Newport (Bellevue, Wash.)	93.9	87.5	6.4	81.7	75	6.7
33	Design and Architecture (Miami, Fla.)	67	58	9	n.a.	93	n.a.
35	St. Petersburg (St. Petersburg, Fla.)	44	19	25	59	29	30
36	King (Tampa, Fla.)	42	20	22	65	46	19
37	Myers Park* (Charlotte, N.C.)	80.2	40	40.2	83.6	48.8	34.8
38	East Chapel Hill* (Chapel Hill, N.C.)	86.3	36.4	49.9	87.8	20	67.8
39	Pittsford Mendon (Pittsford, N.Y.)	97.8	100	-2.2	96.9	80	16.9
40	The Science Academy* (Mercedes, Texas)	92.6	89.7	2.9	93.3	94.9	-1.6
41	Bellevue (Bellevue, Wash.)	90.1	84.6	5.5	74.6	65.4	9.2
43	Great Neck North (Great Neck, N.Y.)	96.4	89.5	6.9	95.9	78.9	17
45	South Side (Rockville Centre, N.Y.)	96.1	81	15.1	97.3	85.7	11.6
46	Banneker** (Washington, D.C.)	86.78	84.91	1.87	96.69	100	-3.31
47	Brighton (Rochester, N.Y.)	93.6	83.3	10.3	94.7	94.4	0.3
52	Enloe* (Raleigh, N.C.)	82.1	47.6	34.5	80.5	44	36.5
53	Miami Palmetto (Miami, Fla.)	46	13	33	69	33	36
54	Spruce Creek (Port Orange, Fla.)	52	25	27	76	49	27
56	North Mecklenburg* (Huntersville, N.C.)	80.7	44.2	36.5	81.7	40.5	41.2
57	Monta Vista** (Cupertino, Calif.)	93.6	66.7	26.9	95.7	75	20.7

All data is from 2004 unless denoted.

\* Data from 2003

\*\* Data from 2005

## Reading and Math Achievement Gaps for Economically Disadvantaged Students *(continued)*

Rank	State	% Reading Proficient			% Math Proficient		
		All Students	Economic	Gap	All Students	Economic	Gap
59	Mills University Studies* (Little Rock, Ark.)	40.6	19.4	21.2	14.9	9.3	5.6
60	Oxnard** (Oxnard, Calif.)	48.5	32.7	15.8	44.6	34.9	9.7
63	Fort Myers (Fort Myers, Fla.)	68	40	28	82	57	25
66	Marine and Science Tech (Miami, Fla.)	75	63	12	n.a.	94	n.a.
67	Grimsley* (Greensboro, N.C.)	77.6	49.5	28.1	80.8	56.8	24
68	University Park Campus (Worcester, Massachusetts)	82.9	82.6	0.3	85.7	87	-1.3
69	Plant (Tampa, Fla.)	59	28	31	83	56	27
70	Gunn** (Palo Alto, Calif.)	89.1	33.3	55.8	89.5	46.2	43.3
71	Churchill (Potomac, Md.)	95.2	83.3	11.9	88.3	72.7	15.6
72	Westlake* (Austin, Texas)	89.2	80	9.2	95	90	n.a.
74	Chapel Hill* (Chapel Hill, N.C.)	85.1	44	41.1	85.7	32	53.7
75	Sumner Academy (Kansas City, Kan.)	78	78.4	-0.4	65.3	62.7	2.6
76	Westwood** (Austin, Texas)	83	71	12	91	65	26
77	W.T. White** (Dallas, Texas)	79	76	3	63	59	4
79	Lake Brantley (Altamonte Springs, Fla.)	49	23	26	75	53	22
80	Walter Johnson (Bethesda, Md.)	84.1	52.4	31.7	74.9	50	24.9
82	Torrey Pines** (San Diego, Calif.)	87.2	48.7	38.5	84.8	47.5	37.3
83	Palm Harbor University (Palm Harbor, Fla.)	69	56	13	88	85	3
88	Butler* (Matthews, N.C.)	76.2	67.7	8.5	79.1	53.2	25.9
89	Cocoa Beach (Cocoa Beach, Fla.)	68	56	12	82	70	12
99	Pikesville (Baltimore, Md.)	76.3	31	45.3	52.1	27.6	24.5
100	Grapevine** (Grapevine, Texas)	81	61	20	83	58	25

All data is from 2004 unless denoted.

\* Data from 2003

\*\* Data from 2005

Source: [www.schoolmatters.com](http://www.schoolmatters.com), New York State Department of Education, California Department of Education

**Table 4: Graduation Rate Gaps Between White and Black Students**

Rank	School Name	Graduation Rate		
		White	Black	Gap
3	Stanton College Prep (Jacksonville, Fla.)	89	83	6
4	Eastside (Gainesville, Fla.)	76	48	28
6	Science/Engineering Magnet** (Dallas, Texas)	100	100	0
7	Paxon (Jacksonville, Fla.)	73	60	13
8	Pensacola (Pensacola, Fla.)	71	53	18
10	Hillsborough (Tampa, Fla.)	72	46	26
13	Coral Reef (Miami, Fla.)	94	92	2
18	Atlantic Community (Delray Beach, Fla.)	74	48	26
20	Dreyfoos School of the Arts (West Palm Beach, Fla.)	95	94	1
24	Interlake** (Bellevue, Wash.)	82.9	54.6	28.3
27	Wilson Magnet (Rochester, N.Y.)	70	72	-2
31	Lincoln Park (Chicago, Ill.)	n.a.	64.7	n.a.
32	Newport** (Bellevue, Wash.)	93.1	50	43.1
35	St. Petersburg (St. Petersburg, Fla.)	67	43	24
36	King (Tampa, Fla.)	83	64	19
41	Bellevue** (Bellevue, Wash.)	94.3	90	4.3
45	South Side*** (Rockville Centre, N.Y.)	97.7	80	17.7
53	Miami Palmetto (Miami, Fla.)	89	62	27
54	Spruce Creek (Port Orange, Fla.)	87	62	25
63	Fort Myers (Fort Myers, Fla.)	87	61	26
66	Marine and Science Tech (Miami, Fla.)	92	95	-3
69	Plant (Tampa, Fla.)	87	59	28
76	Westwood** (Austin, Texas)	98.1	84.6	13.5
77	W.T. White** (Dallas, Texas)	92.1	92.1	0
79	Lake Brantley (Altamonte Springs, Fla.)	86	75	11
100	Grapevine* (Grapevine, Texas)	98.1	100	-1.9

All data is from 2004 unless denoted.

\* Data from 2003

\*\* Data from 2005

\*\*\* Data from 2002, Calculations based on Urban Institute's Cumulative Promotion Index

Source: [www.schoolmatters.com](http://www.schoolmatters.com), New York State Department of Education

**Table 5: Graduation Rate Gaps Between White and Hispanic Students**

Rank	School Name	Graduation Rate		
		White	Hispanic	Gap
6	Science/Engineering Magnet** (Dallas, Texas)	100	100	0
10	Hillsborough (Tampa, Fla.)	72	50	22
12	Highland Park** (Dallas, Texas)	97.1	92.3	4.8
13	Coral Reef (Miami, Fla.)	94	89	5
18	Atlantic Community (Delray Beach, Fla.)	74	55	19
24	Interlake** (Bellevue, Wash.)	82.9	65	17.9
32	Newport** (Bellevue, Wash.)	93.1	100	-6.9
33	Design and Architecture (Miami, Fla.)	n.a.	92	n.a.
36	King (Tampa, Fla.)	83	65	18
40	The Science Academy* (Mercedes, Texas)	n.a.	89.9	n.a.
41	Bellevue** (Bellevue, Wash.)	94.3	100	-5.7
53	Miami Palmetto (Miami, Fla.)	89	85	4
63	Fort Myers (Fort Myers, Fla.)	87	62	25
66	Marine and Science Tech (Miami, Fla.)	92	86	6
69	Plant (Tampa, Fla.)	87	74	13
76	Westwood** (Austin, Texas)	98.1	96	2.1
77	W.T. White** (Dallas, Texas)	92.1	83.5	8.6
79	Lake Brantley (Altamonte Springs, Fla.)	86	69	17
100	Grapevine** (Grapevine, Texas)	98.1	83.3	14.8

All data is from 2004 unless denoted.

Source: [www.schoolmatters.com](http://www.schoolmatters.com)

\* Data from 2003

\*\* Data from 2005

**Table 6: Graduation Rate Gaps for Economically Disadvantaged Students**

Rank	School Name	Graduation Rate		
		All Students	Economic	Gap
3	Stanton College Prep (Jacksonville, Fla.)	88	65	23
4	Eastside (Gainesville, Fla.)	63	43	20
6	Science/Engineering Magnet** (Dallas, Texas)	100	100	0
7	Paxon (Jacksonville, Fla.)	72	57	15
8	Pensacola (Pensacola, Fla.)	60	48	12
10	Hillsborough (Tampa, Fla.)	56	42	14
13	Coral Reef (Miami, Fla.)	91	91	0
18	Atlantic Community (Delray Beach, Fla.)	60	41	19
24	Interlake** (Bellevue, Wash.)	80.1	0	80.1
27	Wilson Magnet (Rochester, N.Y.)	71	62	9
33	Design and Architecture (Miami, Fla.)	92	98	-6
35	St. Petersburg (St. Petersburg, Fla.)	60	39	21
36	King (Tampa, Fla.)	73	52	21
53	Miami Palmetto (Miami, Fla.)	84	59	25
54	Spruce Creek (Port Orange, Fla.)	84	64	20
63	Fort Myers (Fort Myers, Fla.)	79	59	20
69	Plant (Tampa, Fla.)	83	61	22
72	Westlake* (Austin, Texas)	94.3	87.5	6.8
76	Westwood** (Austin, Texas)	97.8	88.5	9.3
77	W.T. White** (Dallas, Texas)	87.9	88.3	-0.4
100	Grapevine** (Grapevine, Texas)	96.9	77.8	19.1

All data is from 2004 unless denoted.

Source: [www.schoolmatters.com](http://www.schoolmatters.com)

\* Data from 2003

\*\* Data from 2005



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## Appendix II: Jay Mathews Responds

This is a fine piece of work. Your data appear to be accurate, and make a point that I have embraced many times. People say: “But the Challenge Index is such a narrow measure.” I say, exactly right, and that to my mind is one of its great strengths. Its narrowness and simplicity means that readers can easily see what I am doing and judge for themselves if it makes sense to them. Since the rating involves only two easily obtainable numbers, they can do the arithmetic themselves for their own schools and see how they compare to those on the list.

Your article recommends that *Newsweek* embrace instead the increasingly sophisticated measures that we have of schools, such as “adequate yearly progress” (AYP). That would leave the reader lost in a statistical jungle, as he or she is with the *U.S. News* college list. There are so many factors in the *U.S. News* “America’s Best Colleges” list, or the AYP list used by government officials, that most readers, including those like me with college degrees, cannot be expected to comprehend them without spending hours examining all the factors and weighing other details. The reader has no choice but either to reject the exercise as too complicated or to trust *U.S. News*, their state department of education or whatever statistical experts have drawn up the heavily weighted and massaged lists. That is not a game most readers can or want to play.

For instance, I have written about the AYP quest of Maury Elementary School in Alexandria, Va. What astonished me in my reporting for that story was that even when the Alexandria people had all the numbers, it was not enough. There was a subjective part of AYP too. The Alexandria school officials had to present almost a legal brief of arguments to get the decision they wanted, including many factors very dependent on seat-of-the-pants judgments.

You are in tune with many other critics when you complain about *Newsweek*’s use of the term “best.” But consider how we use that adjective in America. We argue about it a great deal and have learned that each “best” is different, depending on what measures we prefer. If we are talking about movie directors, for instance, my “best” may be the one

whose movies sold the most tickets. Yours may be the one who won the most Oscars. Each is defensible. The only thing one has to do, in making such lists, is tell everyone what they are doing, and, as you acknowledge, that is what *Newsweek* has done. The discussion of what is best in this case has produced your interesting and valuable paper. But you have to take one more step before you convince me that your critique makes sense.

That last step starts with you recognizing the consequences of saying that schools with high dropout rates and wide achievement gaps don’t belong on any top 100 list. That says to me that Garfield High School in East Los Angeles, the school that first inspired me to be an education reporter, and started me thinking about new ways to rate high schools, does not belong any best list. It would not make your list, it seems to me, because it has, and has always had, a large dropout rate, and if it had a significant number of non-Hispanic white students it would also have a very large achievement gap.

There are a few inner city schools like Garfield that have produced unusually encouraging and resourceful teachers and impressive AP and IB participation rates, but because the vast majority of their students are low-income, they have not made much progress yet on the dropout and achievement gap problems you properly identify. If I knew of any inner city public school with a majority of low-income students that had a significantly lower dropout rate and achievement gap than other schools with similar demographics, I would write about it and then follow your suggestion and look for a way to measure its achievement and rank other schools accordingly. But I have not found such a school, and I think that the dropout and achievement gap factors are so closely tied to average family income that no inner city school would ever get close to the top 100 list of schools that did the best by those measures. Indeed, that would not be a measure of how good the schools were but how well-off their students’ parents were. When we find a way that inner city schools can significantly reduce their dropout rates, as Garfield significantly increased its AP participation rate, then we have something worth measuring. Until then, you

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have a measure with no point. Low-income schools will lose in your game every time.

The Challenge Index was inspired by Garfield, which I found to be doing something that almost no other inner city schools were doing, opening up AP to many students and getting them the intense academic experience they needed to survive in college. Everybody told me Garfield was a bad school, because it had so many poor kids, but I decided that, at least in terms of challenging students and preparing them for college, it was a *good* school, just as good, and in some ways even better, than the majority of schools in affluent neighborhoods where many students who might have benefited from taking an AP course and test were prohibited from doing so. My own son, for instance, had to take an entrance test to get into AP U.S. history at Scarsdale High School in an affluent New York City suburb—a rule that would have justifiably made Jaime Escalante at Garfield High furious.

I realize the Challenge Index is an unusual way to rate high schools. That is the point. The *Newsweek* list of the 1,069 schools that have reached a Challenge Index rating of 1.000 or above—having at least as many AP or IB tests as they have graduating seniors—has room for Garfield as well as Scarsdale High. It is a much better measure of high schools than the most common measure, which you did not mention in your piece—average SAT score. Give me a list of the top 100 schools by average SAT score, and I will show you a list that has *no* schools where even a third of the students qualify for free and reduced-price lunch. But the *Newsweek* Top 100 has 17 such schools, alerting readers to the fact that schools with lots of poor kids are not necessarily bad schools. One or two of them benefit from small magnet programs that have lots of AP or IB test-takers and don't encourage the rest of the school to participate. But in most of those inner city schools on the *Newsweek* list, the AP or IB courses are open to all students. This is a great leap forward from the usual neighborhood back fence view that if a high school has lots of low-income kids, then it is by definition a bad school.

Here is the step you still have to take. Produce your own top 100 list, with clearly defined rules based

on the points you made in your piece. Perhaps you can find inner city high schools that are not on the *Newsweek* list but that meet your high standards for dropout rates and achievement gaps. If so, I look forward to seeing which schools those are and writing stories about them. I think many of the inner city schools that are on the *Newsweek* list have created a special atmosphere that gives more kids a reason to stay and may show up on your list too. But I suspect that your list will have only relatively affluent schools, those with no more than a third of the students qualifying for free and reduced lunch subsidies. The only way to produce a list based on the measures you prefer that includes any significantly low-income schools would be to exclude thousands of middle class schools from consideration, which severely weakens your point.

The *Newsweek* list is designed to distinguish between inner city schools like Garfield and other low-income schools that do not challenge even their best students. They pat them on the head, give them A's for little work and fill them full of dreams of college where they are going to discover that because of the lack of emphasis on AP, IB or any demanding course, they are not going to be ready.

I have looked at the numbers carefully, and those schools with a few kids who take lots of tests do not usually score high on the *Newsweek* list. What gets you on the list is a policy that opens AP or IB to all and tries to get all those kids, even poor kids like the ones at Garfield, ready for the test. What also gets you on the list is being in a region where there are almost no poor students so that even when you restrict access to AP or IB you still have enough tests to make the list. That is *my* biggest complaint about the list I invented—schools winning my game with one hand tied purposely and harmfully behind their back. But I have to be fair, and on this simple measure, they meet the standard. Some of their students complain, however, about being lower in rank than schools they consider their social inferiors. I hope that will lead their schools to open up AP and IB to all of their students.

Your analysis is intriguing and well intended, but I don't think changing the index in the way you suggest would serve the readers of *Newsweek* or *The Washington Post*. The list is journalism, not

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scholarship. It is designed to help readers in the same way the Dow Jones index helps readers of our business section or the earned run average rankings help readers of our sports section. Scholars dismiss both the Dow Jones and the ERA as limited ways of viewing the worlds of business or baseball, but those lists help readers differentiate between companies and pitchers that are performing well in ways that are important to them, and companies and pitchers that are not.

The real point of the *Newsweek* list, at least to me, is not which schools made the top 100 but why the vast majority of public high schools did not make the top 1,069 and cannot reach even the modest standard of one college-level test, on average, for every graduating senior. Most of those seniors are going to college, and they need more help than they are getting from their schools.

—Jay Mathews, February 2006.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> See “Bronxville High School Barely Remains in Newsweek Top 100,” *Journal News*. May 19, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> *Newsweek* has used the Challenge Index for its rankings in 1998, 2000, 2003, and 2005. In addition, every year since 1998 Mathews has used the index to compile rankings of schools in the Washington, D.C., area high schools that are published by *The Washington Post*.

<sup>3</sup> For a fuller discussion of Mathews’ views on key aspects of the Challenge Index see these “Frequently Asked Questions” on *Newsweek’s* website: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/7760504/site/newsweek/>.

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix I.

<sup>5</sup> The entire list is available online at: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/7761678/site/newsweek/>.

<sup>6</sup> We were unable to find data for five schools on the list. School number one, Jefferson County High International Baccalaureate, in Alabama, is a smaller school-within-a-school, and we were able to find student performance data only for the entire campus. School number five, H.B. Woodlawn, in Virginia, was not listed individually in the Virginia State Department of Education’s online school report cards. School number 19, Eastern Sierra Academy in California, has an enrollment too small to publicly report testing data. We were unable to find data for two schools in Oklahoma.

<sup>7</sup> Ideally, we would have compared the percentage of economically disadvantaged students achieving proficiency to the percentage of non-disadvantaged students doing so, but this latter data item was not available in many instances where the percentage of disadvantaged students achieving proficiency was reported.

<sup>8</sup> Of these 73 schools, all but one, the predominantly African American Benjamin Banneker in Washington, D.C., had white students as a subgroup.

<sup>9</sup> Graduation rates used in this analysis come from a variety of sources. Most were obtained from state records available from [www.schoolmatters.com](http://www.schoolmatters.com). Some others were obtained from state school-level report cards found on states’ education department websites. In a few cases where a high school was the only one in its school district and school level graduation rates were not available, we used district-level 4-year graduation rates calculated by the Urban Institute, which are also reported on [www.schoolmatters.com](http://www.schoolmatters.com). These graduation rates also reflect different years, ranging from 2002 to 2005.

<sup>10</sup> See for instance: Jay P. Greene and Marcus A. Winters, *Public High School Graduation and College-Readiness Rates: 1991–2002*, (New York: Manhattan Institute, 2005); Christopher B. Swanson, *Who Graduates? Who Doesn’t? A Statistical Portrait of Public High School Graduation, Class of 2001*, (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, 2004). Although the nation’s governors recently launched an effort to ensure more accurate

reporting and end these practices, most of the graduation rate figures in this paper pre-date that agreement so the graduation rates of many of these schools may be lower than reported.

<sup>11</sup> For example, three schools in the top 10 alone on *Newsweek’s* 100 best high schools list—Eastside, Pensacola, and Hillsborough, in Tampa, Fla.—failed to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) under No Child Left Behind in 2004, because they had too few black, Hispanic, and/or economically disadvantaged students proficient in math and/or reading.

<sup>12</sup> Greene and Winters, op.cit.

<sup>13</sup> See [www.nationsreportcard.gov](http://www.nationsreportcard.gov).

<sup>14</sup> See <http://www.broadfoundation.org/flagship/prize.shtml>.

<sup>15</sup> Disclosure: Andrew J. Rotherham has been a member of this review board, and the Broad Foundation has funded some of his work during the past five years.

<sup>16</sup> Jay Mathews, “Frequently Asked Questions About *Newsweek’s* 100 Best High Schools,” *Newsweek*, May 8, 2005. Available online at <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/7760504/site/newsweek/>. See also Appendix II

<sup>17</sup> For example, in the late 1990’s *U.S. News and World Report* considered creating a high school ranking similar to its college rankings but concluded that such a ranking would be skewed because only limited data measures were available for many high schools. *U.S. News and World Report* was able, however, to produce a sophisticated rating of high school performance in six metropolitan areas. See Thomas Toch, “Outstanding High Schools,” *U.S. News and World Report*, January 18, 1999.