

NEWS FROM DISTRICT 207



Maine East
2601 W. Dempster St.
Park Ridge, IL, 60068

Maine South
1111 S. Dee Road
Park Ridge, IL 60068

Maine West
1755 S. Wolf Road
Des Plaines, IL, 60018

April 21, 2015: For immediate release. Contact Dave Beery at dbeery@maine207.org or 847.692.8053

All 207 schools again earn spot on *Post's* list of top schools

For the second consecutive year, all three Maine Township District 207 schools have earned spots on the *Washington Post's* 2015 honor roll of “America’s Most Challenging High Schools.”

The *Post* is one of several publications to compile an annual list of top high schools. Among these, *Post* education columnist and blogger Jay Mathews utilizes the simplest formula. He divides the number of Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate and Advanced International Certificate of Education tests given at a school each year by the number of seniors who graduated that year. Any result of 1.0 or higher earns a school a place on the list.

Nationally, only 9 percent of schools meet that mark, according to Mathews. Using this formula, Maine East had an index this year of 2.203, giving it the 33rd highest score in Illinois, and Maine South had an index of 2.062, placing it 38th among the nearly 1,000 high schools in the state. Both East and South placed ahead of acknowledged academic powers like New Trier and Lake Forest. Maine West had an index of 1.430, giving it a rank of 65th in Illinois. To put the rankings in perspective over time, in 2003 East had an index of 0.87, South had an index of 1.24, and West had an index of 0.79, so the AP program growth since 2003 in each school is 152% at East, 67% at South, and 81% at West.

“We are incredibly proud of our students and teachers in achieving this important milestone for the second year in a row,” said District 207 Superintendent Dr. Ken Wallace. “We are more focused than ever on improving our college and career readiness metrics for our students, and we will analyze the results and set new goals to increase access to our most rigorous curriculum to as many students as possible. There is no reason that an index of 2.0 cannot be accomplished at Maine West in the short term, and we will fix our sights on an index of 3.0 for all of our high schools in the coming years. We also could not do this without our tremendous public and private elementary school districts that do a great job of preparing our students to succeed in high school.”

Mathews’ premise is that the degree to which a school challenges its students is best indicated by the number of students taking advanced courses and exams. He notes that some schools that do not make his list achieve high average scores on advanced tests, but that they do so by limiting enrollment in these courses to the top students.

The number of students taking AP and other advanced exams is more important, Mathews explains, because they give average students a chance to gain the experience of rigorous college reading lists and long, analytical college examinations. He writes that, “Research has found that

even low-performing students who got a 2 on an AP test (on a 5-point scale) did significantly better in college than similar students who did not take AP.”

A full understanding of the Post’s Illinois rankings requires understanding the emergence of selective enrollment magnet schools, many of which are in Chicago Public Schools. These schools often limit enrollment to *only* students who are doing Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate Coursework, which increases a school’s ranking, and produces the “appearance” that great open enrollment public schools are slipping, despite metrics like the *Washington Post’s* that show clear improvement over time.

“What has to be understood,” said Wallace, “is that selective enrollment magnet schools are being counted in the public school rankings, but they are not true public schools that enroll the entire student distribution within district boundaries or serve the full range of student needs from students with learning disabilities to students with English language learning needs to just struggling learners of any sort. Our schools are better today than they have ever been. That doesn’t mean we can’t get better, but we are committed to serving every single student, regardless of need, every single day in the best possible ways thanks to our great teachers, students, school leaders and families.”

In addition to his work for the *Post*, Mathews is the author of seven books including three about high schools.