

National ranking for Greenwich High

By Steve Anderson

Gather three Greenwich residents in a room and you'll get at least four differing opinions on the state of the Greenwich Public Schools. Comments will cover the gamut from noting the record number of National Merit scholars and top tier college acceptances to the excellent extracurricular activities to concerns for kids "lost" in the middle to "it's not what it was when I went to school here."

With a long history of robust public school performance backed by strong financial support from the townspeople, Greenwich public schools face both high expectations and careful public scrutiny.

But how do others see our school system?

U.S. News and World Report in its December issue weighed in with its view of secondary schools, and rated Greenwich High School as being in the top 3 percent of the 21,069 public high schools that qualified to be surveyed across the United States. Our top 3 percent ranking is designated "Silver" by the magazine (the report uses a Gold/Silver/Bronze classification system). According to the article, the 604 schools that make up the Gold and Silver groups were "... found to do an excellent job of preparing

students for college-level coursework."

The magazine article used a multi-step screening and measurement system that initially measured whether each school's students were performing better than statistically expected for the average student in the state, and then whether economically disadvantaged students (who tend to score lower) were performing better than their statistical expectations. Only those schools performing better than the state averages in these areas were eligible to be ranked using the Advanced Placement tests, which are taken in high school and frequently used as a measurement of how "college ready" a student is. While any measurement system has its strengths and weaknesses, this complete measurement system attempts to balance participation and performance across all levels of students and then specifically focuses in on both the number of AP tests taken as well as the students' performance on those AP tests.

According to the article, Greenwich's Silver classification is the same earned by Darien, New Canaan, Weston, Wilton and Ridgefield. As you dig into the numbers, a couple of interesting facts pop out:

1. The state of Connecticut as a whole has the second highest student performance level (Massachusetts is No. 1), yet the state does not have one Gold-standard school. Why? I'll get to that when we explore the "Gold" classification.

2. Greenwich public schools have a population that is 400-plus percent more diverse (as measured by the number of minority students and free/reduced lunch students) than our Fairfield County competition, yet we still perform at the same high levels. Diversity has many benefits, but it also brings challenges, as the single best correlation to student performance is family income. With our students (and especially our economically disadvantaged students) performing above the state average, Greenwich schools are working hard and showing success. We are improving on already-strong results, and not just at the top but also with the "middles" and those in need of more assistance.

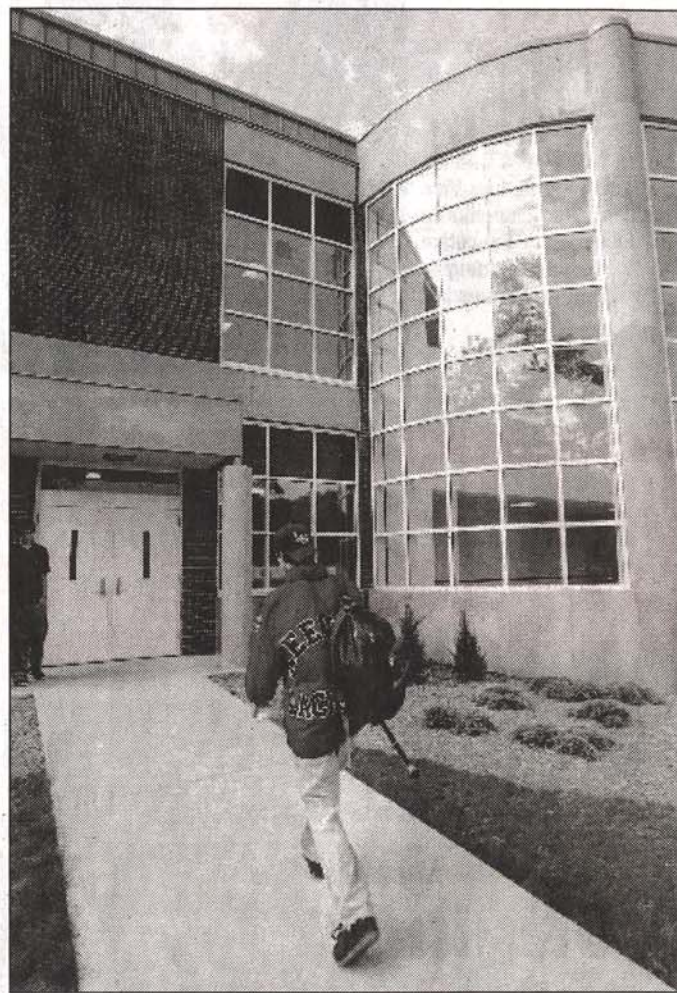
Why no Gold designation for Greenwich or any other Connecticut public high school when the town and the state are so strong in education? Using its AP measurement system, the report came up with the Top 100 high schools and desig-

nated them as Gold. When I broke down the Top 100, I found that an amazing 71 percent of these public high schools are formed as either magnet, charter or selective admissions schools. In my view, these public schools, which carry titles such as "College Preparatory School," "High School of Science" and "School for the Talented and Gifted" do not represent what a true public high school such as Greenwich High is doing in terms of educating all of a town's students.

Our town and our state have traditionally not created high schools that artificially define, control or limit the student population. That obviously hurts in rankings such as this when you're competing against specialized schools. That is why the state can be No. 2 in the nation in education yet not have a single Gold school.

As shown by this report, Greenwich takes all that it is given and does a very good job of molding our students into highly-educated, caring, productive members of our community.

Are Greenwich schools perfect? Not until we get every student achieving at the highest level. Am I pleased with our top-3-percent Silver



FILE PHOTO

U.S. News and World Report has ranked Greenwich High School in the top 3 percent of high schools nationally.

ranking, Greenwich's relative standing against our neighboring towns, and our ability to get students of all backgrounds performing at very high levels? Yes. Am

I satisfied? Not until we're No. 1.

Steve Anderson is a member of the Greenwich Board of Education.