

KELLER CITIZEN MAY 3, 2016 12:52 PM

# Westlake, GCISD schools get high marks in national rankings

## HIGHLIGHTS

Westlake Academy is No. 9 in Texas in magazine rankings

Byron Nelson comes in at No. 129 in Texas

Three Keller high schools make the top 200 in Texas



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BY SANDRA ENGELLAND  
[sengelland@star-telegram.com](mailto:sengelland@star-telegram.com)

A handful of Northeast Tarrant County area schools recently earned spots on annual lists of the nation’s best high schools. Westlake Academy, the charter school operated by the town of Westlake, was ranked No. 9 in Texas and No. 58 in the nation in *U.S. News & World Report* and No. 15 in the state in *The Washington Post*.

The school follows the International Baccalaureate (IB) program at all levels.

“We start to prepare kids when they come to us in kindergarten to be successful in IB,” said Mechelle Bryson, executive director. “We truly believe that all students can complete IB if they’re prepared properly.”

The school has a total enrollment of 826, with 278 at the high school level.

Both publications use Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate tests in their rankings. *U.S. News* looks at what they call College Readiness: the number of graduating seniors who took at least one AP or IB test during their high school years and how many scored 3 or better (considered passing by most public universities). It also includes qualifying benchmark marks of how well students performed on state math and reading assessments and—new this year—the school’s graduation rate.

*U.S. News* tracks only public schools (charter, magnet, specialized and comprehensive). *The Washington Post* looks at the number of tests taken in a calendar year divided by the number of graduating seniors to determine its rankings and includes some private schools.

Most of the top 100 in the Texas *U.S. News* rankings were magnet and charter schools, like national No. 1 Dallas School of the Gifted and Talented. When looking at comprehensive four-year Texas public high schools on the list, Colleyville Heritage was No. 10, Grapevine No. 12 and Keller No. 29. Highland Park in Dallas County and Lovejoy in Collin County were No. 1 and No. 2.

### **Grapevine-Colleyville schools get high marks**

Colleyville Heritage and Grapevine High School both scored in the top 100 for Texas in the two publications. Colleyville Heritage was No. 71 in *U.S. News* and No. 53 in *The Washington Post* while Grapevine was No. 75 and No. 50, respectively.

Carroll Senior High School was the state’s No. 72 in *The Washington Post* but was not ranked in *U.S. News* because of the benchmark for state testing which involves ninth and 10th graders. The school’s College Readiness index would have put them just a spot or two ahead of Colleyville Heritage in *U.S. News*, if both the Senior High and ninth- and 10th-grade center were used.

Shannon Tovar, Grapevine-Colleyville’s director of accountability and continuous improvement, said that the two schools’ success came from increasing access to Advanced Placement classes and making room in the schedule.

The district gives students in eighth and tenth grades the PSAT test and runs the results through the AP Potential program, which indicates students who could benefit from AP courses, Tovar said.

The two high schools also went back to block scheduling, giving students another credit opportunity, and use “arena scheduling” to show students what classes are available in each period on the schedule, she said.

There’s been renewed emphasis for students to take prerequisites in middle school, with Biology 1 added to Algebra 1 for eighth-graders.

Tovar said the early entry allows kids to take more AP math and science tests.

Last year was also the first year that graduating seniors had access to the AVID program for all four years. AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) is an elective that takes students with average grades or those whose parents may not have attended college and encourages them to take Advanced Placement courses each year while preparing them for the rigors of the classes and for success in college.

### **Other area schools**

Keller High School came in No. 100 in Texas and No. 885 in U.S. in the *U.S. News* rankings. Two other Keller district high schools, Timber Creek and Central, ranked 137th and 149th in Texas, respectively. Both were unranked in 2015.

“We encourage all of our students to take rigorous courses that are designed to prepare them for the [AP] assessment,” said Jeff Bradley, director of college and career readiness for Keller schools. “Our teachers put a lot of time and effort in for the kids to help them be successful and showing increase in our participation.”

Northwest district’s Byron Nelson High School was ranked No. 129 in Texas in *U.S. News* report.

Other Tarrant County schools among the state’s top 200 in the *U.S. News* rankings include:

- 4 - Summit International Preparatory in Arlington
- 28 - Harmony Science Academy in Euless
- 43 - Fort Worth Harmony School of Innovation
- 79 - Fort Worth Academy of Fine Arts
- 122 - Aledo High School
- 161 - Mansfield High School
- 165- Arlington Martin High School
- 167 - Hurst Bell High School
- 179 - Euless Trinity High School



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