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## **ORHS on Newsweek's Top Schools List**

By Andrea Bulfinch

John Huff/Staff photographer Eric Shi, Michelle Dionne and Amanda Martin, from left, take advantage of an afterschool homework club at Oyster River High School Tuesday. Oyster River was listed in Newsweek's Top 2000 high schools in the country. [photo caption]

DURHAM — Ranking 753rd out of a list of 2,000, Oyster River High School learned Tuesday they'd made Newsweek's annual list of top high schools across the nation.

In the state, Oyster River ranked second out of four schools chosen — behind Hollis Brookline High School, which ranked 563rd, and ahead of Souhegan High School ranking number 1,098th and Sunapee High School, which ranked 1,418th.

"I've always thought our school was pretty exceptional," principal Todd Allen said. "We do an awful lot that's really student centered that really supports kids and gives them a lot of opportunities."

And those opportunities aren't lost on students.

"We get a lot of freedom," Michelle Dionne, freshman said. She was spending time Tuesday afternoon in the Homework Den with other students who all said they appreciated everything the school was offering them.

"Every activity we have here in the school really appeals to everyone," freshman Nina Messer said.

Junior Amanda Martin named the Drama Department as being a talented group of students and instructors, while Michelle named jazz band as something she'd taken a liking to in her first year attending the school.

John Huff/Staff photographer Nina Messer, Nathen Van Aken, Eric Shi, Michelle Dionne and Amanda Martin, from left, take advantage of an afterschool homework club at Oyster River High School Tuesday. Oyster River was listed in Newsweek's Top 2000 high schools in the country.

“All the teachers working together, they act so much like they've been a family with each other,” Nathen Van Aken said when asked what he thought helped put ORHS on Newsweek's list.

He said that attitude of the teachers is something students pick up on and is also something teachers pass down to their students.

“And that kind of brings all us students together,” he said.

Eric Shi said most of the teachers he's met during his freshman year are really nice and that they push students to strive and work hard to always do better.

“I think they push us because they see your potential,” Amanda.

While Newsweek used a specific set of criteria (explained below) to rate each of the 5,000 schools considered nationwide, students and staff recognized that the atmosphere at ORHS is a lot more comprehensive.

Superintendent Dr. Bruce Morse named options such as elective courses at the school that students are able to take advantage of and the ways in which learning is individualized as much as possible with each of the more than 600 students enrolled there.

“It's definitely something to write home about,” he said, adding that while the school is clearly moving in the right direction, there's always room for improvement and areas to build on.

Enrollment in more rigorous Advanced Placement (AP) courses has doubled since last year and is expected to quadruple, Morse said, over the next few years.

Principal Todd Allen said it's clear at ORHS how much students appreciate the AP offerings.

He said the individual approach to personalized student placement is something the district has been very, very proud of. In the English Department, for example, students can choose courses further emphasizing and developing writing skills. Morse said that type of specialized approach is true in other departments at the school as well.

For the last two years, ORHS has also had a graduation rate of 100 percent.

“Our kids definitely come through here and graduate with a plan,” Allen said. “I think that's largely what's demonstrated through the ranking.”

On its website, [www.thedailybeast.com](http://www.thedailybeast.com), Newsweek lists the criteria used to rate the school with explanations as follows:

- Four-year, on-time graduation rate (25 percent): Based on the standards set forth by the National Governors Association, this is calculated by dividing the number of graduates in 2012 by the number of ninth graders in 2008, plus transfers in, minus transfers out. Unlike other formulas, this does not count students who took longer than four years to complete high school. We accepted 2011 grad rates from districts that had not yet calculated their 2012 numbers.
- Percent of 2011 graduates who were accepted to college (25 percent): This metric reflects the proportion of graduates who were accepted to either a two- or four-year college for matriculation the fall after graduation.
- AP/IB/AICE tests per student (25 percent): This metric is designed to measure the degree to which each school is challenging its students with college-level examinations. It consists of the total number of AP, IB, and AICE tests given in 2012, divided by the total enrollment in order to normalize by school size. AP exams taken by students who also took an IB or AICE exam in the same subject area were subtracted from the total.
- Percent of students enrolled in at least one AP/IB/AICE course (5 percent): This metric assesses the number of students who were exposed to advanced curricula. The number of students enrolled in at least one class was divided by the total enrollment.
- And, average SAT and/or ACT score (10 percent), and average AP/IB/AICE exam score (10 percent).