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Four area high schools among nation's most challenging

Huntley, Cary-Grove, Prairie Ridge, CL Central make national list

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CRYSTAL LAKE – Four area high schools have made the Washington Post's Most Challenging High Schools in America list for their commitment to preparing students for college.

Huntley, Cary-Grove, Prairie Ridge and Crystal Lake Central high schools made the list of the 2,092 high schools nationwide that met the criteria to be ranked. The criteria is based on the ratio of college-level tests – such as advanced placement tests – given at a school in the previous calendar year divided by the number of graduates that year.

A ratio of 1, which is the minimum to be ranked, means the school had as many tests as graduates.

Huntley High School led the way with a 1.567 ratio, coming in at 56 out of the 69 schools that made the cut in Illinois. Prairie Ridge High School followed at No. 62 with a 1.322 ratio, while Cary-Grove was right behind at No. 64 with a 1.184 ratio.

Crystal Lake Central rounded out all Illinois high schools at No. 69 with a 1.008 ratio.

John Burkey, superintendent for Huntley District 158, said the district's focus on advanced placement tests in the past five years has helped improve student performance.

"We have made great improvements over the years and we continue to get stronger and stronger, but we don't do any of it to achieve a ranking," Burkey said. "I'm more proud of the fact our high school is providing high quality education and experiences for the kids."

Placing three schools on the list was an exciting accomplishment for District 155, said superintendent Johnnie Thomas. But Thomas said the performances on those tests and the benefits it provided families were more gratifying.

In District 155, 85 percent of advanced placement exams resulted in honors scores of 3 or higher, saving about \$2.2 million for students' families in college tuition because of the credits earned, he said.

"This validates our efforts to get more students into the rigorous AP courses," Thomas said.

None of the schools are unfamiliar with national recognition. Cary-Grove High School was ranked as the 50th best high school in Illinois in 2013 by U.S. News & World Report while the

others received similar recognition from Newsweek last year.

“It speaks well of our county as a whole,” Burkey said.

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