

City's National Ranking Rises

Many news outlets have placed City on their lists of "best high schools."
Students and faculty weigh in on the importance of these rankings.

By Zoë Hopewell

Every year, lists are published by many news outlets of the best high schools in the country, each based on their own individual ranking systems. City is often listed among these, and in the past few years, has seen jumps in its ranking.

However, Brent Gage, an admissions officer at The University of Iowa, says that these rankings are not considered in admissions to the school.

"High school rankings are more useful in admissions to help universities understand what students have access to in regard to AP, IB, and elective coursework. They do not impact our review of an individual student's credentials in seeking admission," Gage said.

Rankings take into account a variety of statistics, mostly considering academic factors. Newsweek's rankings include proficiency levels on statewide assessments, graduation rates, AP enrollment, and other measures of academic success. Other lists use similar criteria, with a few considering other factors, such as the quality of extracurriculars.

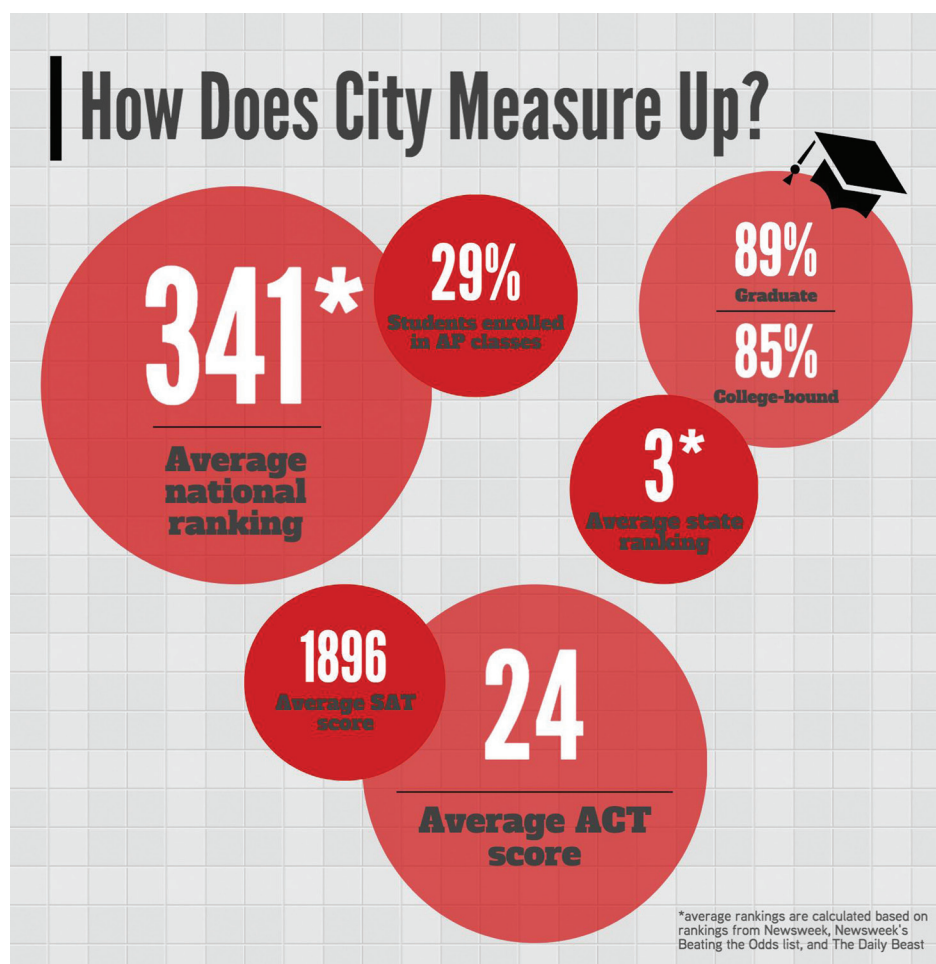
"This is not a perfect measuring system," Principal John Bacon said. "I think there are other aspects to make [City High] a truly well rounded comprehensive high school. Certainly number one is our academics, but right behind [are] the other important parts of the high school experience. Some of the learning experiences that take place in those activities, I can promise you, will stay with you the rest of your life, and they are at least as important as some of the lessons we learn in the classroom."

Some lists have expanded the criteria they use to rank schools. Niche.com uses a ranking system that figures academics as 50% of the overall ranking for a school. Other factors considered include: Health and safety, student diversity, athletics, and extracurricular activities.

Melody Duong '19 also believes that many valuable learning experiences take place outside of the classroom.

"When you're in music and [other activities], you're still learning, and it's as [important] as learning math or science. It's the same with sports—you're still learning," Duong said.

Newsweek has also created two lists of top high schools. One of the lists takes into account socioeconomic status of students in addition to their academic achievements. According to their website, "Newsweek's 'Beating the Odds' list seeks to identify schools that do an excellent job of preparing their students for college while also overcoming the obstacles posed by



students at an economic disadvantage." On this list, City was ranked #1 in the state of Iowa this year.

City was also named #323 on The Daily Beast's list of America's Top High Schools. The most heavily weighted criteria for these rankings are the percentage of students who graduate and those who are accepted to college. Other criteria includes the number of students taking AP exams and the percentage of the students who pass these tests, how many students receive free or reduced lunch, and average scores on the ACT and SAT.

City does well in all of these categories, with an average score of 24. However, Duong believes that rankings shouldn't be based only on test scores due to the variety of factors that can affect these scores.

"If someone does poorly because they're not trying, then the ranking will go down. It sort of places a lot of emphasis on test scores," Duong

said.

Many of the top schools on these lists are magnet schools or charter schools, including all of the top 10 on The Daily Beast's list. Of these 10, six are classified as "selective," which means that students must apply to be considered for attendance. Three use a lottery system to select students. Only one is classified as "open." This means that there is not a selection process for students.

"I'm proud to be a public school that is home to everybody that walks in the door. If we had some type of selection process... our statistics are probably going to get even higher, but that's not our purpose here," Bacon said.

Duong believes that the inclusion of these schools in rankings could create a bias.

"City High is a public school; anyone can be here," Duong said. "If a school selects [who can attend], then it's biased, because they just choose the smartest people to be in their school

and then they get on the list and they're really high up."

The Washington Post's list of most challenging high schools excludes some of these selective schools, such as charter and magnet schools with average test scores higher than that of any normal enrollment school. Their list is based on the number of Advanced Placement and other college-level tests given at that school divided by the number of graduating seniors.

Gage believes that the job of high schools goes beyond preparing students for college.

"They should be providing the opportunity for students to master core competencies that will make them successful," Gage said.

Bacon also believes that differences between top ranking high schools can be very small.

"You get to a point that you're really splitting hairs when you're looking at decimal point differences in achievement on exams," Bacon said. "I think everyone on that list is doing a pretty great job, and I'm sure there are plenty of schools that aren't on that list that are doing a pretty great job."

Duong agrees, saying that it matters more to her that the school has earned a spot on the list than where it is ranked.

"I just care more about being on the list than where we're actually ranked, because we could be ranked last and still be a good school," Duong said.

For families considering a move to Iowa City, the quality of the public schools can be a motivating factor, but rankings aren't always what they first consider.

Gage has children who will attend City High in the future, and his family considered the quality of the schools before moving to Iowa City, but did not look at ranking lists.

"While we did not check any lists or rankings, we did visit several schools to learn more about what they had to offer," Gage said.

Duong says for her, the role of the rankings is as a source of motivation.

"I guess [I feel a responsibility], because you need to make sure that you're doing well also, and if you're doing well, then your school will be doing well," she said.

Bacon agrees that these rankings can be motivational, and that they should serve as a source of pride.

"I hope everybody's head goes up a little higher, and everybody knows that this is the expectation here," Bacon said. "We're going to perform at a high level, get active and involved, achieve in the classroom, and do our best," he said. "I think it should be a source of pride, and I hope that it is for students."

*Syrian Refugees from A1

"I think [Governor Branstad's statement is] unfortunate because people who see the Syrian refugees know first hand that they are in need of support, and they are the victims, actually, of the terrorists," Abuissa said. "[Governor Branstad] is giving more power to the terrorists. You cannot paint [the Syrian refugees] with the same brush as terrorism, and if he does that, it's actually empowering the terrorists."

Brett McCleary '17 shares the same safety concern that Governor Branstad has proposed.

"I believe in helping. I believe in foreign policy and other countries having a chance, but I don't believe that all of the Syrian refugees should be welcome into the United States," McCleary said. "I don't believe that they should come to our country just because [it would jeopardize] our national security."

The mayor of Swisher, Iowa, Christopher Taylor, has recently stated that he would welcome all visitors—including Syrian refugees—contradicting Governor Branstad's proclamation. Along with Mayor Taylor, Matt Hayek, mayor of Iowa City, would welcome Syrian refugees as well.

"The City Council has not formally addressed the refugee issue. However, Iowa City has ties throughout the world, and I believe our community would do its part to help with the crisis. We would welcome refugees," Mayor Hayek said. "Personally I find Governor Branstad's action to be in-

consistent with our state's history of helping displaced people."

The argument that an influx of Syrian refugees to Iowa City could cause security concerns has also been denounced by Mayor Hayek.

"[I would worry about the Syrian refugees] no more than I would worry about anyone else in the community," Hayek said. "Ironically, the background of a refugee who came to Iowa City would be far more scrutinized as a result of the federal program than that of anyone else new to the community."

The terror attacks in Paris, the recent shooting in California led by two individuals that pledged allegiance to ISIS, and the mounting number of refugees fleeing Syria has sparked America's presidential candidates to engage firmly in the foreign policy conversation. Abuissa has been involved in Democratic Governor Martin O'Malley's presidential campaign, and has appreciated O'Malley's recent meetings with newly acclimated United States citizens from Syria.

"[The Syrian refugees] were just catching their breath [after getting their citizenship], and trying to adjust to the new environment," Abuissa said. "It was lucky that Governor Martin O'Malley wanted to meet them. That was a nice welcoming gesture from a presidential candidate."

Republican presidential candidates have also voiced their input, the most notable being Donald Trump's proposal to track and ID all Muslims, and even deny all Muslims'

entry into the United States. Trump has faced bipartisan scrutiny.

"You have to know the background, and you have to know the facts. Someone's not a terrorist until they're a terrorist. If someone's a Muslim then they're a Muslim; that's just their religion," McCleary said.

Legislation to tighten the security process of admitting Syrian refugees has recently passed in the U.S. House of Representatives. The bill requires the director of the F.B.I., the secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, and the director of national intelligence to justify that the Syrian applicant will pose no threat. This is proposed to be added onto the extensive 18-24-month screening process for Syrians in several federal agencies.

"Syrians are very well vetted; they are the most vetted out of any nationality on the face of the Earth," Abuissa said. "The president wants to welcome about 10,000 Syrian refugees, and that is a very small, but meaningful, number to the people who are able and would like to come."

According to the Refugee Processing Center, the United States has accepted 2,200 Syrian refugees since 2011. The admission rate is expected to increase to suffice President Obama's plan of accepting 10,000 more refugees.

"I think it's better for us to help people in need," Abuissa said. "That's how we win the heart and minds of people, when they are in need."

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