



May 9, 2005

*Newsweek*  
P.O. Box 2120, Radio City Station  
New York, N.Y. 10101

To the Editor:

As a nonprofit organization dedicated to every child graduating from high school ready for college or the modern workplace, the Alliance for Excellent Education commends *Newsweek* for putting the crisis in high schools squarely in the public eye. Any national education system that results in two-thirds of its students either dropping out or not finishing with the skills they need clearly needs massive public review and overhauling.

While the article thoroughly discusses the challenges facing high schools, the attempt by *Newsweek* and Jay Mathews to list “The 100 Best High Schools in America,” unfortunately falls short of the mark. Successful high schools are complex entities that defy efforts to rank them by a simple criteria.

Rating a school based simply on how many students take AP or International Baccalaureate courses is like comparing athletes based only on how fast they run. Ignored is how they shoot a basketball, kick a soccer goal, or field a grounder.

All of the high schools listed by *Newsweek* are obviously educating **some** of their students well. Those young people who are taking AP or IB classes are no doubt better prepared than many of their peers for the demands of college or other postgraduate training. But less than 60 percent of U.S. high schools participate in the AP program, and fewer than 500 schools in this country offer an International Baccalaureate degree.

Are schools that offer AP or IB classes better than their peers in educating **all** of their students? Of the 100 best high schools cited in this report, many are considered by the U.S. Department of Education as “in need of improvement” – in most cases because some subgroup of their students are not making adequate yearly progress. Even more important, this report does not factor in the students who are admitted into these schools in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, but who drop out prior to graduation.

As one of the necessary elements of a successful high school, students certainly need rigorous courses. But they also need caring, well-trained teachers, effective programs to help them raise their literacy levels, individual learning plans that help them achieve their academic objectives over a four or six year period, personalized learning centers, relevant curricula, and a variety of other supports that will make the difference between success and failure.

The Alliance for Excellent Education applauds the schools that have been included in *Newsweek's* top 100 high schools, but urges parents and community leaders to look at all of the factors that go into making successful schools as they rate the high schools in their neighborhoods and beyond.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bob Wise". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "B" and "W".

Bob Wise  
President