

## Cd'A Charter Academy makes Newsweek list

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### Magazine ranks school No. 544 out of 1,300 best high schools in nation

COEUR d'ALENE -- The sliding glass doors that lead into Coeur d'Alene Charter Academy used to lead into a pet store.

Principal Dan Nicklay uses his school's ex-pet store status to prove that beautiful buildings aren't necessary for good education.

"All you need is a room and a great teacher," Nicklay said.

Newsweek ranked the school as the 544th best high school in the nation, on a list 1,300 schools long.

"We're a college prep school, exclusively,

But, a public, preparatory school. All classes are honor classes and class time is sacred, with rare interruptions.

The school was born under the premise that acceptance to elite colleges should be available to all -- not just the wealthy.

"Our goal is to prepare them to go anywhere they want to go," Nicklay said. "If they want to go to NIC (North Idaho College), that's a fine choice, but if they want to go to Notre Dame, they have to be prepared."

"Sometimes we have to throw in a nice compliment," junior Tori West said Friday afternoon in her principal's office. "Like, your tie looks so nice today."

"I liked your other tie better," junior Katie Baker told her principal.

"Charter academy inside jokes," explained freshman Caleb Drechsel.

Uniforms are required. Nicklay said that rather than stifling individuality, identical outfits can bridge socio-economic gaps and free time that would otherwise be spent on deciding between green and blue.

"If your personality is determined by what you wear, then yes," it's a problem, Nicklay said. Otherwise, "it frees them up to kind of be who they really are."

Classes are capped at 25, but Nicklay said small school size impacts learning more than small class size. He knows all his students, he said.

Anonymity "can be defeating and even dangerous," since it allows curse words and cut classes to go unnoticed.



SHAWN GUST/Press

Sofia Cardoso, right, and classmate Briana Murphy study chemistry during class Friday at the Coeur d'Alene Charter Academy.

West compared her experiences at another local school.

Her other school tended to be cliquish, and West said teachers are more accessible at the academy.

"People here actually want to learn," she said.

"Usually, people that are really smart are judged," said Baker. "No, we're a public school and we're not all smart, we just want to learn," she said she tells people.

"Kids do not have to be brilliant," Nicklay said. But they have to be willing to work hard.

"If you come in here below grade level, you're not going to make it no matter how hard you work," he said. "Our whole program is about challenging kids beyond what they would see in regular school."

Since the school is public, all a prospective student needs to do is sign up. But numerically, slots are limited. At the start of the school year, 462 students were enrolled. Enrollment has dropped to 425. Nicklay attributes the attrition to the academy's academic rigor.

To compile the list, Newsweek took the total number of Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate or Cambridge tests given at a school in May, and divided that number by the number of graduating seniors.

Under their methodology, Newsweek explained that while subjective factors like teacher quality and extracurricular activities affect students' educational experiences, quantifying them for a ranked list is impossible.

"Participation in challenging courses and tests, on the other hand, can be counted, and the results expose a significant failing in most high schools -- so far only 5 percent of the public high schools in the United States qualify for the Newsweek list," the study's author wrote on the magazine's Web site.