Walhalla High recognized among nation's best schools

BY GREG OLIVER
THE JOURNAL

WALHALLA —Walhalla High School has been named one of the best high schools in the nation by U.S. News and World Report — marking the second consecutive year the national magazine has recognized the school.

While 13 South Carolina schools, including Walhalla High, earned Bronze recognition last year as America's Best High Schools, this year's list includes 19 Palmetto State schools. Of that number, Walhalla High is among seven schools to repeat while Pendleton High School, from Anderson District Four, is among 12 new Bronze recipients.

Walhalla High School Principal Evie Hughes said she is excited to be one of the 11 percent of South Carolina high schools recognized.

"I am so proud of our teachers and students for this recognition of all their hard work," Hughes said. "It validates what we are trying to do at Walhalla High School to help our students be successful after high school."

Oconee County District Superintendent Mike Lucas said Walhalla High and Tamassee-Salem Middle/High (the latter recognized in 2007) are the only two high schools from the school district to ever be recognized by the magazine.

"Walhalla's distinction for the Bronze level has to do with students exceeding the 'predicted' performance of schools with similar poverty or minority levels," Lucas said. "In other words, statistics are used to predict school and student performance and Walhalla High students exceeded it.

"Performance above the predicted level is a sign of a quality instructional program, and the teachers and staff are to be commended for this accomplishment."

The magazine and School Evaluation Services — a kindergarten through 12th-grade education and data research and analysis business that provides parents with education data on Schoolmatters.com and which served as its partner in the rankings project — examined nearly 22,000 public high schools nationwide. U.S. News and World Report uses a three-step process in its selection.

The first two steps ensured that the schools serve all their students well, using state proficiency standards as measuring benchmarks. The second step determined whether the school's least-advantaged students, such as black, Hispanic and low income, were performing better than average for similar students in the state.

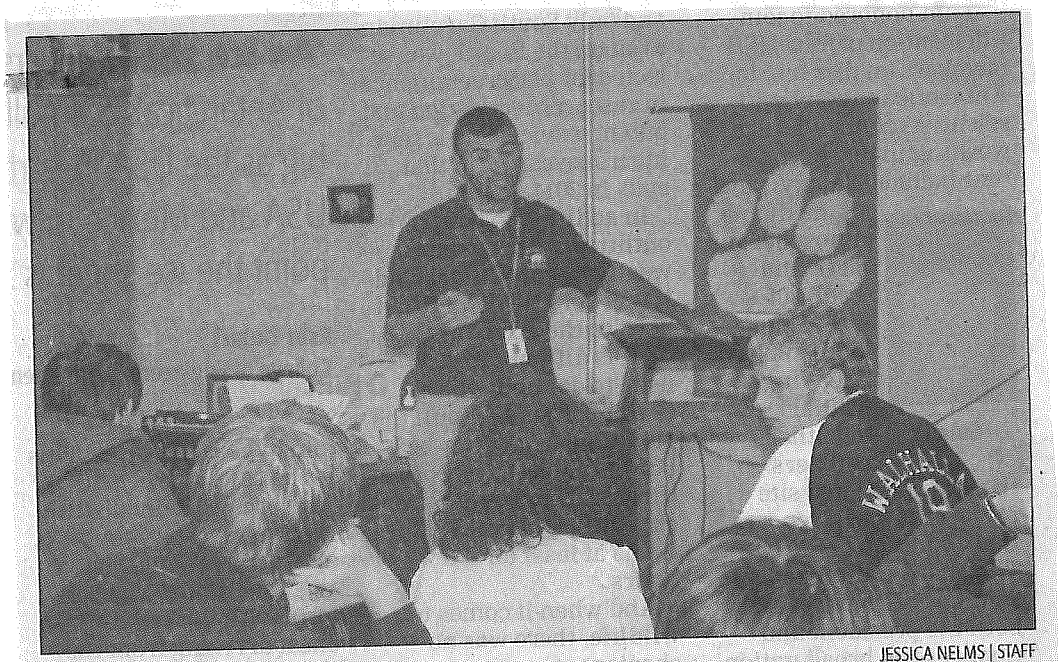
Those schools that advanced past the first two steps had to pass a third step that assessed the degree to which schools prepare students for college-level work. Advanced Placement and/or International Baccalaureate test data were used as benchmarks for success.

The 100 high schools with the highest college readiness scores were ranked and awarded gold medals while the next 461 top-performing schools earned silver medals. Bronze medals were awarded to 1,189 schools.

Lucas said Oconee County schools are not large enough for the "Gold" category, as most of those recipients are magnet schools that draw only top students and offer advanced curricula.

South Carolina ranked 18th nationally in the number of bronze, silver or gold winners as a percentage of total high schools in the state.

greg@dailyjm.com | (864) 973-6687



JESSICA NELMS | STAFF

Walhalla High School, with a classroom session pictured here, is among 19 high schools in South Carolina to receive a Bronze ranking by U.S. News and World Report. The rankings, which consist of America's best high schools, are posted on the magazine's Web site and will appear in print later this month.

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