



Address: 3333 N. Shartel, Oklahoma City 73118
Contact: Linda Lightner
Telephone: 405-702-4322
Email: llightner@hfaaokc.org
Website: <http://hardingfinearts.org/>
<https://www.facebook.com/hfaaokc>

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Harding Fine Arts Academy HS Ranks in Top 500 Schools in the Nation

Oklahoma City- Harding Fine Arts Academy Charter High School (HFAA) has been ranked among the top 500 high schools in the nation according to Newsweek.com.

For over a decade, Newsweek has been recognizing the achievements of the best public high schools in the United States for college readiness. However beginning in 2014, Newsweek began publishing two separate lists in an effort to address the complexities of assessing the “best” high schools when students’ socioeconomic backgrounds are taken into account.

According to Newsweek.com, “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. The question, ‘What are the best schools?’ has two different answers depending on whether or not student poverty is taken into account. In an effort to address the effect of socioeconomic disadvantage on education, Newsweek is publishing two lists: ‘America’s Top High Schools 2015,’ which ranks schools solely based on performance (our “absolute” list) and ‘Beating the Odds 2015,’ which ranks schools based on performance while also controlling for student poverty rates (our ‘relative’ list).”



Newsweek evaluated regular public high schools based on their proficiency rates on standardized state-level math and reading/language arts assessments, using the proficiency rates to create a high school achievement index for each school. This index takes several factors into account including college readiness, graduation weight, weighted SAT/ACT composite score, student retention and counselor-to-student ratio. This index was used to identify high schools that perform 0.5 standard deviations or more than their state's average when accounting for students' socioeconomic status as reflected by the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

More than 50% of HFAA's student body is on below with poverty line (free and reduced lunch) and our school is a federally recognized Title I school. Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) provides financial assistance to states and school districts to meet the needs of educationally at-risk students. The goal of Title I is to provide extra instructional services and activities which support students identified as failing or most at risk of failing the state's challenging performance standards in mathematics, reading, and writing.

Barry Schmelzenbach is the principal of Harding Fine Arts Academy. "There are many reasons for Harding's success at meeting the needs of its students, but arguable its culture and approach to curriculum are the two most powerful, says Schmelzenbach. "Our teachers and leadership believe every student has great potential and we strive to foster a culture of high expectations while providing supports for students and families focused on their needs as individuals," he said.



In addition to the national ranking (#112 out of 500), HFAA was identified with an Equity (Gold Star) Analysis. Within the top high schools identified in the ranking analysis, Newsweek then identified schools in which economically disadvantaged students performed at or above the state average for all students on standardized state reading/language arts and mathematics assessments.

HFAA board president, Sally Bentley said” It’s very rewarding to see the outstanding efforts of our administration and teachers result in deserved recognition of the school environment and mission. HFAA meets the needs of students who respond to a creative and challenging college preparatory program where diversity and individual differences are valued and expectations are high for all stakeholders”.

For the 2013- 2014 school year Harding Fine Arts Academy received a score of an A+ from the Oklahoma State Department of Education. Harding Fine Arts Academy was also named one of the top ten high schools in Oklahoma by US News & World Report.

Harding Fine Arts Academy is a college preparatory high school focused on the integration of arts and academics. It is a tuition-free, non-selective school chartered by Oklahoma City Public Schools that accepts 9th - 12th grade students from all over the metro area.