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The Top High Schools 2014: Chatham Takes the Top Spot

Chatham rules the roost in this year's rankings. How did your town's school rank? Check out our full list!

Posted August 11, 2014 by [Ken Schlager](#)



Looking Up: Chatham High School seniors, from left, Andi Chin, Devynn Pedell and Cameron Blazoski celebrate Chatham's rise to the top of New Jersey Monthly's high school rankings. All three participated in extracurricular activities or athletics, one of the key factors driving success at the school, says principal Darren Groh.

Photo by Frank Veronsky

New Jersey has a new number 1 high school. **Chatham High School in Morris County** jumps to the top of *New Jersey Monthly's* 2014 rankings of the state's top public high schools

"I'm very proud of what our students have accomplished and what our teachers do in the classroom every day," says Chatham High School principal Darren Groh. As keys to Chatham High's success, he cites a supportive community with parents who value education, a high level of participation by students in extracurricular activities and a "comfortable" school environment.

In 2012, the last time *New Jersey Monthly* published **a ranking of the top schools**, Chatham was number 20. The school's march up the chart is fueled largely by changes in our methodology, which in turn reflect changes in the state Department of Education's annual School Performance Reports. The DOE reports for the 2012-2013 school year are the sole source of data used by New Jersey Monthly in the school rankings. (For complete methodology, [click here](#).)

Chatham has always been a strong contender; the school was **number 8 in the 2010 ranking** and **number 10 in 2008**. What drove it to number 1 this year?

To a large degree, the school can thank two new pieces of data in the DOE report:

SAT Scores. Rather than just report a school's average SAT scores, the DOE now calculates the percentage of students scoring 1,550 or better, a benchmark that it says is "associated with a high likelihood of college success." At Chatham High School, 74.3 percent of students surpassed that benchmark. It was the 14th best result in the state.

Postsecondary Enrollment. Two years ago, the state introduced the adjusted cohort graduation rate as a more accurate way of calculating student results. Now it has added the postsecondary enrollment rate, which is described as the percentage of students enrolled in a two- or four-year college 16 months after high school graduation. Chatham was number 3 in the state.

Groh, who lives in Chatham and has been principal for nine years, attributes his students' college-level success to the school's "four-day rotating block schedule," which simulates a college routine. "It really is kind of a college-prep schedule," says Groh. "The students have to budget their time. It creates better time management." The students also have a lot of freedom to select their courses. "We are fortunate that our students take education seriously," Groh adds.

New Jersey Monthly made other methodology changes for this year's rankings. We've dropped two factors: average class size (which is no longer available from the DOE) and percentage of faculty with advanced degrees. We also have stopped compiling

separate rankings by District Factor Group, a classification based on a district's relative socioeconomic status that is no longer included in the DOE reports.

Newly reported this year is information on International Baccalaureate (IB) testing. New Jersey has 14 IB schools, each offering the same rigorous curriculum used by more than 3,700 IB schools around the world. "We know how our kids are doing against kids in Shanghai," explains Mackey Pendergrast, superintendent of the West Morris Regional High School District.

The two high schools in Pendergrast's district offer IB programs—in addition to the AP programs that most schools offer to their top academic achievers. Both schools soared in the rankings as a result of this change. West Morris Mendham High School jumped 41 positions to number 4 this year; West Morris Central, in Chester, moved to number 11 from number 56.

Another strong performer this year is Haddonfield Memorial High School in Camden County. Powered by impressive results in the High School Proficiency Assessment tests (HSPA) and the SATs, Haddonfield moves from number 33 to number 2. Northern Highlands Regional, in the Bergen County town of Allendale, zips from number 22 to number 3. Millburn High School, the number 1 school in 2008 and 2010, and New Providence High School, the chart-topper in 2012, came in at numbers 5 and 6.

Filling out the top 10 are Pascack Hills High School in Montvale and Glen Rock High School, both in Bergen County, and Marlboro High School and Rumson-Fair Haven Regional in Monmouth County. Marlboro makes the most impressive leap in the top 100, soaring from number 123 in 2012 to number 9. Like Chatham High School, Marlboro was propelled up the chart by its strong SAT performance and postsecondary enrollment rate.

One school missing from the top of the chart is McNair Academic, the renowned magnet high school in Jersey City. McNair had held the number-2 spot in the last three rankings, but fell to number 62 this year. While McNair students are still among the best in the state as far as SAT and HSPA scores are concerned, the school was pulled down the chart by its post-secondary enrollment rate of 76 percent—far below the state's best-performing schools.

This year's rankings include charter schools for the first time. The best performing charter, Central Jersey College Prep in Somerset, finished at number 167. **[A separate chart of the state's top vocational high schools can be seen here.](#)**

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