

Making the grade

By MAUREEN DOLAN
Staff writer

Cd'A Charter Academy ranked in nation's top 100

COEUR d'ALENE -- When it comes to high schools, Coeur d'Alene Charter Academy is among the best.

Again.

U.S. News and World Report ranked the school 97th among the top 100 high schools in the nation in a report released today.

More than 21,000 high schools were analyzed by U.S. News for possible inclusion on its 2009 list of America's Best High Schools.

Charter Academy is the only Idaho school to make it into the top 100 and achieve the honor of being named a "Gold Medal" school.

"This is really great," said principal Dan Nicklay. "We've gotten a lot of recognition, various awards here and there, but to be one of the top 100, this is really cool."

Last year, Newsweek ranked the school the 544th best high school in a list of 1,300.

In 2007, Charter Academy was named a National Charter School of the Year by the Center for Education Reform.

The benchmarks used by U.S. News to measure the top schools are what the organization considers indicators of college readiness including high performance in reading and math, proficiency rates on standardized tests that exceed state averages and performance on Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate exams.

The school functions on significantly less money than a regular public school, Nicklay said, because as a charter, the school has no taxing authority and cannot levy property taxes for supplemental funding to maintain and operate the school or for its facility needs.

The school does not receive any federal funding, no hot lunches or busing so parents have to be more involved in getting their children to school, he said.

"There is a level of investment on the parents' part that is really key," Nicklay said.

One of the first charter schools to open in Idaho after the state passed its Charter School Law in 1998, the school serves students in grades six through 12.

In 1999, Charter Academy opened with 200 students attending seventh through 10th grades in a converted pet store and garden center along Kathleen Avenue.

Opening enrollment for the 2008-2009 school year was nearly 550 with waiting lists for some grades.



SHAWN GUST/Press

Jake Gerringer, in blue, and Patrick Crabb, both freshmen at Coeur d'Alene Charter Academy, watch an experiment in oscillating reaction Thursday through the window of their physical science class. The experiment is set up outside due to a lack of hood fan in the lab. Despite having less than state-of-the-art facilities and tools, Coeur d'Alene Charter Academy was named one of the Top 100 high schools in the nation recently by U.S. News and World Report.