

Alachua County Public Schools named 'District of the Year' by Cambridge International

Alachua County Public Schools has been selected as the recipient of the 2018 Cambridge District of the Year award in the small district category by Cambridge Assessment International Education, the organization that runs the prestigious Cambridge program and is part of the University of Cambridge in the United Kingdom.

In a letter to Superintendent Karen Clarke, Mark Cavone, Regional Director of North America for Cambridge International, praised the district for both the diversity and quality of the local Cambridge program, which is based at Gainesville High School.



Cavone pointed out that access to Cambridge exams had expanded by 21% over two years, while the pass rate remained a 'phenomenally high' 92% for 2017-18. A total of 88 students received a Cambridge Scholar Award in 2018 based on their performance on the rigorous exams, including seven who earned 'Top of the World' and 'Top of the Country' scores.

"Alachua County Public Schools is being recognized for ranking highest for exceptionally strong commitment to expanding access and delivering a high quality Cambridge education with equally strong performance," wrote Cavone. "These achievements reflect the hard work and dedication of your district and school staff, students and teachers."

"We're thrilled that another of our programs is earning national recognition," said Karen Clarke. "Providing our students with additional high-quality educational options is a top priority for this district."

A representative from Cambridge International is coming to Gainesville to present the award to the district and the school during the May 7th School Board meeting. The presentation will include recognition of students and staff from Gainesville High. That meeting will be held at 6 p.m. at the District Office at 620 E. University Avenue.

"We're so honored to receive this amazing recognition," said GHS principal David Shelnutt. "It shows that combining outstanding students, dedicated teachers and a fantastic curriculum will lead to impressive results."

Early in the 2017-18 school year, Shelnutt eliminated a standard senior English Honors class and replaced it with the Cambridge General Paper Course taught by English teacher Nicole Harris. As a result, about 90 non-Cambridge students took on the more challenging coursework and had the opportunity to earn college credit if they passed the exam. Sixty-seven of the students, including 45 students of color, did just that, for a passing rate of 77%.

"We continue to look for ways to expand academic course offerings for our students," said Shelnutt. "It offers new opportunities for all students while also preparing them for college and the future."

Cambridge is a demanding, internationally-recognized of study for academically-talented students. It was established more than 150 years ago under the auspices of the University of Cambridge. Cambridge exams are currently administered in more than 160 nations throughout the world. The program at GHS was begun in 2004 and has since produced hundreds of Cambridge graduates.

According to Cavone, this is the second year that Cambridge International has "awarded districts that have ranked the highest in both increasing access to the rigor of the Cambridge curriculum, showing commitment to serving economically disadvantaged students, while simultaneously sustaining or improving student performance."

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