

Charter this: Academy rocks

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Merry Christmas, Charter Academy.

For all your hard work, U.S. News & World Report is recognizing you as one of the very finest high schools in America: 97th in a field of some 21,000.

Charter is at the top of the magazine's charts in part because it is exemplary in preparing its students for college. As unimpressive as Charter's physical stature is, its academic standing is one of Idaho's dazzling success stories.

In those buildings and trailers seemingly cobbled together with baling wire and bubble gum, an exhilarating learning environment has been nurtured since Charter was opened in August 1999 by founder Bill Proser, who still teaches English and economics at the school. In a way, Charter is perceived as something of a stepchild in the Coeur d'Alene School District because it has its own board, works feverishly on fundraising, and scores far better than its North Idaho peers on comprehensive tests -- all as a public school. In this case, the stepchild is the object of some envy.

Why does Charter succeed to the point that it is one of the top 100 high schools in the country? It's partly because Charter hires excellent teachers and staff and demands more of its students than most other schools. It's partly because many of the best students in the region elect to go to Charter, knowing that their hard work can readily translate into scholarship offers and rewarding careers. But in our view, one of the biggest reasons Charter succeeds is because of its parents.

Charter parents are asked to help keep the lights on by donating what they can, kind of a voluntary private school tuition. They consistently pack the small gymnasium -- which doubles as the performing arts center -- for events of every kind, showing strong support for the kids' extracurricular activities. And in a more active role, Charter parents tend to invest more of their time and energy helping their students meet Charter's rigorous academic standards.

Dr. Proser, Principal Dan Nicklay, the entire staff and faculty and all of the 400 or so Charter students should take a bow on the community's highest academic stage. And behind it, all those great parents should be high-fiving each other.