

The following article was provided by David Himes, principal of the Lewisburg Area High School, to be used in our newsletter and website.

### **LAHS Named One of America's Best High Schools**

On December 5, 2008, LAHS was named by *US News and World Report* as a silver medal school. Each year the publication ranks high schools throughout the country and recognizes three categories of distinction: gold, silver and bronze. The silver medal distinction identifies Lewisburg High School as one of the top 604 high schools in the country or in the top 3% of the more than 21,000 high schools analyzed. Only one school in Pennsylvania received Gold Medal recognition and Lewisburg shares the Silver Medal recognition with 19 other schools.

The publication uses a methodology that was developed by School Evaluation Services, (a k-12 education data research business run by Standard & Poor's) that examines a school's ability to serve all of its students. In making this determination, a three step process was followed. The first step looked to see if students taking the state proficiency test were performing better than expected. For schools who met this criteria, the research group analyzed the performance of the school's least advantaged population (minorities and economically disadvantaged). If these students also were performing better than expected, the school was considered for the third criteria which measured college readiness using Advanced Placement data. A "college readiness index" was established based upon the percentage of students who took at least one AP class and how they performed on the AP Exam given at the end of the year. For a school to be recognized as a Gold or Silver medal school, it must meet all three of the criteria.

As a Lewisburg Alumnus, you can be very proud of this recognition. Lewisburg has always been recognized as one of the best high schools in the area and the tradition of excelling on the athletic field, stage, and classroom is well established. As a student enters the hallowed halls of LAHS, they are aware of the many accomplishments of those who walked before them. So if we have always been good, why are we now receiving this recognition for the first time? The answer lies within the criteria and the changes that have occurred within LAHS.

Although the building is much the same, the culture and climate have undergone a drastic change while the school has become more of a Professional Learning Community. In the past it was common practice for some students to do well and some to fail. Most teachers created tests that were designed to classify students rather than measure what the students had learned. They believed in the "bell curve" which meant some students would do well, some would be average, and some would fail. Students who did not do well in the class were placed in lower sections where less was demanded of them. Today, all students are expected to achieve at a high level and it is no longer acceptable for them to fail or even pass with a D. Almost all of the "levels" of classes have been eliminated as teachers have begun to believe that all students can learn to a high level! Teachers meet on a regular basis in Academic Intervention Teams to identify students who are struggling and to implement interventions that will help the student be successful. Each staff member is dedicated to the success of every student. As a result, graduation rates are up and the dropout rate is down. The 2006-07 school year marked the first time in which every senior who began the school year graduated and there were not any dropouts. In 2007-08, only one student failed to graduate with the class and that student failed a science course at Bloomsburg University.

Instructional strategies and methods have also changed dramatically. It has been said “The talking teacher is the largest obstacle to learning.” Many teachers in the high school have taken this statement to heart. While short lectures are still a valuable instructional strategy, teachers are constantly finding a variety of learning activities that students find engaging. These activities require students to learn more as they analyze, synthesize and create solutions to real-world problems. The integration of technology into the curriculum is helping us to provide the knowledge and skills that must be part of a 21<sup>st</sup> Century education.

Lewisburg students have more opportunities to participate in AP or college level work than ever before. The number of AP classes offered at the high school has grown tremendously and more students are encouraged to take these classes. We believe that if more than 80 percent of our students go on to college, then AP classes should not be limited to only the top students in the class. In addition to the AP opportunities, the ACE program allows some students to complete their 12<sup>th</sup> grade graduation requirements by taking classes full time at Bloomsburg University and several students each semester take a class at Bucknell University.

Although we are very proud of our Silver Medal recognition, we are not satisfied with our performance. The staff, teachers, and students at LAHS will continue to work hard in an effort to remain one of America’s Best. As the silver changes to gold, we will never forget those teachers and students who, over the decades, helped to establish the excellent reputation of Lewisburg Area High School and the high expectations of being the best.