

Shining bright: Austell academy named a top Christian high school

by Justin Larson

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*Cumberland Christian Academy sophomore Violet Thompson and senior Elisha Campbell work as part of the summer Music Worship Camp on Thursday under the leadership of Fine Arts Director, Dr. Angela Smith.
Staff/Kelly J. Huff*



*Cumberland Christian Academy Headmaster Lee Campbell stands outside the chapel at the school as students race off to class Thursday.
Staff/Kelly J. Huff*

Cumberland Christian Academy in Austell has been listed as one of the top Christian high schools in the nation, according to an article by a website devoted to education.

TheBestSchools.org reviewed data on about 12,000 Christian schools across the country. The reviews were based on academic standings, extracurricular activities and diversity. The resulting list was not a ranking, but a showcase of top schools, according to editor James Barham.

Cumberland was the only school in Georgia to make the list.

According to the article, the school uses an active college planning process, faculty is certified or obtaining certification, many have advanced degrees, and students have access to doctoral-level mentors and state-certified counselors.

Headmaster Lee Campbell said weekly chapels encourage students spiritually. Students of all ages participate in faith and community service projects, he said.

The school's listing in the article doesn't come as a surprise to its staff.

"Cumberland is doing everything right," said Joanna Kimbrel, a teacher at the high school. "They don't just care about meeting standards, they care about the education of the individual."

Campbell credits the school's success to simply putting the focus on the students.

"We focus on helping our kids become the best they can be," he said. "We work hard for students most schools would leave behind."

Carmen Hernandez-Freemire says she immediately picked up on the attention her son, Jacob, was receiving when he was accepted in 2012.

"He was disengaged in past schools because the teachers were disengaged in him," Hernandez-Freemire said of her son, who is now a 10th-grader. "Jacob told me how excited he was because the teachers and the kids at Cumberland listened to him and took him seriously. Cumberland focused on the positives about my son."

Cumberland was founded in 1989 and met in rented rooms in local churches. The teachers were supplied with used books, desks and equipment.

The school now has three campuses with enrollment at the high school campus at about 300 students. Tuition for the upper school ranges from \$4,000 to about \$7,500.

Cumberland keeps its students busy with extracurricular activities such as photography, filmmaking, contemporary worship and instrumental ensembles, as well as field and mission trips.

Cumberland Christian Academy also offers its own online courses for home schooled students.

"I get this feeling that Cumberland is all about what they can do for your kids, never thinking about what they will get out of it," Hernandez-Freemire said.

The article praised the school's diversity, with international students coming from countries such as Taiwan, Italy, South Korea, Vietnam and Honduras. English as a second language classes are provided and students can live with a Christian family known as a "homestay family."

"It really is impressive how diverse the student body is," Hernandez-Freemire said. "You don't normally see that in private schools."

Of the last four graduating classes, 100 percent went on to college with roughly \$1 million in scholarship money, according to the article.

"What's funny is an attorney told our founder he was going to fail when the school was young," Campbell explained. "No one would ever be able to create a Christian school for the middle class."

Cumberland will be celebrating its 25th anniversary in September.