

classmates will also go on to a four-year college while 20 percent pursue a two-year degree. That's an enviable record in a school with a population that's 16 percent low income and almost one-quarter minority.

**“NTLB”**

Boly believes that pushing students to dream—and helping them realize their dreams—can only happen in an environment where there's distributed leadership and teacher collaboration. “It's not just about No Child Left Behind: It's no teacher left behind. It's about identifying a team of teacher-leaders who can help lead the whole school,” she says. English teacher Sharon Larpenteur backs that up: “Sarah has a vision, but she's able to reach out. She listens carefully to everyone's opinion and crafts a solution that works for everyone.”

The ability to make things work has turned out to be a mixed blessing for Boly. Instead of retiring this year, as planned, she's been persuaded to take on the role of Beaverton's assistant superintendent. She'll face the challenge of applying some of Southridge's lessons to Oregon's second-largest school district.

**THE NUMBERS**

Grades	9–12
Total students	1,950
Racial/ethnic make-up	
White	76%
African American	2%
Hispanic	5%
Native American	> 1%
Asian	16%
Free and reduced-price lunch	9%
Staff	
Teachers	91
Counselors	4
Administrators	6
Support staff	64



# 2.

## SERIOUS GOALS, PLAYFUL ENVIRONMENT

Parents fulfill a pivotal role at Coeur d'Alene, where it's okay to be a little corny.

By Mindy Cameron

COEUR D'ALENE, Idaho—Mr. Casey strides down the hallway, a velvet cape billowing behind him, a regal cap seated firmly on his head. “Mr. Renaissance” is on the move.

In most high schools this would be an odd sight. Here there is no surprise, only smiles.

Steven Casey has been principal of Coeur d'Alene High School for 10 years. For much of that time he has been donning his Mr. Renaissance costume to bring added attention to the school's Renaissance Recognition Program. On this morning he enters a classroom and surprises rookie-of-the-year teacher Tarraugh Carr. He congratulates her, gives her a Viking mug, and in return gets an appreciative hug.

Running a high school doesn't have to be all business, Casey says. Having fun, even being a little bit corny, is part of his strategy for creating a successful learning environment.

**A PUBLIC PLEDGE**

At CHS success is a clearly stated expectation. “Our goal is to be the state academic champion by 2006,” Casey proclaims. The goal is posted on a big, bold banner in a visible spot in the cafeteria. To achieve it, every current sophomore must pass the Idaho State Achievement Test (ISAT) and graduate.

That goal is reinforced by asking each incoming freshman to sign a pledge to graduate. Signatures are posted behind glass in a hallway to remind everyone what is expected and what has been promised.

While the principal may be the most important person at any school, even the best school leader cannot do the job alone. Casey credits his leadership team, plus an unusually active parent group, for successes at CHS. When parents decided they wanted to be more than a traditional parent-teacher organization, they became the Parent Volunteer Organization (PVO) to emphasize what they do: volunteer.

**PARENTS STEP UP**

Parent involvement is instilled throughout the Coeur d'Alene school district by a policy that says parents must constitute 25 percent of membership on any committee. But at CHS parents do more than sit on committees. PVO president

## THINGS THAT WORK AT COEUR D'ALENE

### 90% Attendance Rule

Under a districtwide policy, if a student has 10 or more absences per semester in any class, he loses credit for that course. The student must then pass a competency exam for the class in order to get a grade and credit.

### Portfolio Diploma

At graduation, seniors are given a "portfolio diploma" that includes a description of their senior project and letters of recommendation that will assist them as they pursue their dreams beyond the walls of CHS. The senior project is a culmination of four years of work and is a requirement to pass senior English.

### Dual Enrollment

CHS juniors and seniors can enroll in courses at North Idaho College and receive both high school and college credit. To be eligible for the program, students must have a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher, be at least 16 years of age, and must have successfully completed at least half of the high school graduation requirements.

For more information: [www.sd271.k12.id.us/chs/](http://www.sd271.k12.id.us/chs/)

Rene Kaufman estimates that as many as 300 actively involved parents donate thousands of hours each year. They help out with virtually every school activity, attend student council sessions and faculty meetings, raise money for mini-grants for teachers, and work in the school office. Parents support the Renaissance Program by soliciting gift certificates for students singled out for recognition and sending congratulatory cards to those students' parents.

Casey and Kaufman agree that ongoing parent involvement also helps when district voters are asked to support supplemental levies. This high school, on the outskirts of one of the fastest growing cities in the Northwest, was built in 1971. Two years ago it was remodeled thanks to a facilities levy supported by 83 percent of the voters.

"There is a direct connection between an active PVO and community support for school elections," Kaufman said. Casey puts it even more simply: "Parents are vital to our success."

CHS has a legitimate claim to the "successful school" mantle. Independent accreditation officials have named it an Idaho School of Merit in five of the last six years (Casey winces when asked about that missing year). Its college-

Photo by William M. Berg



*Principal Steven Casey takes on the role of "Mr. Renaissance."*

bound students score above state and national averages on both SAT and ACT. On the broader measure of ISAT—taken by all 10th-graders in Idaho—the school also scores above state averages. In 2000, Casey was named Idaho's Secondary Principal of the Year.

## A STUDENT VOICE

Like many high schools, CHS has had to deal with issues about student dress. According to Casey, concerns about "skin"—cleavage, short skirts, bare midriffs—bubbled to the surface. How the issue was handled says a lot about how things work at this school.

Casey first went to the students, challenging them to think about rules that were being applied elsewhere, as well as the issue of school uniforms. "I asked them what they were willing to give up to appease adults" and other critics, including some of their peers.

Students came up with ideas, as did staff and parents. A consensus proposal was put on an advisory ballot that got overwhelming student support. Among the new rules is one barring any visible underwear, including bra straps and boys' boxers that show above saggy pants. "It took a year to work it out, but it was worth it," claims Casey. "I have more clout now because I can say 'As a school we have decided,' instead of imposing my rules."

Casey is deliberate about his interaction with students. Some principals delegate the job of advising student government leaders. At CHS Casey keeps that on his task list, meeting monthly with student-elected leaders. He also holds a monthly youth forum to engage with students who are not school leaders. "We talk about anything they want to talk about," he says. If students don't have a lot on their minds that day, Casey is sure to have plenty of ideas.

# 3.

## WIRED WORLD

**In an unlikely setting, an Anchorage charter school connects kids with business and technology.**

*By Denise Jarrett Weeks*

ANCHORAGE, Alaska—It’s as if they’re in a parallel universe: those teenagers banding together along the promenades of America’s shopping malls, occupying the same lanes as the grown-ups but in a separate reality. But here on a busy boulevard in Anchorage, Alaska, there is a shopping-mall-turned-charter-school where those dual worlds happily collide.

At Highland Tech High, younger folk and older folk interact all the time, creating a richer reality together, says Principal C.J. Stiegele. She’s seen how easy it is for a teenager to go through an entire day without talking to a single adult, and she’s vowed that, at this school, that will be impossible.

Students and teachers are encouraged to think of this technology-focused school as functioning like a workplace, where collaboration and shared responsibility are expected. Everyone’s a colleague, though students are to look to their higher-ranking teachers for guidance. And guidance is abundant. Class sizes are small, so teachers can spend ample time with individual students. Every teacher and administrator serves as an advisor, working closely with students to help them craft their school careers with care.

A steady stream of adult professionals comes to the school to talk with students about their jobs, and, often as not, they become mentors to aspiring students. Students themselves are regularly out in the working world, side-by-side with adults as they participate in “job shadows” and work on community-based school projects.

### A CHANCE TO SHINE

Stiegele founded Highland Tech as a public charter school focusing on academic standards, technology, and character building. The school opened its doors in fall 2003 to 300 students seeking an alternative to large comprehensive high schools and tradition-bound teaching. All the students who arrived that autumn were bright and hopeful, yet most had struggled to show their promise in traditional school settings, says Stiegele. By the end of that inaugural year, Stiegele and her staff had reason to believe that they were doing something right.

Take the sophomores and juniors, for example. Of the 72 students who came to Highland Tech as 10th-graders, 54 percent had failed half their classes at their previous schools. And

### CONNECTING WITH FRESHMEN

In this age of high-stakes testing, school leaders are looking for new ways to create supportive learning environments. At CHS a program called IGNITE is one such approach. Incoming juniors and seniors volunteer for training in the summer to become mentors for the new class of freshmen. The idea is to “ignite” good behavior. Having 90 kids connect with freshmen and establish a sense of belonging has been “a tremendous help for the school climate,” Casey says.

Student body president Taylor Neal agrees. “There are always kids who feel they don’t belong. This school has done a great job in dealing with that.”

Another new program focusing on freshmen takes a page from research that shows the value of smaller high schools. Casey calls it a school-within-a-school: Working with middle schools, CHS staff identify incoming freshmen who are at risk of getting lost in the transition to high school. They’re placed in a different learning environment with smaller classes that meet in three-hour blocks. The student-teacher ratio is lower and a counselor is part of the teaching team.

The added cost of the program is covered by the district’s recent \$1 million “remediation” override levy. Some of the levy also is used for students who need extra help for the ISAT.

Never an easy job, running a high school today is more challenging than ever. At CHS Casey cuts through the complexity with one basic rule for administrators, staff, teachers, and students. That rule: Do the right thing.

### THE NUMBERS

Grades	9–12
Total students	1,450
Racial/ethnic make-up (districtwide)	
White	95%
African American	<1%
Hispanic	3%
Native American	<1%
Asian	1%
Free and reduced-price lunch	21%
Staff	
Teachers	71
Counselors	4
Administrators	4

