




Geneva Community Unit School District 304
Office of Learning and Teaching

 **TO:** Board of Education
Dr. Kent Mutchler

FROM: Patty O'Neil

RE: GPA Distribution at GHS Replacing Individual Class Rank

DATE: August 11, 2014

At the June 16th Board of Education meeting Principal Tom Rogers and Associate Principal Doug Drexler presented the findings and subsequent recommendations from the GHS Staff Study on Individual Class Rank. Although individual Board members seemed supportive of the recommended change, we are requesting that the Board formally approve this change to GPA Distribution from individual class rank which will be an improvement in our service to students. Included is the original document that the high school administration developed and presented to the Board on June 16th for easy reference. Thank you for your attention to this item.

TO: Patty O'Neil
FROM: Tom Rogers, Principal
Doug Drexler, Associate Principal
DATE: June 16th, 2014
SUBJECT: Recommendation to replace individual class rank statistic with GPA distribution

The topic of individual class rank in high schools has gained considerable attention in recent years, as many high schools around the nation have ceased using this student statistic for a variety of reasons. Over the past two years, the Geneva High School Administration has studied the topic of individual class rank, asking the following questions:

1. How do colleges and universities use the individual class rank statistic that is currently reported to them?
2. What benefit does the individual class rank statistic actually provide for our students?
3. Would GHS students be negatively impacted in any way if individual class rank were no longer reported?
4. If individual class rank were no longer reported, what additional information might we need to provide to colleges?

There are several suburban-Chicago high schools that have ceased reporting individual class rank statistics for their students, including at least 28 high schools in the following districts:

- D125 Stevenson High School
- CUSD 200 Wheaton-Warrenville
- D 225 Glenbrook
- D 113 Highland Park/Deerfield
- Warren Township HS
- Ridgewood High School
- CHSD 128 Libertyville Vernon Hills
- New Trier High School
- D 207 Maine Township HS Dist
- D 86 Hinsdale Township HS Dist
- D 219 Niles
- Lake Forest High School
- D 95 Lake Zurich
- D 211 Palatine
- D 220 Barrington HS
- D 203 Naperville CUSD
- Evanston Township HS

Over the past 2 years, we surveyed more than 50 colleges and universities that visited the GHS Counseling & Advising Office. Additionally, we sought out some highly selective universities that did not visit GHS to ensure that we had all tiers of universities represented in our study.

Findings:

- None of the colleges and universities in our study require students to submit an individual class rank statistic for the purposes of admission.

- Colleges and universities reported that even when they receive an individual class rank statistic on a student application, they don't use it to make admission decisions since so many high schools no longer report this information.
- More than half of all American high schools no longer report individual class rank. High schools with large populations of high-performing students are more likely not to report individual class rank. A student with an individual class rank of 50 at GHS can have a very different achievement profile than a student with an individual rank of 50 at a high school with fewer high performing students and a less rigorous curriculum.
- Colleges and universities emphasized that they make decisions holistically, but do utilize the transcript, GPA, ACT scores, and extracurricular activities in their decision.
- When asked directly if GHS students would be hindered in any way in the admissions process if individual class rank were not reported, all of them responded that they would not.
- Although college admissions offices have shifted away from using individual class rank statistics in their admissions decisions, there remain some scholarship applications that have not yet adapted to this change and continue to ask for an individual class rank statistic.

In addition to finding that our current practice of reporting individual class rank does not benefit our students in the admissions process, we identified that there could be negative consequences to our current practice of ranking students individually. Geneva High School is fortunate to have a large population of high-achieving students. These students, even though they have strong grades, can have a lower individual class rank that can mask their high level of academic achievement. Consider these statistics from the GHS Class of 2014:

- A student with a 3.50 GPA ranked in the 38th percentile, the bottom two-thirds of the class.
- A student with a 3.25 GPA ranked in the 52nd percentile, the bottom half of the class.
- A student with a 3.00 GPA ranked in the 67th percentile, the bottom third of the class.

The above students had very respectable grades at GHS, engaged in rigorous coursework, applied to colleges, and are likely be successful in college. Unfortunately, because GHS currently reports individual class rank, many of them had to report on their college applications that they were in the bottom half of their class. While our study did find that colleges are increasingly ignoring this statistic, ceasing the reporting of the individual class rank statistic is a way that we could help GHS students look even more attractive to colleges and universities.

We did find as part of our study that colleges and universities do need some statistic that indicates how an individual GHS student compares to their peers at GHS. Typically, high schools who no longer report individual class rank have moved to a GPA distribution statistic as part of their school profile that is sent to colleges. For example, below is what this statistic would look like for our seniors (Class of 2015):

Class of 2015 GPA Distribution (cumulative 6th semester)					
	Highest	95th pctl	90th pctl	75th pctl	50th pctl
Weighted	4.77	4.19	4.11	3.71	3.28
Unweighted	4.00	3.91	3.81	3.56	3.24

This statistic provides colleges with information that is more useful to them in the admissions process. Additionally, this type of statistic eliminates the sometimes unhealthy competition between students that are separated by mere hundredths of a GPA point. Competition, which can be a powerful motivator, will still exist under this model, but in a healthier way – students will be competing against more of a standard rather than their fellow student.

Another benefit of moving away from individual class rank reporting is that it opens up more course opportunities to our students. Currently, some of our students make course selection decisions based on preserving their individual class rank statistic. Students may opt not to challenge themselves in an AP class where they risk earning a B. Similarly, students may opt not to take the art class that they have always wanted to take because it is not a weighted course. With academic achievement being reported in percentile groups, students would have more flexibility to take courses for the purposes of learning rather than the mathematical GPA advantage that a course provides.

Recommendation:

The GHS Administration recommends that the use of individual class rank be phased out and replaced by a GPA distribution statistic. Seniors (Class of 2015) who already have received an individual class rank statistic would continue to receive information about their rank until they graduate, while other students (who do not yet have an individual class rank) would not receive an individual rank statistic. As there are some scholarships that continue to ask for class rank, individual class rank would be provided to students upon receipt of documents that require it.

Overall, we see only benefits to replacing the statistic of individual class rank with a grade point average distribution. To date, this recommendation has been shared with the GHS Department Chairs, the District Staff Curriculum Development Council, and the GHS PTO. All groups have been very supportive of this recommendation. We are now seeking Board approval of this recommendation so that we can communicate this to students and parents in the fall.

Please let us know if you have any questions about this recommendation.