

## Weighted Grades/Rank Proposal

### **Rationale**

We offer over 25 Advanced Placement and College in the Schools courses. Arguably, these college level courses are more rigorous than non-AP. Consequently, students fear that they may earn a lower grade in the course, and thereby affect their GPA and class rank. It is possible for a student who does not take any AP or CIS courses to have a higher GPA and class rank than a student who takes one or more AP or CIS courses due to earning lower grades in the AP/CIS courses. A weighted GPA would reward the student who takes a rigorous course that has the potential of awarding college credit.

Five colleges have been contacted to inquire about their process for reviewing student transcripts when some come from weighted and some come from unweighted grading systems. These schools include: University of Minnesota, University of St. Thomas, Hamline University, Gustavus Adolphus, and St. Cloud State University. Of these schools, the University of Minnesota is the only school that indicated that they look at the type of courses taken by a student in addition to the student's GPA or class rank, recognizing that some GPAs/Class Ranks are weighted and some are not. Each of the other schools indicated that they do not unweight the grades and, as a result, a student with a weighted GPA may receive greater admission preference and/or scholarship money.

In an effort to get a sense of the schools within our athletic conference as well as neighboring high schools that utilize weighted grades, I contacted each of these schools. With one exception, each high school contacted utilizes some form of a weighted grading system. The only exception is Chisago Lakes High School that does not weight GPAs. The weighting formula used by these schools varies. Some use a factor of 1.2, some use a factor of 1.25. One school simply adds a .5 weight value to each grade value. For instance, a B has a numeric value of 3.0. In this weighted system, the weight value becomes 3.5. Additionally, the schools vary with respect to which courses receive an additional weight value. In some cases, only AP courses are weighted. However, in most cases, any course that awards college credit receives a weighted value. These include, AP, IB, and concurrent enrollment courses (CIS, College Now, etc.).

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## **Recommendation**

### **Weighted Grades**

Beginning with the 2015-2016 school year, Forest Lake Area High School will apply weighted grades earned in all courses taken at FLAHS that offer college credit, with the exception of courses operating under articulation agreements. This would include all AP courses, College in the School Schools Courses (University of Minnesota), College Now courses (Southwest State University), and concurrent enrollment courses offered through community and technical colleges.

The weighted grading system would be in effect for the above listed courses for any student beginning in the 2015-2016 school year, including juniors and seniors. In effect, seniors would have one year with weighted grades, juniors would have two years with weighted grades.

The factor for weighed the above listed courses will be 1.25. Thus, an "A" with a gpa value of 4.0 would receive a weighted grade of 5.0. See the table below for the the complete grade calculations.

A with a grade value of  $4.0 = 5.0$

A- with a grade value of  $3.7 = 4.625$

B+ with a grade value of  $3.3 = 4.125$

B with a grade value of  $3.0 = 3.75$

B- with a grade value of  $2.7 = 3.375$

C+ with a grade value of  $2.3 = 2.875$

C with a grade value of  $2.0 = 2.5$

C- with a grade value of  $1.7 = 2.125$

D+ with a grade value of  $1.3 = 1.625$

D with a grade value of  $1.0 = 1.25$

D- with a grade value of  $.7 = 1.625$

### **Class Rank**

A recent post on the College Board website references a report by the National Association for College Admissions Counseling (NACAC), stated that more than half of all high schools no longer report student rankings. For this reason, and because the difference in curricula and grading standards at different high schools, colleges are now beginning to discount class rank when considering student enrollment decisions and merit scholarship awards.

Students' high school academic programs can vary greatly. However, depending upon the rigor of one student's courses compared to the rigor of another student's courses, the student with a less rigorous academic plan may have a higher class rank. Consequently, students begin to compare themselves to other students based on their class rank and begin to make academic decisions based on how their grades in the courses may affect his/her class rank. Instead, students should be selecting courses based on their academic interests with the goal of preparing for college, not based on how a course may influence his/her class rank.

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The median GPA for the class of 2014 was 2.93, for the class of 2013 was 2.96, and for the class of 2012 was 2.92. This means that a cumulative GPA of 2.9 is in the lower 50th percentile of the class rank. Because some colleges offer immediate acceptance for students at or above the 50th percentile of their school's class rank, a student with a GPA of 2.9 would not be granted preferred admission. Class rank is based purely on students' cumulative GPA, irrespective of the courses the students take. Once again, we do not believe that a student should select their academic course rigor based on how the grades earned in these courses will affect their class rank.

Beginning with the 2014-2015 school year, class rank for all students will no longer be posted on student transcripts. Class rank will still be calculated and made available for students who are applying to colleges or for scholarship that require a class rank. In these cases, the class rank calculated from weighted GPAs will be reported.

### **Issues to consider**

1. We will need to appropriately advise students about the academic readiness necessary to be successful in college level courses. We still maintain that the purpose in taking college level courses is to prepare for college level academic work and to sufficiently challenge oneself with an appropriate amount of academic rigor. We do not believe that a student should take a college level course simply because the grade in the course is weighted. The weighted grade is intended to reward a student for the additional academic rigor in a college level course.
2. We will need to continue to stress the importance of academic balance in a student's schedule. This balance includes sufficient rigor, which is unique for each student, and exposure to and the participation in elective courses. We do not believe that a student should forgo elective courses where they have an interest in order to take a course with a weighted grade simply to boost his/her GPA.
3. We will need to monitor the extent to which students are electing to take courses with a weighted grade simply because it may boost their GPA. Related to this concern will be the effect these choices may have on elective courses. It will be especially important to guide students along their academic path, ensuring that students create balanced schedules which includes the taking of elective courses.

### **Process:**

1. High School administrative team
2. High School Teaching and Learning Team
3. High School Department Chairs
4. District Cabinet
5. School Board Staff Welfare Committee
6. Small focus group with teachers
7. Focus group with parents
8. Focus group with students