



MEMORANDUM

TO: Dr. Brian Blake, Superintendent of Schools
Hopkinton School Board
FROM: Steven M. Chamberlin, Principal
SUBJECT: Grade Weighting
DATE: February 6, 2009

This memorandum is a summary of the issues surrounding grade weighting at Hopkinton High School.

1. Grade Weighting Definition:

Grade weighting is the practice of assigning certain courses different weights in the calculation of a grade point average. For example, a 90 in an honors course would be increased to a 93 in calculating a grade point average.

2. Literature Review:

Article 1: Differentially Weighting High School Grades: A Critique From the Perspective of Social Justice, Suzanne Rice, Howard Ebmeier
Journal of School Leadership, Volume 12 – May 2002

- “The practice of weighting AP courses is based at the root, on the assumption that certain knowledge is inherently more valuable. This assumption is difficult because it does not relate the value to the individual. If value denotes weight, then automotive should be weighted for some students.”
- “Another assumption underlying weighted grades is that AP courses are more difficult than other types of courses.” This assumption may or may not be true. Students have anecdotally described courses more difficult than those with the AP or honors designation. AP courses have recently been required to undergo a curriculum approval process. This new process has increased standardization of AP courses.
- “There are two primary ways in which weighted grading practices further disadvantage vulnerable students. The first is largely psychological.” The message is sent that the work from students who don’t participate in weighed classes is less important. The second involves students who attend college years after high school.
- “If weighed grades are to be given at all, schools should consider giving them in all types of courses not just those designed for students who plan on attending college.” This concept is interesting; weight grades in second levels of all content areas: art, wood, physical education, mathematics.

- “In small schools, Rank In Class (RIC) is a relatively meaningless measure, because the size of the student body is not large enough to justify the application of statistical algorithms that assume a normal distribution of the population.”

Article 2: Weighting for Recognition: Accounting for Advanced Placement and Honors Courses When Calculating High School Grade Point Averages:

Philip M. Sadler, Robert H. Tai

NASSP Bulletin, March 2007

- “Several studies have found little or no evidence that weighting HSGPA for advanced high school courses predicted better college performance.”
- “Colleges and universities rely on student transcripts in their admission process. Half recast GPAs based on their own standards.”
- “In a review of college and university admissions policies, HSGPA (or RIC) was the most important factor in college admissions. AP course enrollment ranked above SAT II scores in importance.”
- One of the statistics gathered was persistence (attending to the next year of college). Collecting this data on our graduates would be valuable.
- “On average, students who end their high school year with a B in an AP course do not do better in the college subject than those who earn an A in the regular course.
- “One of the pressures on schools to give bonus points for honors and AP courses is that grade inflation has compressed the scale of HSGPAs at the high end: 18% of seniors had an A average in 1968 versus 47% in 2004. (Cooperative institution research Program, 2005)
- “Weighted HSGPAs allows exceptional students to stand out more prominently to colleges, whereas a policy of non-weighting tends to benefit students who do not take advanced courses when applying to college that do not recalculate HSGPAs.”

Article 3: Accurate and Fair Class Ranks: One Step Closer with the Class Rank Index, David M. Lang

ERS Spectrum, Summer 1997

- Current system is flawed; new system would be as well.
- “No matter which method is used, the Bonus Point Method has two very significant problems inherent in it.”
 - “The first problem is that it may prevent top students from taking additional courses for fear of dropping in class rank.”
 - Ex. Student one: 10 reg. courses and 8 honors courses, all A’s - 4.44 GPA
 - Student two: 11 reg. courses and 8 honors courses, all A’s - 4.42 GPA
 - The second problem is students receive different incentives in the same class. The bonus points count differently based on your grade.
- Proposed Class Rank Index: Factors in number of courses. Can include community services or suspensions.

Article 4: Grade Weighting: Solution to Disparity, or Creator of Despair?

John C. Capasso

NASSP Bulletin, February 1995

- “Equality of opportunity is still a goal of U.S. Public Education.”
- “If college prep courses are weighted for the college bound, should not a parallel weighting system be created for the student who is orientated to a career?”
- “Public high schools—all schools, for that matter—should be committed to offering individuals the opportunity to realize their full intellectual potential.”
- “The plight of college bound students is indisputable. They need all the help they can get from wherever they can get it. Manipulating the grading system for such individuals may provide such help, but only artificially and arbitrarily and at the expense of the students and possibly a school’s integrity.”

3. Data From Colleges and Universities

Twelve colleges/universities were contacted to get the college/university perspective on weighting grades. A table depicting the results is below.

College/University	Thoughts on grade weighting
Lynchburg	Recalculates grades if questionable
Elon	Recalculates all core academic grades (math, English, science, history, world language).
George Washington	Weighted grades do not make a difference, they do not recalculate. They look at the transcript and profile – they figure it out for themselves.
UNH	Prefers weighted courses, because it makes it easier for them since they process approximately 17,000 applications each year. It would be extremely difficult for them to recalculate. GPA and class rank are the most important factors to them.
Keene	Recalculates GPAs; they give more weight to honors and AP courses.
Northeastern	Recalculates GPAs and gives more weight to honors and AP courses.
Colby	Does not care if grades are weighted; they consider the transcript and profile.
Middlebury	Stated that weighted grades are most helpful, as typically more rigor is represented; however, Middlebury does not care which is given, as they figure it out themselves.
University of Vermont	Believes that weighted grades are a good indicator, but can figure it out either way.
Dartmouth	Doesn’t care about weighted grades, they figure it out from the transcript.

4. Data From Other High Schools

Eight high schools were surveyed to determine their grade weighting practices. A table depicting the results is below.

School	Weighting Practice	Details
Hollis/Brookline HS Hollis NH	Yes	AP courses, honors courses, jazz, honors anatomy, American Studies, 4 th and 5 th level of languages.
Oyster River HS Durham NH	No	
Bow HS Bow NH	No	
Hanover HS Hanover NH	No	
Sunapee HS Sunapee NH	No	
Concord HS Concord NH	Yes	Prep classes (special education classes are not included in GPA) weight by credit
Bedford HS Bedford NH	Yes	AP courses, honors courses, International Baccalaureate (IB) courses

5. Mock Class Rank With Weighted Grade Point Averages

A top 15 list of a recent graduating class was reconfigured with a weighted grade point average. All honors and advanced placement courses were assigned an additional 3 points (97 became 100) of a grade.

Old Rank	Old GPA	New Rank	New GPA
1	96.39	1	98.54
2	96.28	2	97.18
3	95.55	4	96.31
4	95.28	3	96.47
5	94.19	6	94.3
6	94.17	5	94.32
7	92.77	7	94.03
8	92.54	8	94
9	91.89	9	93.09
10	91.86	13	91.86
11	91.65	11	92.74
12	91.64	12	92.55
13	91.55	10	93.07
14	90.23	14	90.46
15	89.51	15	90.24

6. Impact on Hopkinton High School

Research states that grade weighting adds an incentive for students to take Advanced Placement and Honors courses. This incentive does not seem to be needed at Hopkinton High School. Currently, 384 students (some are taking more than one) are participating in honors or advanced placement courses.

Grade weighting could “force” students to take honors courses to stay even with those who do. This practice could have a significant impact on our elective program. Will students take courses, but lose ground in the GPA race?

One of the strengths of our school is that all students and areas are valued. Anecdotally, I taught at a school where physical education was not included in the calculation of the GPA. The lack of inclusion impacted teacher preparation and student engagement. For some, a different level of planning existed for those classes that were weighted vs. those classes that were not weighted.

Grade weighting would be a significant change to the culture of our school, and a tier would be established. Certain courses/programs would be treated differently, which is not something that has been done at our school previously.

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