

HMHS GRADE WEIGHTING

The Current System

- Step 1 – Quality points will be calculated for each course by multiplying the credits assigned by the numerical grade received.
- Step 2 – The total number of credits attempted will be divided into the total quality points to produce a Grade Point Average.
- Step 3 – All credits earned in accelerated courses will be added together, and then multiplied by 4.
- Step 4 – All credits earned in advanced placement courses will be added together, and then multiplied by 8.
- Step 5 – The products obtained in steps 3 and 4 will be added together and that sum will be divided by the number of credits needed for graduation (presently 110 [should be 120?]) to produce the Weighted Factor.
- Step 6 – The sum of the Grade Point Average and the Weighted Factor will produce the Weighted Grade Point Average.

$$\textit{Weighted GPA} = \frac{\textit{Quality Pts}}{\textit{Total Credits}} + \frac{\textit{Honor Quality Pts}}{110}$$

- What's a Quality Point?
 - Just weights a grade based on number of credits for course
 - “Quality Point” = Grade * [Credit for Course]
 - “Honor Quality Point” = [Honor Wt.]*[Credit for Course]
 - General Course: Weight = 0
 - Accelerated Course: Weight = 4
 - AP Course: Weight = 8

$$\text{Weighted GPA} = \frac{\text{Quality Pts}}{\text{Total Credits}} + \frac{\text{Honor Quality Pts}}{110}$$

- What's the impact of 110 or 120?
 - Mathematically,

$$\text{Eff. AP Weighting} = 8 \times \frac{\text{Total Credits}}{110}$$

- Where “Eff. AP weighting” describes the weighting that is the same as just adding the weight to the grade at the time of grading.
- At end of Junior Year, the effective weight is currently less than 8 & 4 (depending on the total number of credits taken).
- At the end of Senior year, the effective weight is currently more than 8 & 4 (depending on the total number of credits taken).
- Bottom line, under current system, the more courses/credits you acquire, the more pronounced the weighting for AP and accelerated becomes.

Impetus for Change

- Current System Not Readily Comprehensible to Students, Parents, or Admissions Officers
- Current System Provides Less Weight to Difficult Courses Than Systems Used By Most Other Comparable Districts. (This is getting worse, as graduation requirement change, e.g. 120 credits versus 110 credits.)
- This Disadvantages Students When Applying For Merit-Based Scholarships, Honors Programs, and Admissions Generally

Objectives of New System

- The grade weighting procedure should be easily explainable, in one or two sentences, to students, parents, and admissions officers.
- The grade weighting system should be transparent. Students, parents, and admissions officers should be able to see, on a transcript, what difference, if any, grade weighting makes.
- The grade weighting system should ensure that HMHS students are not at a competitive disadvantage compared to students from other districts when applying for merit-based scholarships and admission.

Parental Perspectives/Perceptions

- Virtually no one understands our current grade weighting policy. It is not transparent and cannot be easily explained.
- Most other comparable districts have a more generous grade weighting policy for accelerated and AP courses. Thus, students in other districts will, all other things being equal, have higher GPAs than our students.

- Only 49% of colleges attempt to recalculate GPAs according to their own formula. 51% of the colleges simply accept whatever GPA is reported to them. Examples of schools that do not recalculate GPA include Stanford, University of Chicago, University of Virginia, Brown, Cornell, and UNC Chapel Hill. (Examples of schools that do recalculate GPA include Harvard, Princeton, University of Michigan and University of Delaware). [source – National Association of College Admission Counseling website]

- Many merit-based scholarships and honors programs are based heavily on reported GPAs. Students from schools that weight AP and accelerated courses more heavily are at a competitive advantage. Some parents perceive that their children lost scholarships to kids from other districts where the other students took less demanding course loads and received lower grades, but had higher GPAs.

Review of Comparable Districts

- The overwhelming majority of schools use a 4.0 grading system, rather than the 100-point grading system that Haddonfield uses.
- Most schools also use the ten-point system, where 90-100 is an “A”, 88-89 is a “B”, etc.
- A review of the top 25 high schools in New Jersey, as rated by NJ Monthly Magazine in 2008) reveals that the most common grade weighting policy is one additional point (on the four point scale) for both accelerated and AP courses.

Top 25 Schools Using 1/1 Weighting

- Princeton
- Northern Valley
- Chatham
- Holmdel
- Pascack Hills
- Ramsey
- New Providence
- Northern Valley
- West Windsor – Plainsboro North
- West Windsor – Plainsboro South
- Ramapo
- Pascack Valley

Top 25 Schools Using 1/0.5 Weighting

- Glen Ridge
- Ridgewood
- Northern Highlands

Top 25 Districts

High School	AP Weight	Accelerated Weight
1. Millburn	0.67	0.33
2. McNair (magnet school)	unknown	unknown
3. Tenafly	0.5	0.5
4. Mountain Lakes	0.5	0.5
5. Glen Ridge	1.0	0.5
6. Princeton	1.0	1.0
7. Ridgewood	1.0	0.5

8. Northern Highlands	1.0	0.5
9. Northern Valley (Demarest)	1.0	1.0
10. Chatham	1.0	1.0
11. Holmdel	1.0	1.0
12. Pascack Hills	1.0	1.0
13. Ramsey	1.0	1.0
14. Haddonfield		
15. Governor Livingston (does not rank or weight)		

16. Montgomery	0.5	0.5
17. New Providence	1.0	1.0
18. Northern Valley (Old Tappan)	1.0	1.0
19. West Windsor – Plainsboro North	1.0	1.0
20. Livingston	1.33	0.66
21. West Windsor – Plainsboro South	1.0	1.0
22. Summit	0.7	0.7
23. Ramapo Franklin Lakes	1.0	1.0

Ridge	1.0	0.67
Pascack Valley	1.0	1.0

- Overall – We have data on 22 schools. A majority (12 of the 22) use 1/1 system. One school uses 1.33/0.66, and 9 schools use 1/0.7 or lesser weight.
- “The system of calculating grade point average used by New Providence High School [i.e. 1/1] is consistent with the procedure most often recommended by the National Association of Secondary School Principals and most frequently used by local high schools.” [source – New Providence website].

Administration's Recommendation

- Award 8 additional points for every accelerated course taken.
- Award 12 additional points for every AP course taken.
- Weighted GPA is determined by multiplying the credit hours times the weighted grade received, and dividing by the total number of credits taken.
- Transcripts continue to report unweighted grades for each course, but weighted GPA (which is no change from our current practice).

Alternatives Considered

- Administration reviewed various permutations of other grade-weighting combinations, e.g., 12 & 8, 10 & 10, 25 & 12.5, etc.
- Students and faculty almost unanimously felt there should be a differential for AP and accelerated.
- 12/8 system recommended is similar to the 10/10 system used by many comparable schools, but it provides a differential for AP and accelerated.

- 10/5 system would significantly underweight accelerated courses compared to many of the other districts, and accelerated courses are significantly more common than AP courses on transcripts produced at the end of the junior year, which is the most significant time for college and scholarship applications.
- Administration recalculated class rank for a recent class using the 12/8 system and found it appeared to rank students more fairly or accurately than the current system.

Fairfax County Report

Recently, the Fairfax County Public Schools considered two questions -- (1) changing their 93 – 100 scale for an “A” to the 90 – 100 scale, and (2) grade weighting.

Fairfax County changed to the 90 – 100 scale for an “A” and adopted a 10/5 weighting factor for AP and accelerated courses.

Key Findings

- 75 out of 78 school districts that had recently reviewed their grading policies had switched to the ten-point system, under which a grade of 90 to 100 is an A. (One of these districts was reported to be Voorhees, which reportedly switched in 2007-08.).
- The ten-point scale is the most common grading scale in use according to both high schools and college admission offices surveyed by Fairfax County. It is also the scale used by the federal government and the College Board.

- Fairfax County students were at an enormous disadvantage in terms of GPA when compared with students in ten-point school districts, due to both Fairfax County's lesser grade weighting and their narrower grade range for an A grade. Holding SAT scores constant, Fairfax County students had much lower GPAs than students from other districts.
- For example, looking at the surveyed public high schools with median SAT scores in the range of 1200 - 1249 (which was the highest SAT range), the report found that in Fairfax County only 4.9% of the students had weighted GPAs of 4.0 and above, which at other schools, 26.5% of the students had weighted GPAs of 4.0 and above.
- Even looking at unweighted GPAs, Fairfax County had only 17.3% of their students with an unweighted GPA of A- and above, while other schools had 34.2% of their students with an unweighted GPA of A- and above. These differences held up in other SAT ranges as well.

- The majority of colleges to which Fairfax County students applied did not recalculate GPA.
- Weighted GPA, along with SAT/ACT scores, were reported by admissions offices to be the two crucial factors for merit scholarships and admission to honors programs.
- The most common cut-off for consideration for an honors program was a weighted GPA of 3.5. The report concluded that even small disparities in GPA may determine acceptance or rejection.

BUT . . .

- The Fairfax Report cited a study by Julian Betts and Jeff Grogger (“The Impact of Grading Standards on Student Achievement, Educational Attainment, and Entry-Level Earnings”). While the study found no impact on educational attainment and entry-level earnings, it did find an impact on student achievement. The study concluded that tougher grading standards led to higher student achievement.
- Fairfax County, like 75 out of 78 other school districts, changed to the 10-point scale. Fairfax County also adopted a 10/5 grade weighting factor.

Considerations Governing When Change Should Take Effect?

- Suggested change will not lower anyone's GPA. A student who has taken no accelerated or AP courses will see no change. All other students will see their weighted GPAs rise.
- Relative class ranks will change. Those with more accelerated and AP courses will be ranked higher under the new system than under the old system.
- Class rank, however, is not reported to colleges or scholarships unless required. Weighted GPA is always reported.
- Class rank is most important to those few students attempting to graduate at the very top of the class.

Administration Proposal

- No change for current seniors.
- New grade weighting policy will apply to current freshmen, sophomores, and juniors, and all new incoming classes, with one exception.
- For the sole purpose of determining next year's valedictorian and salutatorian, the old grade-weighting system will be used. All other current juniors will gain the benefit of the new grade-weighting policy.