

GRADE POINT AVERAGE

Question & Answer

On February 3, 2009, the Rumson-Fair Haven Board of Education adopted a number of proposals regarding how students' Grade Point Average (GPA) will be calculated effective September 1, 2009. The proposed changes were a result of months of research and analysis of grade reporting practices at comparable high schools, and an evaluation of student transcripts and admission review procedures by leading colleges and universities.

This Q & A has been developed to help explain the changes to our present procedures in calculating and reporting students' GPA. Some of the changes affect all students while others will be "phased in" starting with next year's freshmen class (Class of 2013).

The significant changes for present students (Class of 2010, 2011, and 2012) are:

- Physical Education (PE) will count in the calculation of every student's GPA
- PE "waivers" for athletes in season are no longer permitted
- Letter grades will be used rather than the current numeric system

In addition to the changes above, the following will apply for the Class of 2013:

- The grades reported on the transcript will reflect a student's actual grade received in class. Honors and AP "weighting" will be calculated into the year-end, cumulative GPA
- The weight of Honors classes will be an additional .67
- The weight for AP/SUPA and dual enrollment classes will be an additional 1.0
- Because of the changes above, our GPA system changes from a 4.5 system to a 4.0 system

What prompted the research?

The research began in response to issues raised by students, parents, faculty, and college admission offices. Students, parents, and colleges expressed confusion regarding the 4.5 GPA scale currently used by RFH. The 4.5 scale made it difficult for students to make GPA comparisons to national statistics provided by colleges which are based on a 4.0 scale (A=4.0) and frequently leading to students being confused as to their "real" average. In fact, college admissions officers have admitted making mistakes interpreting our students' GPA and, those mistakes adversely affected our students. Conversations among faculty and school leaders resulted in a recommendation to research these GPA issues which came to light during the last RFH Middle States self-evaluation.

How was the research gathered?

In the fall of 2008, an electronic survey was sent to 18 demographically similar high schools. The survey focused on gathering information and comparative data in four key areas: 1)GPA scale being used, 2) range of subjects included in GPA, 3) types of grades reported, and 4) how grade weighting was calculated. At the same time, an electronic college survey was sent to 75 colleges to gather feedback regarding how the current RFH 4.5 GPA scale is both perceived and applied during admissions decisions. Surveys were also sent to 20 competitive high schools considered most similar to RFH, as well as to the top 20 colleges in applications received from RFH and the top 20 colleges RFH students attended in 2008.

What were the results of the high school surveys concerning PE?

The surveys indicated that 88% of the high schools surveyed include PE in the GPA and were comprehensive. In general, GPAs are either Academic (include only core academic courses) or Comprehensive (all graded subjects). The vast majority of high schools report comprehensive GPA (includes PE). Samples of our current students showed that in all cases, including PE had a positive impact on GPA.

How do other high schools report grades?

Currently, RFH uses numeric grades for quarterly report cards and GPA calculations (e.g. 3.8) for semester and final grades as well as transcripts, unlike the alpha or numeric system used by most high schools. Sixteen of 20 high schools use letter grades. The top of the grade range in half of the high schools surveyed is an A+; the other half end at A. In most of the high schools surveyed, whole letter grades as well as + and – ranges are used.

What did the research tell us regarding grade weighting?

All high schools, other than RFH, reported showing weight only in the GPA calculation. All high schools surveyed report unweighted course grades earned on the transcript. While most high schools weight for Honors, Advanced Placement (AP) and Dual Enrollment courses, some weight them the same, while other differentiate weight with Honors earning less weight than AP or Dual Enrollment.

Why is that noteworthy?

Currently, RFH reports “weighted” grades, meaning that the grade reported on the student’s transcript is the actual grade earned plus 10 points for Honors and AP classes. No other school weights grades and reports them as actual grades.

What did the research from the colleges show?

The research from the colleges indicated confusion with our 4.5 GPA scale. Colleges indicated that because the scale was not standard (4.0), RFH grades on transcripts were recalculated to an alpha/numeric scale that equates to a standard 4.0 scale. In recalculating each student’s grades, many colleges believe that it increased the potential for calculation

errors. They also noted that the current RFH system is more cumbersome to convert than the more commonly used letter grade ranges that correspond to a 4.0 alpha/numeric scale.

How do colleges view weighted courses?

Colleges indicate that they expect Honors and AP to carry some weight but many believe that courses which can earn college credit (AP, International Baccalaureate (IB), and Dual Enrollment courses) should be weighted more than Honors courses. About half of the colleges surveyed strip weight from grades/GPAs to determine an unweighted average, and then use their own calculation to award weight for Honors and AP courses. Some will keep the weighted average for comparison unless it is deemed “excessive” and all tally Honors and AP/Dual Enrollment courses. Colleges reported “excessive” as a weight greater than 1.0. Colleges believe that the weighting of grades should be only included in the GPA and not in the course grades on the transcript.

How was this research shared within the RFH school community?

Initially, research was summarized and shared with the Education Committee of the Board and with the full Board of Education in December, 2008. This was followed with three additional meetings with the education Committee, a presentation to the Principal’s Advisory Council, and two additional Board of Education meetings. The supervisors were briefed often and teachers were updated in department and faculty meetings.

SUPERINTENDENT’S PROPOSALS MADE AS A RESULT OF THIS RESEARCH

What proposals were approved regarding the range of subjects to be included in the GPA?

Previously, although a grade was earned in PE, the grade was not used in the GPA calculation. The first proposal was to include PE in the GPA. Beginning in September 2009, final grades in PE will be included in the GPA calculation for all students. An analysis of the impact of including PE grades in the calculation of the GPA showed no negative impact.

How will reporting of grades change?

Beginning in September 2009, academic achievement in all courses will be reported as letter grades on report cards and transcripts. Research confirmed that the trend is to report grades using letters. Letter grades, when banded together in small increments, benefit most students. When college admission offices were asked their preference, most indicated that they prefer letter grades as they are easier to analyze and compare and make grade trends more apparent.

How will previous grades appear on the transcript?

For students in the classes of 2010, 2011, and 2012, final transcript grades will be converted to the new letter grade equivalent. We believe that the students’ transcripts will be

easier to understand if all grades, past and present, are reported in the same way. Since weight was already included in the grade, the new letter grade will be the equivalent of the weighted average.

What GPA scale will we use for the classes of 2010, 2011, and 2012?

We will use a weighted 4.0 system, where an A = 4.0. Although we will be using a 4.0 system, a grade of A+ will earn a 4.33. An A+ (4.33) is a well recognized and acceptable “bonus” available to all students regardless of the level of the courses. Our research with colleges indicates they consider this a 4.0-based GPA system, and there is no need for recalculation, as is the case with our previous GPA 4.5-based scale.

The new 4.0 based GPA system scale is as follows:

Current Weighted Transcript Grades on 4.5	Numeric Grade Scale	New Letter Grade Scale (A=4.0)	New GPA for Calculation
4.3 +	97 – 100	A+	A+ = 4.33
3.8 – 4.2	93 – 96	A	A = 4.0
3.5 – 3.7	90 – 92	A-	A- = 3.67
3.2 – 3.4	87 – 89	B+	B+ = 3.33
2.8 – 3.1	83 – 86	B	B = 3.0
2.5 – 2.7	80 – 82	B-	B- = 2.67
2.2 – 2.4	77 – 79	C+	C+ = 2.33
1.8 – 2.1	73 – 76	C	C = 2.0
1.5 – 1.7	70 – 72	C-	C- = 1.67
1.2 – 1.4	67 – 69	D+	D+ = 1.33
1.0 – 1.1	65 – 66	D	D = 1.0
0	<65	F	F = 0

Will actual or weighted final grades be reported?

Research shows that the colleges expect actual letter/number grades be reported and weight be applied only when calculating the final GPA. We believe it is important to be transparent in grade reporting. There is some concern by parents of current students about the change in year over year grade comparisons if grades do not include weight, as per past practice. In order to not penalize based upon past practice, it was determined for our current students only (Class of 2010, 2011, and 2012) weight would be added to the final grade, as is currently the practice, and the equivalent weighted letter grade would appear on the transcript. The weighting will continue at 1.0 for Honors, AP, and SUPA courses. GPA points will not be displayed, but will be calculated as a year-end and cumulative average. Since the weight is already included, no additional weight will be added at the end. Beginning with the Class of 2013, an unweighted GPA average will be calculated as well.

When will the new “alpha” transcripts be available to view?

We anticipate sending a copy of the new “alpha” transcripts to all rising seniors in August, along with their previous “GPA grade” transcript, so that all rising seniors can see the improvement in appearance and clarity of the grade reporting. All other students will review their transcripts shortly after.

How will weight be reported beginning with the Class of 2013?

Beginning with the Class of 2013, weight will be added for Honors and AP/SUPA/Dual Enrollment (DE) courses to the reported year-end and cumulative GPA only. GPA will be calculated in accordance with credits earned in all subjects and shown as a year-end overall average, not individually by course. The weight for Honors classes will be an additional .67; the weight for AP/SUPA and DE will be an additional 1.0.

The new GPA scale for the Class of 2013 and beyond will be as follows:

Actual Numeric Range/Grade	Actual Grade Reported on Transcript	GPA for Calculation		
		Level 1	Honors	AP/SUPA/DE
97-100	A+	4.33	5.0	5.33
93-96	A	4.0	4.67	5.0
90-92	A-	3.67	4.33	4.67
87-89	B+	3.33	4.0	4.33
83-86	B	3.0	3.67	4.0
80-82	B-	2.67	3.33	3.67
77-79	C+	2.33	3.0	3.33
73-76	C	2.0	2.67	3.0
70-72	C-	1.67	2.33	2.67
67-69	D+	1.33	2.0	2.33
65-66	D	1.0	1.67	2.00
<65	F	0	0	0

If GPA is calculated with quality points (weighting) based on the letter grade earned rather than a specific numeric grade for each subject, won't there be more GPA ties?

Since letter grades band a few grades together per letter, it is possible for students' (average) GPAs to be closer together. But, since we do not rank, there are far less issues raised. For purposes of scholarships or valedictorian, unweighted averages are also available for our calculations. Colleges expect our profile to address both weighted and unweighted averages, and grade distribution by subject to assist them in differentiating our students, especially those whose performance is at the top of the GPA scale.

For additional information, please contact your student's guidance counselor.