

Grade Weighting and Reporting: Current and Future Practices

GREAT NECK UFSD

APRIL 11, 2022

Good evening, and thank you for this opportunity to share some exciting news with you regarding grade weighting in the Great Neck Public Schools.

Great Neck Tenets

We believe in our mission to look out for the best interests of all students

We should continue our practice of placing students in appropriately rigorous courses—grade weighting should not impact such placement.

We should support students' interests in encore and elective courses that are not typically weighted in other districts.

We should avoid practices that may potentially place additional stress on students based on course selection.

We are philosophically opposed to grade inflation, and we recognize that any form of grade weighting is, in fact, grade inflation.

Grading systems should not create or exacerbate divides among our populations of students.

As many are aware, Great Neck does not currently employ a system of grade-weighting. The reasoning behind our practice goes well beyond a long-held belief that college admissions offices unweight grades prior to reviewing college applications. We also embrace the tenets noted in this slide. At a recent District-wide Shared Decision Making training event, Harvard researcher Tony Wagner spoke about reimagining how students might demonstrate mastery of skills needed for success in life beyond high school, and his views clearly support these tenets. He noted that most CEOs, regardless of where they attended college, have a deep sense of self, and desire in employees creativity and problem solving skills that are not necessarily reflected in students' course grades. He also emphasized the importance of play, passion, and purpose for our students, of supporting student passions regardless of where they lead, and of the risk of placing too much pressure on students.

A Bit of History:

Shared Decision Making Review about a decade ago

- Admissions offices use unweighted averages or reweighted using their own methods
- Nassau County school districts used inconsistent methods of weighting
- Building-level SDMs did not recommend a change to our practice

The UPTC's Educational Enhancement Sub-Committee recently provided information that challenged our understanding of the use of weighted averages for admissions and scholarships.

A Grade Weighting Review Group comprising administrators, guidance department heads, and teachers was formed and charged with gathering current data, reviewing it, and making recommendations.

When reviewed about a decade ago, we were confident in our belief that weighted averages did not impact admissions and scholarship decisions. Given the extremes of current grade-weighting practices in Nassau County (I'll share more details in an upcoming slide), it seems reasonable that colleges would, out of necessity, use unweighted averages. However, the UPTC's Educational Enhancement Sub-Committee recently provided information that challenged our understanding of the use of weighted averages for admission and scholarship purposes. As a result, a Grade Weighting Review Group comprising administrators, guidance department heads, and teachers was formed and charged with gathering current data, reviewing it, and making recommendations regarding our practice based on its findings.

Grade Weighting Review Group

Used Naviance to identify the colleges and universities to which Great Neck's students most frequently applied over the most recent three year period,

Determined the questions that should be asked of admissions representatives to establish if and how weighted grades are used, if at all, and

Analyzed the information received.

- If data supported the position that grade weighting **DOES NOT** impact admissions/scholarship decisions, no change should be considered.
- If data supported the position that grade weighting **DOES** impact admissions/scholarship decisions, what system of grade weighting should be adopted in consideration of the expected impact outside of reported GPAs?

Key Data Findings

“Do you use an applicant’s weighted GPA for any purpose...?”

- 70 responses, 30 “Yes”, 40 “No”
- Schools answering “Yes” included: Indiana University, Penn State, Tufts, UConn, NYIT, Quinnipiac, Williams, Union, Michigan State, Ithaca, UC Santa Barbara, SUNY (Plattsburg, Purchase, Geneseo, Cortland, Binghamton, Albany, Buffalo), Vassar, Notre Dame, Marist, Reichman, Elon, St. John’s, Adelphi, Towson, Rutgers, UPenn, Florida Atlantic, Miami of Ohio
- Those answering “No” typically recognize that, “given the variance in GPA weighting and scales across the country, comparing GPAs between schools is like comparing apples and oranges.”
- Some of those answering “Yes” do so “just as a reference to determine how much the weighting has influenced the overall GPA”, or because “it can be helpful to understand a student’s program rigor and/or place in class.” In these cases, only a weighting system which differentiates between classes based on tracking (e.g. Regents, Honors, AP) would provide an admissions office with meaningful data.

The data we found was in stark contrast to our beliefs, and you see here that, of the 70 schools that responded, a significant number use weighted GPAs for some purpose. Those responding “no” may have their own system for weighting, may review GPA in the context of the rigor of the program taken in conjunction with the rigor of the available program, may not weight at all, and typically recognize the “apples and oranges” aspect of weighting scales not just across our county, but across the country. As noted, some stating “yes” are looking for a fast way to determine the rigor of a student’s program. Yet some of their statements make it clear that many of our students would benefit from weighting because it could provide opportunities similar to those of students in nearby districts:

“We take the highest cumulative GPA from a transcript; therefore, if a school does weight it could make a difference.

“We do not recalculate, but do use a variety of factors such as level of course work to make admission decisions. This is the same for scholarship consideration.”

“Weighted GPAs are used to determine a student's academic eligibility for admission, as well as eligibility for merit based scholarships.” “On transcripts we record the weighted GPA, not the unweighted GPA, to review for admission.”

“We use the highest GPA provided on a transcript. Generally the weighted GPA is higher than the unweighted, which makes the student more competitive for admission.”

“Weighted GPA is used for merit scholarships.”

“The weighted GPA is used for admission review and academic scholarship eligibility.”

As a result, the Grade Weighting Review Group determined that re-examine our practice with regard to grade weighting was the responsible thing to do for our students.

Regional Data

Nassau County Districts	Other	Regents	Honors	AP
Maximum Weight	1.075	1.075	1.125	1.200
# Weighting/Mean Weight	1.002	1.009	1.061	1.100

This data dramatizes just how varied practices are within the county. Not seen in this data is the fact that some districts simply add points to GPAs based on performance in AP classes. Some weight only AP classes. Some weight AP and College credit classes run in partnership with local and regional universities. Some include honors at the AP level, while others do not. As noted in an earlier slide, “comparing weighted averages is like comparing apples and oranges.” One college told us that, if a weighted GPA varies too widely from the unweighted GPA, they revert back to the unweighted average. One would reasonably surmise that the maximum weights shown here would likely be dismissed.

However, for the committee’s purposes, this information provides a starting point to look at HOW to weight grades. As such we began with a typical 1.00 Regents/Other, 1.05 Honors, and 1.10 AP/College to see the impact on students’ grades.

Hypothetical GPAs for Students Taking a Very Rigorous Course Load

English considered "H" in grades 9 and 10, AP in grades 11 and 12

Math considered "H" in grades 9-11, AP in grade 12

Science considered "H" in grades 9 and 10, AP in grades 11 and 12

Social Studies considered "H" in grade 9, AP in grades 10 – 12

World Language considered "H" in grades 9-11, AP in grade 12

PE not considered honors

Electives 1 and 2 considered AP in Grade 12

For our model, we also used the information from this slide as a basis for examining the impact of grade weighting on students taking a very rigorous program.

Hypothetical GPAs for Students Taking a Very Rigorous Course Load

	GPA Without Weighting				GPA Traditional Honors 5%, AP10% Weighting			
	<u>9</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>12</u>
English	95	95	92	92	99.75	99.75	101.2	101.2
Math	95	95	95	92	99.75	99.75	99.75	101.2
Science	95	95	92	92	99.75	99.75	101.2	101.2
Social Studies	95	92	92	92	99.75	96.6	101.2	101.2
World Language	95	95	95	92	99.75	99.75	99.75	101.2
PE	98	98	98	98	98	98	98	98
Elective 1	98	98	98	92	98	98	98	101.2
Elective 2	98	98	98	92	98	98	98	101.2
GPA	94.70				99.66			

While we looked at uniform course grades of 85, 90, and 95 in some models, we also looked at this model where Regents and Other course grades we placed at 98, Honors at 95, and AP/College at 92. Students earning these grades in districts with a tiered weighting approach would end up with an overall GPA of 99.66.

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However, a tiered approach to weighting conflicts with many of our core beliefs, shown again here. As a result, we considered an approach that weights all courses equally, with the results compared with the tiered weighting system shown on the previous slide.

Hypothetical GPAs for Students Taking a Very Rigorous Course Load

	GPA Traditional Honors 5%, AP10% Weighting				GPA 5% Overall Weighting			
	<u>9</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>12</u>
English	99.75	99.75	101.2	101.2	99.75	99.75	96.6	96.6
Math	99.75	99.75	99.75	101.2	99.75	99.75	99.75	96.6
Science	99.75	99.75	101.2	101.2	99.75	99.75	96.6	96.6
Social Studies	99.75	96.6	101.2	101.2	99.75	96.6	96.6	96.6
World Language	99.75	99.75	99.75	101.2	99.75	99.75	99.75	96.6
PE	98	98	98	98	102.9	102.9	102.9	102.9
Elective 1	98	98	98	101.2	102.9	102.9	102.9	96.6
Elective 2	98	98	98	101.2	102.9	102.9	102.9	96.6
GPA	99.66				99.44			

Note that the overall weighted GPA differs by only about 2/10s of a point. Using this universal weighting approach allows our students taking our most rigorous program to be considered on an equal basis with most surrounding districts. And while some may argue that weighting should provide an advantage for students taking such a schedule, the reality is that, for the most selective schools, it is the combination of course rigor and performance that is considered. Moreover, regardless of our approach to weighting, one should not expect the proportion of our students accepted to the most selective schools to change. And there are an advantages to this approach: A tiered weighting approach would have to be phased in beginning with an incoming freshman class. If this had been the recommendation of the Grade Weighting Review Group, then the benefits would first be available for the Class of 2026. The current recommendation benefits the Class of 2023 and beyond—there is no need to phase in implementation because prior course selection will not advantage or disadvantage any student based on course selections during their 9th, 10th and 11th grade years. In addition, all students meeting weighted GPA standards and other criteria (such as standardized test performance) for certain schools and programs would be considered more favorably for guaranteed admission and/or scholarships.

Grade Weighting Review Group Recommendations

Beginning with the Class of 2023, Great Neck North High School and Great Neck South High School will weight students' overall GPAs by 5%, regardless of the courses taken.

Both the weighted and unweighted GPAs will be included on our students' official transcripts.

Our school profiles will clearly indicate that our system of weighting is for all courses taken. The content and format of our profiles is under review to establish the merits of other possible changes.

Therefore, based on our beliefs and the data, the grade weighting group has made these recommendations which will be in place beginning with the Class of 2023.

Questions?
