



**HIGHLAND PARK HIGH SCHOOL**

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# **CLASS RANK**

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**STUDY TEAM REPORT**



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## PURPOSE

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Any student, parent, faculty member, or administrator who has been involved at the high school level and has not had a spirited conversation about class rank probably lives outside the United States.

Being in the top 10% of their graduating class is a tremendous accomplishment for most Highland Park High School (HPHS) students. It qualifies them for recognition at graduation ceremonies and earns them respect for their hard work and abilities. Additionally, it sends a message to college admissions counselors that students have taken a challenging curriculum and performed well among their peer group. It also qualifies them for automatic admission into any Texas public university. The benefits of a class rank policy seem to be obvious for the top 10% of a class, yet is it just as beneficial for the other 90% of our students? The student in the top 40% of his or her class in 2008 would have a GPA of 3.85 (B+ average), would have taken several rigorous courses, would have participated in extracurricular activity, and would likely have performed community service above the minimum requirements. Does the statistical rank published at HPHS help or hinder that student who is being considered for college admissions? In addition, what message does this send to the student, his or her peers, and college admissions counselors? Similar questions have communities and school administrators evaluating their class rank policies across the country. Therefore, these are the questions that have been surfacing more and more frequently at many levels within the Highland Park Independent School District (HPISD) that have led to the formation of a study team and the following report.

In order to ensure that the HPISD and the HPHS Mission Statements are being pursued in earnest, policies of the school district must be reviewed periodically to measure their contribution to the fulfillment of those statements. The commitment to excellence called for in both mission statements is a clear mandate for us never to let the status quo be an accident. Thus, the class rank policy deserves updated research and review for appropriateness in fulfilling our mission.

This study was compiled by a group consisting of administrators, faculty, students, and parents of the district. During the 2008-2009 school year, the study team met collectively and in various ad hoc committees for the purpose of studying, examining, and exploring the class rank policy as it impacts Highland Park students and the college admissions process.

Determining where the influence of class rank begins and ends is an imprecise exercise. The study team determined that class rank is best studied when considering who utilizes class rank and why it is needed. The HPHS Class Rank Policy impacts many facets of a student's experience at Highland Park. For purposes of this study, we examined class rank from the perspective of the following: college admissions process, awarding of academic scholarships, and student curriculum choices. The current state law requiring districts to rank the top 10% of each graduating class does not allow for any optional ranking methods. Consequently, the scope of the class rank policy that is examined in this study includes its impact on the other 90%.

The temptation in studying and exploring class rank is to venture off into a variety of issues which are not a part of a class rank policy but are interdependent with such a policy. Some of the issues which are related but not a part of this report include the following:

- ① the impact of the State of Texas 10% legislation on the college selection process
- ① uniform GPA discussions ongoing in Austin
- ① HPISD's delineation of grade points between A+, A, and A-
- ① HPISD's practice of determining which courses receive "AP" and "Pre-AP" course weightings
- ① the practice of informing students of their class rank beginning in the second semester of their sophomore year

Additionally, in researching these issues, the study team made it a priority to pursue a broader perspective than just our district. Research efforts were extended beyond the State of Texas to discover any changes occurring in the college admission process and trends occurring in other school districts involving this issue.

As the scope of the work of the study team evolved, it became clear that the topic of class rank impacts many constituents in our community. This subject has continued to be discussed in a variety of settings throughout the district from several different perspectives but is always one related to the impact of the policy on our students. Clearly, this report is something that the district administration needs, the parents want, and the students deserve.

The process that the study team undertook throughout its existence has ultimately focused on two questions:

1. Does the HPHS Class Rank Policy help or hinder our students during the college admissions process?
2. What are the pros and cons of using a numeric class rank system?

This report centers on studying, examining, and exploring these two questions and is organized to reflect the study group's findings as follows:

- I. Purpose
- II. History of HPISD Class Rank
- III. Study Team Structure
- IV. Findings
- V. Appendix



# HISTORY

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## **Progression of Class Rank**

Throughout the history of HPISD, class rank has been reported in two ways: percentiles and numerically. The committee conducted a ten-year review starting with the freshman class of 1996-97. Beginning with this class and continuing through the class of 2001, rank was reported in percentile rather than as a specific number. As a transition to this system, the classes of 1997-1999 had the option of having a specific rank or percentile provided for college admissions. With percentile ranking in place, the Top 10% Law (originally styled “Texas House Bill 588”), passed in 1997, created a need for Highland Park High School (HPS) to form a committee to evaluate existing policies and administrative guidelines. The recommendation from the designated committee was to transition from the percentile system to a numeric ranking system, which took place with the class of 2002.

## **Rationale for the Class Rank Study Team**

The HPISD Superintendent, HPS Principal, HPS Assistant Principals, counselors, other administrative staff were periodically asked about the purpose and significance of class rank for Highland Park students during various meetings, informal gatherings, and discussions. Despite class rank not being a formal agenda item at these events, the topic was frequently raised at such meetings or gatherings as the following: student council, principal coffees, “lunch bunch” meetings, student leadership groups, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Consortium, teacher/counselor feedback, College Admission Informal Survey feedback, Sounding Board, Staff Leadership Team (SLT), Campus Leadership Team (CLC), counseling staff meetings, parent conferences, and sophomore conferences.

In an effort to simultaneously acknowledge a system embedded in a ranking process and the discussions emerging about the value of class rank, the assistant superintendent was charged to explore and determine the need for a comprehensive study. In the spring of 2007-08, the Concept Committee, composed of the principal, director of guidance and counseling, and the assistant principal for instruction, convened to address the following agenda items:

## AGENDA

1. The need, if any, for a class rank study
2. Alignment of HPISD Strategic Plan Beliefs and Mission Statements with the practice of rank in class
3. Purpose of the study
4. Review of current legislation and Higher Education Coordinating Board rules
5. Examination of the change from an 8.0 to 4.0 GPA scale (class of 2006) in relation to rank in class

As a result of the inquiry, the recommendation from the Concept Committee was to proceed with the formation of the Class Rank Study Team. It was followed by determination of membership, purpose, and nature of the work.

In identifying the study team composition, emphasis was placed on the following diversity of membership:

- ① HPHS/Highland Park Middle School (HPMS) teachers who work with various groups of students and various subject areas
- ① HPHS administrators and HPHS/HPMS counselors
- ① Parents of students with diverse interests, achievement levels, genders, grade levels, private school experiences, and curricular/program needs
- ① Students who represent the diverse interests, achievement levels, genders, grade levels, private school experiences, and curricular/program needs

With membership criteria established, the Concept Committee engaged the counseling staff and campus/district administration to propose potential committee representation. Invitations were extended to the suggested membership with only one person declining.

### **HPISD TEACHERS:**

- ④ Ed Martin, HPHS social studies
- ④ Liz Peterson, HPHS science
- ④ Shannon Taliaferro, MIS 6<sup>th</sup> grade
- ④ Becky Weber, HPHS English
- ④ Melynda Wright, HPHS mathematics
- ④ Linda Raya, HPHS Fine Arts Director & teacher

### **HPISD ADMINISTRATORS:**

- ④ Emily Bowers, HPHS Assistant Principal
- ④ Patrick Cates, HPHS Principal
- ④ Gena Gardiner, HPISD Assistant Superintendent
- ④ Marta Gott, HPHS Assistant Principal
- ④ Kim Rose, HPISD Director of Guidance & Counseling

### **HPISD COUNSELORS:**

- ④ Margaret Arnold, MIS/HPMS
- ④ Judy Ware, HPHS

### **HPISD PARENTS:**

- ④ Margie Bankhead
- ④ Rob Bare
- ④ Peggy Bessellieu
- ④ Cordelia Boone
- ④ Charlene Gowdey
- ④ Connie O'Neill
- ④ Janet Todd
- ④ Keith Waggoner
- ④ Zazelle Wingo
- ④ Linda Yates

### **HPISD STUDENTS:**

- ④ Cameron Gosnell, 10<sup>th</sup> grade
- ④ Boone Howell, 10<sup>th</sup> grade
- ④ Allison Mootz, 11<sup>th</sup> grade
- ④ Caleb Robinson, 11<sup>th</sup> grade
- ④ Claire Straty, 12<sup>th</sup> grade
- ④ Lauren Thompson, 11<sup>th</sup> grade

With the Class Rank Study Team in place, the first meeting was held in the HPISD Administration Building on September 30, 2008.



# STUDY TEAM STRUCTURE

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During the fall semester of 2008, the group met collectively to explore the initial charge. The first order of business was to establish the norms, which included honest conversation, commitment to the group's work, and sublimation of personal agendas. A key element of the agenda was the formulation of the focus questions and purpose including alignment with the mission statements of the campus and the district.

## Focus Questions/Purpose

- ⦿ *Does class rank help or hinder Highland Park students during the college admissions process (students outside of the top 10%)?*
- ⦿ *What are the pros and cons of using a numeric class rank system?*

## Mission Statements

### ***Highland Park High School***

*The mission of Highland Park High School is to provide an environment which will enable students to develop and to continue the lifelong academic, cultural and physical aspects of learning in order to foster visionary individuals who strive toward excellence with a sense of global and technological awareness and who will go forth to serve the community and world as responsible citizens.*

### ***Highland Park Independent School District***

*Highland Park Independent School District, with an unyielding commitment to excellence, will provide an exceptional academic program that recognizes the unique potential of each student and integrates the intellectual, social, cultural, and physical aspects of learning. This program will empower each student to become an eager lifelong learner committed to academic excellence, integrity, responsible citizenship, and service to others.*

## **Process of the Study**

During the course of the fall meetings, central issues and challenges were identified through large group and table discussions. A review of current research articles determined information, issues, and questions in need of further study. (*see appendix*)

As a result, four major class rank topics and areas of study were established. Members volunteered for the ad hoc study committees:

- ① Research
- ① Public and Private High Schools
- ① Public and Private College Admissions
- ① Data Analysis, Legislative, and Policy Review

## **Guiding Questions**

The ad hoc committees met from December to February. Ad hoc study committees developed guiding questions for the scope of their work. Examples of guiding questions were as follows:

- ① How do universities and colleges evaluate applicants from non-ranking public and private high schools?
- ① Across the United States, what are the public and private high school class rank trends? What is the prevalent rationale?
- ① What methods and criteria are used in reviewing a college applicant?

## Ad Hoc Committee Work

### RESEARCH

**Members:** *Facilitator-Emily Bowers, Connie O’Neill, Liz Peterson, Caleb Robinson, Keith Waggoner, Becky Weber*

Class rank issues were researched by searching the internet for related articles, reviewing professional journals/periodicals, and gathering information from other school districts. A bibliography of relevant articles was created and made available for all team members to utilize as a resource. The literature provided valuable insight into the depth of the class rank dilemma.

### PUBLIC AND PRIVATE HIGH SCHOOLS

**Members:** *Facilitator-Kim Rose, Margaret Arnold, Peggy Bessellieu, Cordelia Boone, Charlene Gowdey, Claire Straty, Shannon Taliaferro, Lauren Thompson*

Public and private high school counselors across the country were interviewed regarding their use of class rank. Informal conversations with the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Consortium High Schools and metroplex private high schools provided insight concerning the history of class rank at these institutions. In addition, class rank studies completed by high schools comparable to HPHS were reviewed. A class rank survey was created and sent to the top 100 public and private high schools recognized by *Newsweek* with a response rate of 25%.

### PUBLIC AND PRIVATE COLLEGE ADMISSIONS

**Members:** *Facilitator-Judy Ware, Cameron Gosnell, Allie Mootz, Linda Raya, Janet Todd, Melynda Wright, Linda Yates*

To gain insight into how college admission officials view rank in class as an admission criterion, the Public and Private College Admissions Ad Hoc Committee surveyed the 100 colleges and universities to which our students most often apply. Our eight-question survey was e-mailed to the colleges using Survey Monkey<sup>®</sup>. We received 43 responses from schools in 19 states throughout the nation.

### DATA ANALYSIS, LEGISLATIVE, AND POLICY REVIEW

**Members:** *Facilitator-Marta Gott, Margie Bankhead, Rob Bare, Patrick Cates, Boone Howell, Zazelle Wingo*

The Data Analysis and Legislative Review Ad Hoc Committee focused on two primary areas of study - state legislation related to college admissions and the relationship of the grade point average to class rank at HPHS. A legislative review of all states was conducted to identify similar legislation regarding automatic admission. The committee also examined five years of HPHS GPA data trends.

### *Ad Hoc Committee Chairman Coordination*

In addition to the team as a whole, monthly meetings were held with the ad hoc committee chairs and the assistant superintendent from January through the conclusion of the committee reports in April. The purpose was to review progress and to support the preparation of the formal presentations of each subcommittee.

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The collective Class Rank Study Team resumed meetings from February to April 2009 to report information learned in the four key areas of study. A summary of the findings is provided in the next section of the report.



# FINDINGS

**A. *Does class rank accurately represent the level of achievement of HPHS students in the college application process?***

As the committee went about the study of this core question, data was gathered from a broad spectrum of sources. The information to follow shows the findings as the study team investigated how the use of class rank impacts our students at HPHS.

In the beginning stages of the investigation, GPA ranges from HPHS graduating classes over the past five years were reviewed. A numeric portrait of each class is shown to demonstrate the distribution of grades from which class rank is derived.

The charts below detail five years of HPHS GPA trends.

Year A					Year D				
Decile	Mean GPA	GPA Range		GPA Spread	Decile	Mean GPA	GPA Range		GPA Spread
1	4.39	4.66	4.24	0.42	1	4.35	4.63	4.18	0.45
2	4.16	4.24	4.09	0.15	2	4.1	4.17	4.01	0.16
3	4.04	4.09	3.98	0.11	3	3.94	4.01	3.89	0.12
4	3.9	3.97	3.85	0.12	4	3.82	3.88	3.77	0.11
5	3.79	3.85	3.72	0.13	5	3.7	3.76	3.65	0.11
6	3.66	3.72	3.58	0.14	6	3.56	3.65	3.5	0.15
7	3.51	3.58	3.42	0.16	7	3.43	3.5	3.37	0.13
8	3.33	3.42	3.22	0.2	8	3.28	3.37	3.16	0.21
9	3.11	3.22	2.96	0.26	9	3.06	3.15	2.94	0.21
10	2.7	2.95	1.82	1.13	10	2.7	2.94	2.18	0.76

Year B					Year E				
Decile	Mean GPA	GPA Range		GPA Spread	Decile	Mean GPA	GPA Range		GPA Spread
1	4.37	4.75	4.19	0.56	1	4.11	4.42	3.98	0.44
2	4.08	4.16	3.99	0.17	2	3.86	3.98	3.78	0.2
3	3.89	3.99	3.81	0.18	3	3.71	3.77	3.64	0.13
4	3.76	3.81	3.72	0.09	4	3.59	3.64	3.51	0.13
5	3.68	3.71	3.64	0.07	5	3.46	3.51	3.39	0.12
6	3.58	3.64	3.51	0.13	6	3.34	3.38	3.3	0.08
7	3.45	3.51	3.38	0.13	7	3.24	3.3	3.19	0.11
8	3.3	3.38	3.19	0.19	8	3.12	3.19	3.04	0.15
9	3.09	3.18	2.94	0.24	9	2.93	3.03	2.8	0.23
10	2.62	2.94	1.98	0.96	10	2.58	2.79	1.73	1.06

Year C				
Decile	Mean GPA	GPA Range		GPA Spread
1	4.36	4.58	4.2	0.38
2	4.12	4.2	4.04	0.16
3	3.95	4.04	3.87	0.17
4	3.81	3.87	3.75	0.12
5	3.68	3.75	3.62	0.13
6	3.56	3.62	3.51	0.11
7	3.43	3.5	3.37	0.13
8	3.32	3.37	3.25	0.12
9	3.12	3.24	3	0.24
10	2.78	3	2.38	0.62

Deciles are not a ranking system. Rather, they provide a descriptive analysis which segregates a population into ten equal groups. There is no mathematical exception for multiple GPA's being the same. The GPA's are in numerical order and are divided into equal groups regardless of duplicate GPA's. For example, the second decile and third decile may have the same GPA.

From year B at HPHS:

- ④ The student ranked 350 out of 462 would be in the eighth decile with a GPA of 3.29. 75% of the others in this class ranked higher than this student.
- ④ The student ranked 115 out of 462 would be in the third decile with a GPA of 3.89. 25% of the others in this class ranked higher than this student.
- ④ The difference in the ranking of these two students is 235 places (which is over half the class) yet the GPA difference is only .6 of a point.
- ④ Further, the GPA's of 80% of the students fall within one point of each other. For example, year B's mean GPA of the second decile is 4.08; the mean GPA of the ninth decile is 3.09.

Although the spread in GPA is significant, there is little variance among students. In the five years detailed above, the average spread of the second through seventh deciles is .13, slightly more than a .1 of a point.

The chart below reflects two years of the average SAT and ACT scores of students from HPHS's lowest decile in comparison to state and national averages. This data indicates that the academic abilities of students in HPHS's lowest decile are only slightly lower on par with both state and national averages from the entire population.

SAT/ACT	-YEAR A- HPHS <i>lowest decile</i>	-YEAR A- State Average	-YEAR A- National Average	-YEAR B- HPHS <i>lowest decile</i>	-YEAR B- State Average	-YEAR B- National Average
Comb. SAT	980	999	1017	993.57	993	1017
Total SAT	1456.52	1481	1511	1481.43	1473	1511
ACT	21.07	20.5	21.2	21.6	20.7	21.1

**B. *How does class rank benefit HPHS students in the college application process?***

1. Class rank is an objective measure of a student’s academic performance. The number provides a clear assessment that is easily evaluated by universities. For some colleges, the lack of a singular objective measure of class rank forces admission decisions to be more subjective. A *New York Times* article by Alan Fink quotes William M. Shain, Dean of Undergraduate Admissions at Vanderbilt University: “The less information a school gives you, the more whimsical our decisions will be.”<sup>1</sup>

Jim Bock, the Dean of Admission and Financial Aid at Swarthmore College, stated in *The New York Times* article referenced above, “If we are looking at your son or daughter and you want us to know that he or she is among the best in their school, without a rank, we don’t necessarily know that.”<sup>2</sup> The Dean of Admissions at Brown University, Jim Miller, asserted in the same article that class rank is needed to demonstrate the true measure of a student’s performance, asking, “If a kid has a B-plus record, what does that mean? If a school doesn’t give any A’s, it could be a very good record. You’ve got to position the kids in some relative environment.”<sup>3</sup>

2. Students themselves benefit from ranking by taking more rigorous courses in order to earn the weighted grade- point average assigned to more demanding AP and Pre-AP courses. An additional resulting benefit is that college admission professionals consistently note that the rigor of courses in which a student has enrolled is a meaningful factor in admission decisions.
3. Especially for students just outside the top 10%, class rank is a significant tool and motivator, urging them to work harder. HPHS counselors report anecdotally that each year some students just outside of the top 10% put forth exceptional effort that results in their moving into the top decile.

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<sup>1</sup> Fink, Alan. “Schools Avoid Class Ranking, Vexing Colleges.” *New York Times*, March 05, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

**C. *How does class rank hinder our students in the college application process?***

1. The link between stress and class rank can begin as early as sophomore year, when a student receives the first official transcript that reveals how that student compares to his or her peers.

Class rank encourages cutthroat competition, cheating and choosing classes based on GPA weight rather than on interest, not to mention directly pitting students against one another. Abolishing class rank sends the message that schools are interested in students as individuals rather than as compared to their classmates. In any case, for more than ten years, the importance of class rank has been diminishing in the eyes of college admissions officers.<sup>4</sup>

2. Academically accomplished students who are not at the top of their class are greatly affected by ranking. A 2001 study conducted by City University of New York faculty members determined that “except for those graduating at the very top of their classes, students from academically rigorous high schools were rejected by Ivy League schools even though their academic credentials were well above the median score of students admitted from less challenging schools.”<sup>5</sup>
3. Class rank can restrict student eligibility for some special university programs and financial aid. Some honors colleges and scholarship programs require a certain class rank in the evaluation process. When class rank is not available, however, an applicant’s GPA is evaluated instead. For example, at Southwestern University in Georgetown, Texas, an applicant in the top 15% of his or her high school who scores either a combined 1250 on the SAT or a 28 on the ACT can earn a \$10,000 annual scholarship. However, when class rank is not provided by the applicant’s high school, the student is evaluated on GPA instead; for the same \$10,000 award, an applicant would need the same standardized test scores and a 3.6 GPA.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Robbins, Alexandra. *The Overachievers*, Hyperion Press, 2006. 390-391.

<sup>5</sup> Marklein, Mary Beth. “More Public Schools Dropping Class Rank,” USA Today.

<sup>6</sup> Southwestern University Scholarship Chart,  
<http://www.southwesternedu/assistance/types/scholarships/merit.php>.

## SOUTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY MERIT SCHOLARSHIPS

SAT/ACT	1150/25	1200/26	1250/28	1300/29	1350/30	1400/31	1450/32	1500/33	1550/34
Valedictorian/ Salutatorian	\$13,000	\$14,000	\$15,000	\$16,000	\$17,000	\$18,000	\$19,000	\$20,000	\$21,000
Top 5% (if no rank, 3.8 GPA)*	\$12,000	\$13,000	\$14,000	\$15,000	\$16,000	\$17,000	\$18,000	\$19,000	\$20,000
Top 10% (if no rank, 3.7 GPA)*	\$10,000	\$11,000	\$12,000	\$13,000	\$14,000	\$15,000	\$16,000	\$17,000	\$18,000
Top 15% (if no rank, 3.6 GPA)*	\$8,000	\$9,000	\$10,000	\$11,000	\$12,000	\$13,000	\$14,000	\$15,000	\$16,000
Top 20% (if no rank, 3.5 GPA)*	\$6,000	\$7,000	\$8,000	\$9,000	\$10,000	\$11,000	\$12,000	\$13,000	\$14,000
Top 25% (if no rank, 3.4 GPA)*	\$5,000	\$6,000	\$7,000	\$8,000	\$9,000	\$10,000	\$11,000	\$12,000	\$13,000

<http://www.southwestern.edu/assistance/types/scholarships/merit.php>

As the HPHS GPA data trends indicate, a 3.6 GPA generally falls in the 6<sup>th</sup> decile of the class.

4. On occasion, ranking can deter universities from admitting students. As an example, Stevenson High School in Illinois tested their suspicion that class rank adversely affects their students and prevents them from being admitted to certain state universities. Stevenson’s study involved a group of students whose applications, including class rank, had been rejected. Stevenson asked these schools to unofficially reexamine the denied students’ applications, omitting class ranks. The result was that a higher percentage of students were admitted when class rank was withheld.<sup>7</sup>
5. The intense focus on class rank can discourage students from pursuing other interests. An article in the *Journal of College Admission* quotes Rutledge in “An Alternative to Ranking High School Students”:

A distasteful scenario develops: students avoid the courses they are interested in to take courses that advance their rank; students avoid intellectual risk-taking and engage in petty competition with their classmates, which impedes a positive spirit of learning; and parents and students become frantic when rankings shift dramatically, which is not uncommon because student grade point averages are bunched together.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Pilot Study on Class Rank, Stevenson High School, Lincolnshire, Illinois, June, 2006.

<sup>8</sup> Moss, Kirk D. “When More Is Less: High School Music and Class Ranking.” Principal Leadership, February 2002.

Further, any non-required, non-AP course becomes problematic as students must take “hits” to their grade point averages and, thus, class ranks if they choose to take a fine arts class rather than an AP science class or, even more ironically, choose to take a fine arts class as opposed to no class at all (study hall, open period, or office aide). As explained in an article in *The Wall Street Journal*,

If your teenager takes four advanced placement classes in high school, earns an A in all of them, and fills her idle time with study halls, she finishes the year at the top of her class with a 5.0 average on a 4.0 grading scale because AP classes carry extra credit. But, if she takes four advanced-placement classes, earns an A in all of them, and fills her idle time with a music class and aces that, too, she ends up with only a 4.8 average, dragged down by that enrichment class that doesn't offer extra credit.<sup>9</sup>

These scenarios suggest a risk of class rank in highly competitive environments. In these cases, students are unintentionally taught that the number is the ultimate measure by which to guide personal, educational, and intellectual development.

***D. How does class rank benefit colleges and universities in the college admission process?***

1. As reported by a 2006 study from the National Association of College Admission Counseling (NACAC), because class rank is a concise measure, many large universities rely on it to sort through the high volume of applicants<sup>10</sup>, making students who come from schools that rank simpler to evaluate.

Colleges prefer that class rank be included in their applicants' files, especially in large schools. The fact that large schools are more desirous of this information indicates that, due to the large numbers of applications they receive, these schools use class rank as a simple, objective filter for determining a student's qualifications, one that enables the school to quickly assess, and possibly dismiss, an applicant.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> NACAC, Research to Practice Brief, Issue 3, 2007.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

2. Class rank and standardized test scores are good predictors of success and as such are valued pieces of information for colleges and universities desiring higher retention and graduation rates.

***E. How does the absence of class rank hinder colleges in the application process?***

1. With more schools eliminating class rank, colleges have had to adjust to the absence of class rank's singular objective measure. In the fall of 2005, 57% of Vanderbilt's applicants came from schools that did not supply rank; Kenyon College admitted a freshman class in which 60% of students came from non-ranking high schools; 51% of the applicants to both Swarthmore and the University of Massachusetts had no rank.<sup>12</sup>

Clearly, applications that lack rank require more time to review. In an article surveying the trend of dropping rank, however, *The New York Times* reports that "canny college officials, in turn, have found a tactical way to respond. Using broad data that high schools often provide, like distribution of grade averages for an entire senior class, they essentially recreate an applicant's rank."<sup>13</sup>

2. The absence of class rank also leads to unintended consequences that many wish to avoid: When not given class rank, colleges rely more heavily on SAT and ACT scores.<sup>14</sup> High-ranking students who have difficulty taking standardized tests benefit from the inclusion of class rank.

***F. What are the trends among high schools with regard to class rank?***

1. Three states, Texas, Florida and California, currently have legislation that requires ranking of public school students who are applying to state universities.
2. More and more high schools, private and public, are eliminating class rank. A 2005 NACAC admissions trends survey found that 40% of public and private high schools do not assign class rank.<sup>15</sup> Schools that have eliminated the practice cite reasons such as giving their students a better chance at college admission, curbing student anxiety, and promoting the intrinsic value of learning among their students.

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<sup>12</sup> Finder, Alan. "Schools Avoid Class Ranking, Vexing Colleges." *New York Times*, March 05, 2006.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Marklein, Mary Beth. "More Public Schools Dropping Class Rank." *USA Today*, January 27, 2003.

<sup>15</sup> NACAC, research to Practice Brief, Issue 3, 2007.

Among the schools that have dropped class rank are several public and charter high schools that share characteristics similar to HPHS, including the following:

- ① New Trier (IL)
- ① Wilton High School (CT)
- ① Thomas Jefferson High School (VA)
- ① Princeton High School (NJ)
- ① Lake Forest High School (IL)
- ① City Honors School (NY)
- ① Darien High School (CT)
- ① Libertyville High School (IL)
- ① Boston Latin (MA)
- ① The Charter School of Wilmington (DE)
- ① Wellesley High School (MA)
- ① Horace Greeley High School (NY)
- ① Ladue Public Schools (MO)
- ① Bronx Science (NY)
- ① Classen School of Advanced Studies (OK)
- ① Sturgis Charter Public School (MA)
- ① Scarsdale High School (NY)
- ① Highland Park High School (IL)

Locally, the following private schools do not rank their students: Fort Worth Country Day, Nolan Catholic, Jesuit, Hockaday, Greenhill, St. Mark's, and Ursuline.

At this time all public schools in Texas rank their students numerically.

3. Even schools that have eliminated traditional class rank, however, have not abandoned the practice completely. NACAC's Research to Practice Brief found that 92% of high schools regularly report class rank information of some type to colleges and universities.<sup>16</sup> This can include decile and quartile information, highest and lowest GPA's, scattergrams, bar graphs, and other expressions of grade distribution.

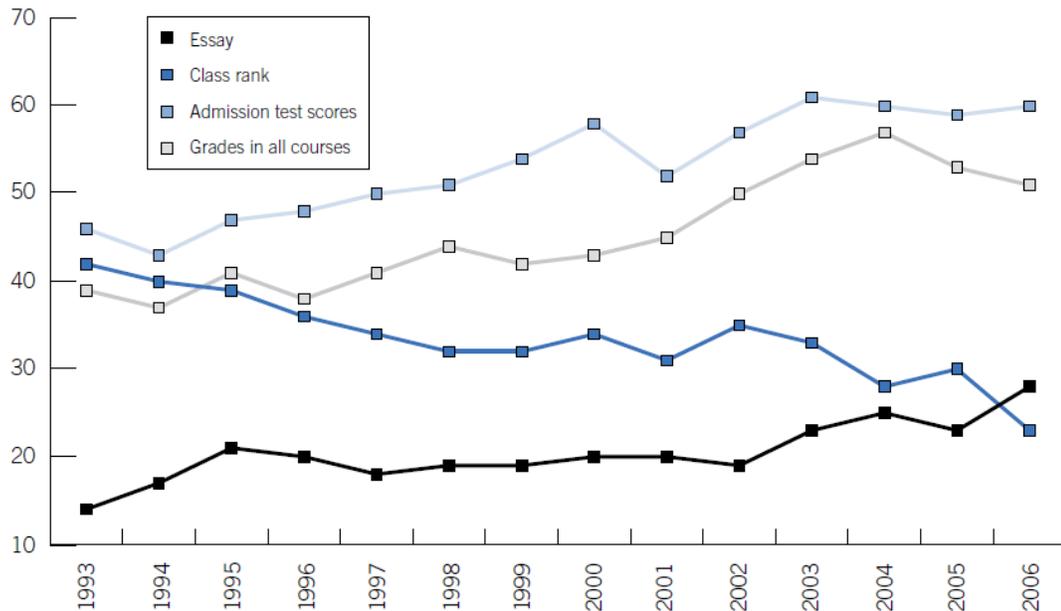
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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

**G. What are the trends among colleges regarding the use of class rank in the admissions process?**

1. The 2007 NACAC brief cited above revealed that secondary school class rank has declined in importance as a factor in college admission over the last decade: 23% identified class rank as having considerable weight in the admission process, a decline from 43% in 1993.<sup>17</sup>

**Figure 1. Percentage of colleges attributing “considerable importance” to factors in the admission decision: 1993–2006**



SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Surveys, 1993-2006.

2. There does appear to be a difference between small and large colleges with respect to the importance of class rank in evaluating a student’s application for admission. According to a NACAC report, small schools more commonly place class rank in lower importance when assessing an application. Further, public colleges tend to emphasize class rank more than private colleges. Highly selective institutions place more importance on the entire range of factors in the admissions process than institutions that are less selective.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

3. To gain a deeper insight into the evaluation processes of the colleges in which HPHS students are most interested, the Public and Private College Admissions Ad Hoc Committee surveyed the 100 colleges and universities to which our students apply most often. Forty-three public and private institutions in 19 different states throughout the nation responded to the eight-question survey.

Fifty percent of respondents, when asked how important class rank was in the admissions process, replied that it was “very important.” However, when asked to rate the importance of eight possible measurements they might use in making their admission decisions, class rank was not the most popular measure. The following factors were deemed “very important”:

- ④ High school GPA - 81.4% of respondents
- ④ Rigor of coursework - 72.1% of respondents
- ④ SAT/ACT scores - 58.1% of respondents
- ④ Class rank - 48.8% of respondents

The ad hoc committee’s survey also revealed that when class rank is omitted from a student’s application, colleges consider other factors more closely. The most frequent response (17 out of 40) showed colleges would use GPA, whether alone, combined with course rigor, weighted GPA, GPA combined with SAT, GPA recalculated on core classes only, or GPA recalculated by some other method. In addition, many colleges will go to lengths to estimate rank or develop another objective measure by which to assess applicants.

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### **Summary of Findings**

Over the past nine months, the study committee has explored both historical and current data with a singular guiding thought: Does Highland Park’s current practice of reporting numeric class rank help our students or hinder them in their quest for admission to colleges that best fit their talents, their goals, and their aspirations? Additionally, the study team has examined current trends among both high schools and colleges in reporting of class rank for admission consideration. The findings of the Class Rank Study Team are presented here without bias or conclusion for consideration by the HPISD School Board.



## APPENDIX

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 **Bibliography**

 **Five-Year Graduate Summary Data**

**HIGHLAND PARK INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT  
CLASS RANK COMMITTEE (RESEARCH)**

KEY CONCEPT TOPIC	ARTICLE NAME	PUBLICATION	WEBSITE	SYNOPSIS
<i>College Perspectives</i>	Class Rank & College Admissions To rank or not to rank	<i>The Collegeboard</i>	<a href="http://www.professionals.collegeboard.com/portal/site/Professionals/menuitem">www.professionals.collegeboard.com/portal/site/Professionals/menuitem</a>	Reviews why high schools have eliminated class rank because they feel it penalizes many excellent students who are squeezed out by the top 10% rules.
<i>College Perspectives</i>	Class Rank Demoted in College Admissions Process	<i>The News Sentinel</i>	<a href="http://www.news-sentinel.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article">www.news-sentinel.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article</a>	Highlights universities use of a variety of factors of which class rank is merely one measure.
<i>College Perspectives</i>	How Important Is Class Rank?	<i>Online Gargoyle</i>	<a href="http://www.uni.uiuc.edu/og/news/2006/12/how-important-class-rank">www.uni.uiuc.edu/og/news/2006/12/how-important-class-rank</a>	Reviews how colleges react to high schools that do not use class rank.
<i>College Perspectives</i>	Is There Life After Rankings?	<i>The Atlantic Online</i>	<a href="http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/print/200511/shunning-college-rankings">www.theatlantic.com/doc/print/200511/shunning-college-rankings</a>	A report card from one college president, whose school now shuns the <i>US News</i> ranking system.
<i>College Perspectives</i>	NACAC National Association for College Admission Counseling	<i>State of College Admission 2008 Report</i>	<a href="http://www.nacacnet.org/PublicationsResources/Marketplace/Pages/StateofCollegeAdmission.aspx">http://www.nacacnet.org/PublicationsResources/Marketplace/Pages/StateofCollegeAdmission.aspx</a>	Reviews highlights including the decline of importance in class rank, how colleges vary in their use of class rank based on a combination of institutional characteristics; high school range of class rank models.
<i>College Perspectives</i>	Say Good-bye to Class Rank	<i>Duke Gifted Letter</i>	<a href="http://www.dukegiftedletter.com/articles/vol5no3_cl.html">www.dukegiftedletter.com/articles/vol5no3_cl.html</a>	Discussion of the minuscule margin between a student who ranks 75 <sup>th</sup> and the student who ranks second and raises the issue: should a student with few rigorous courses share the same value as a student from an academically demanding high school?
<i>College Perspectives</i>	Admissions Decisions: What Counts	<i>The Collegeboard</i>	<a href="http://www.professionals.collegeboard.com/portal/site/Professionals/menuitem">www.professionals.collegeboard.com/portal/site/Professionals/menuitem</a>	Outlines what factors colleges use when class rank is not submitted with an application.
<i>College Perspectives</i>	Keep It Honest, Keep It Real	<i>Newsweek (08-18-2008)</i>		A veteran admissions officer discusses the value of authenticity during the application process.
<i>College Trends</i>	The Frog Pond Revisited: High School Academic Context, Class Rank & Elite College Admissions	<i>Sociology of Education ProQuest Educational Journals</i>		Description of an elite college admission process. Elite colleges develop relationships with elite high schools seeking to recruit the most select type of student.
<i>College Trends</i>	Stratification Among the Haves	<i>Phi Delta Kappan ProQuest Educational Journals</i>		Description of high schools moving away from reporting class rank and how colleges have countered with pseudo ranks...assigning value to those falling in the top deciles.

KEY CONCEPT TOPIC	ARTICLE NAME	PUBLICATION	WEBSITE	SYNOPSIS
<i>Current Trends</i>	Getting Rid of Class Rankings: A Good Idea	<i>The Concord Monitor</i>	<a href="http://www.concordmonitor.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article">www.concordmonitor.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article</a>	Reviews how a poor ranking may unfairly hurt a student's chance at admission when students are separated in class rankings by just a few hundredths of a point.
<i>Current Trends</i>	Legal Tips for Drafting a Picture-Perfect Class Rank Policy	<i>Texas Association of School Boards</i> <i>Texas Lone Star Legal News</i>	<a href="http://www.tasb.org/news/tls/2002/may/lgl">www.tasb.org/news/tls/2002/may/lgl</a>	Review of the legal ramifications of challenges to a school's class rank policy.
<i>Current Trends</i>	More Public High Schools Dropping Class Ranking	<i>USA TODAY</i>	<a href="http://www.usatoday.printthis.clickability.com/pt/cpt?action">www.usatoday.printthis.clickability.com/pt/cpt?action</a>	Reviews affluent suburban communities doing away with class rank, fearing that numbering hurts many academically strong students in the competitive world of college admissions
<i>Current Trends</i>	Schools Avoid Class Ranking, Vexing Colleges	<i>The New York Times</i>	<a href="http://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/05/education/05rank.html">www.nytimes.com/2006/03/05/education/05rank.html</a>	Reviews concept of dropping class rank as a way to encourage colleges to take a holistic view when reviewing a student application.
<i>Current Trends</i>	New Trier High School: Subject Levels	<i>Wikipedia</i>	<a href="http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Trier_High_School">www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Trier_High_School</a>	Review of this high school's academic planning guide to college admissions and its class rank policy.
<i>Current Trends</i>	Class Rank, GPA and Valedictorians: How High Schools Rank Students	<i>American Secondary Education</i> <i>ProQuest Educational Journals</i>		Presents survey data outlining procedures for determining class rank and valedictorian status.
<i>Current Trends</i>	RBR Makes Class Rank Optional Red Bank Regional High School	<i>the hub</i>	<a href="http://www.hub.gmnews.com/news/2008/1231/front_page/006.html">www.hub.gmnews.com/news/2008/1231/front_page/006.html</a>	A high school similar to ours discusses its decision to drop class rank.
<i>Current Trends</i>	Research to Practice Brief	<i>NACAC (Issue 3, 2007)</i>	<a href="http://www.nacenet.org">www.nacenet.org</a>	Highlights the range of class rank models employed by high schools and the variety of ways class rank is used by college admissions officers. The article discusses the use of class rank in eligibility for merit-based financial aid.
<i>Student Considerations</i>	Applicants Omit Class Rank Many competitive high schools have stopped providing this information	<i>University Business End Note</i>	<a href="http://www.universitybusiness.com/viewarticle.zspx?articleid=889">www.universitybusiness.com/viewarticle.zspx?articleid=889</a>	Discusses how omitting class rank, primarily due to student anxiety, may hurt rather than help students in the college admissions process.
<i>Student Considerations</i>	Class Rank Is Low On Many Colleges' Lists	<i>The Dallas Morning News</i>	<a href="http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/dn/latestnews/stories">www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/dn/latestnews/stories</a>	Specific review of how the University of Texas deals with the issues of the top 10% rule.
<i>Student Considerations</i>		<i>The Overachievers</i> <i>Hyperion Press, 2006</i>		Explores how educational culture has defined students by scores and statistics.

KEY CONCEPT TOPIC	ARTICLE NAME	PUBLICATION	WEBSITE	SYNOPSIS
<i>Student Perspectives</i>	When More is Less: High School Music	<i>Principal Leadership</i> <i>ProQuest Educational Journal</i>		Discussion of high school students who opt not to take favorite electives because they are not weighted grading.
<i>Student Perspectives</i>	The Winner Take All High School: Organizational Adaptations to Educational Stratification	<i>Sociology of Education</i> <i>ProQuest Educational Journal</i>		Discussion centers on families seeking elite public high schools assuming that such schools improve a talented student's prospects for college admissions. This article shows that these students are at a disadvantage due to competitive class ranks.
<i>Student Perspectives</i>	Who's First? And Does It Matter	<i>The New York Times</i>	<a href="http://www.query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res">www.query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res</a>	A recent graduate discusses her acceptance to her first choice university...without class rank.

## HPHS 5-YEAR GPA DATA TRENDS

YEAR A				
DECILE	MEAN GPA	GPA RANGE		GPA SPREAD
1	4.39	4.66	4.24	0.42
2	4.16	4.24	4.09	0.15
3	4.04	4.09	3.98	0.11
4	3.90	3.97	3.85	0.12
5	3.79	3.85	3.72	0.13
6	3.66	3.72	3.58	0.14
7	3.51	3.58	3.42	0.16
8	3.33	3.42	3.22	0.20
9	3.11	3.22	2.96	0.26
10	2.70	2.95	1.82	1.13

YEAR D				
DECILE	MEAN GPA	GPA RANGE		GPA SPREAD
1	4.35	4.63	4.18	0.45
2	4.10	4.17	4.01	0.16
3	3.94	4.01	3.89	0.12
4	3.82	3.88	3.77	0.11
5	3.70	3.76	3.65	0.11
6	3.56	3.65	3.5	0.15
7	3.43	3.5	3.37	0.13
8	3.28	3.37	3.16	0.21
9	3.06	3.15	2.94	0.21
10	2.70	2.94	2.18	0.76

YEAR B				
DECILE	MEAN GPA	GPA RANGE		GPA SPREAD
1	4.37	4.75	4.19	0.56
2	4.08	4.16	3.99	0.17
3	3.89	3.99	3.81	0.18
4	3.76	3.81	3.72	0.09
5	3.68	3.71	3.64	0.07
6	3.58	3.64	3.51	0.13
7	3.45	3.51	3.38	0.13
8	3.30	3.38	3.19	0.19
9	3.09	3.18	2.94	0.24
10	2.62	2.94	1.98	0.96

YEAR E				
DECILE	MEAN GPA	GPA RANGE		GPA SPREAD
1	4.11	4.42	3.98	0.44
2	3.86	3.98	3.78	0.2
3	3.71	3.77	3.64	0.13
4	3.59	3.64	3.51	0.13
5	3.46	3.51	3.39	0.12
6	3.34	3.38	3.3	0.08
7	3.24	3.3	3.19	0.11
8	3.12	3.19	3.04	0.15
9	2.93	3.03	2.8	0.23
10	2.58	2.79	1.73	1.06

YEAR C				
DECILE	MEAN GPA	GPA RANGE		GPA SPREAD
1	4.36	4.58	4.2	0.38
2	4.12	4.2	4.04	0.16
3	3.95	4.04	3.87	0.17
4	3.81	3.87	3.75	0.12
5	3.68	3.75	3.62	0.13
6	3.56	3.62	3.51	0.11
7	3.43	3.5	3.37	0.13
8	3.32	3.37	3.25	0.12
9	3.12	3.24	3	0.24
10	2.78	3	2.38	0.62

Deciles are not a ranking system. Rather, it is a descriptive analysis which segregates a population into ten equal groups. There is no mathematical exception for multiples GPA's being the same. The GPA's are in numerical order and are divided into equal groups regardless of duplicate GPA's. For example, the second decile and third decile may have the same GPA.

### GPA by Decile

