

Spring Branch ISD

Inspiring minds. Shaping lives.

CLASS RANK Task Force Report



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Purpose:

The Top Ten Percent Law

Texas Education Code Title III Higher Education, Subtitle A Higher Education in General. Chapter 51. Provisions generally applicable to higher education. Section 51.803 Automatic admission: all institutions - states in part that:

Each general academic teaching institution shall admit an applicant for admission to the institution, as an undergraduate student if the applicant graduated with a grade point average in the top ten percent of the student's high school graduating class in one of the two school years preceding the academic year for which the applicant is applying for admission.

Popularly known as the top ten percent law, the admission regime is predicted on research showing that high school grades better predict college success than standardized test scores (Bowen & Bok, 1998; Crouse & Trusheim, 1988; Klitgaard, 1985). Architects of the uniform admissions law were concerned that a handful of large suburban schools dominated enrollees at the public flagships (Montejano, 2001; Tienda & Niu, 2006b).

In their attempt to broaden access by geographic, socioeconomic and ethno racial lines, Texas legislators sought to design a system that not only rewards merit based on a uniform criterion, namely class rank, but also broadens access by drawing high-achieving students from all Texas high schools - rich or poor, large or small, urban or rural.

Important to the law's success in leveling the playing field is the stipulation that high schools, not colleges, determined which students qualified for the admission guarantee. This provision implies that students compete with the same-school classmates rather than students from other schools, to qualify for automatic admission.

Being in the top ten percent of the graduating class is a tremendous accomplishment for a SBISD student in any one of our five high schools. Membership in the top decile qualifies students for recognition at graduation and earns them scholarship opportunities that honor their hard work. Most importantly, it alerts college admissions counselors that Spring Branch students have participated in rigorous academic courses that have prepared them well for post-secondary success.

Graduating in the top ten percent also qualifies them for automatic admission into any Texas public university, pending the completion of the full college application by the deadline established by the university.

After much discussion on this topic, these questions remain:

- Does publishing class rank for all students help or hinder students not in the top ten percent?
- Given that the competition for class rank may look very different at each SBISD high school (for example: a given grade point average may result in a top ten percent ranking at SWHS, but that same grade point average may fail to reach the top ten percent ranking at MHS), does publishing class rank for all student advantage SBISD students at some schools but not others?

The Five-Year Plan - Post Secondary Success

In its Five-Year Plan, the Spring Branch Independent School District has made a firm commitment to post-secondary success for all students. Post-secondary success is defined as students achieving a two-year technical certification, a two-year associates degree, or a four-year bachelors degree. In order to ensure this commitment to excellence, it is important that we attend carefully to these critical questions in order to best position all SBISD students for college admission.

The SBISD District Goals & Core Commitments, in addition to these critical questions informed the charge given to the SBISD Class Rank Task Force.

Research & Review of the Data

The Task Force's discussion of the critical (focus) questions led to the identification of several data sources. In addition, the Task Force facilitators had prepared in advance key research. Among the data and research the Task Force reviewed were:

- Several key research articles on the topic
- Analysis of SBISD grade point averages over two years ranked by deciles (ten percent groups)
- SBISD Student Survey results
- Results of a poll of 39 colleges and universities, public and private, in- and out-of-state
- Results of a poll of Texas school districts as to their current class ranking practices
- Results of phone conferences with individual Texas public high schools whose populations & demographics mirror those of the five SBISD high schools, as to their current class ranking practices
- Results of phone conferences with Texas private high schools, as to their current class ranking practices and underlying rationale
- Studies & committee work done on class rank by other Texas school districts
- The Task Force hosted a speakers' panel of college admissions advisors from several Texas universities
- Reviewed School Profiles for SBISD high schools and demographically similar Texas high schools
- Reviewed SBISD Clearinghouse data for 2008 - 2009 and 2009 - 2010 school years to examine where SBISD students attended college after high school graduation.

These data did not include the number of colleges where students were accepted but did not attend. Among the indicators examined for each student:

- SBISD high school attended
- Class rank
- GPA on 4-point scale
- GPA on 6-point scale (weighted GPA as per SBISD current practices)
- ACT scores (where applicable) - reading & math
- SAT scores (where applicable) - reading & math
- SAT essay score
- SAT score with essay score included
- College or university where student enrolled

District Goals and Core Commitments

Prepared for Higher Education

Spring Branch ISD will graduate well-rounded students, prepared for higher education, the workplace and active participation in American democracy.

Excellence in All Areas

Spring Branch ISD will be a high performing school system exhibiting excellence in all aspects of the district.

Rigorous Standards of Performance

The achievement gap will be closed while maintaining rigorous standards of performance for all.

All Children will Reach Their Full Potential

All children will learn on grade level and will be challenged to reach their full potential.

A Safe Environment for Learning

Spring Branch ISD will provide an environment that is safe, secure and conducive to learning.

Engage Stakeholders

Spring Branch ISD will seek input from, be responsive to, and actively engage all stakeholders.

A Great Place to Work

Spring Branch ISD will be an employer of choice.

Student Success is Our Focus

The Board of Trustees will govern in an efficient and effective manner in the best interest of all students.



Charge to the Task Force:

Purpose & Scope

In accordance with the Spring Branch ISD Five-Year Educational Plan, the purpose of the Class Rank Task Force is to study the way in which Spring Branch ISD calculates class rank and the ways in which other Texas school districts calculate class rank. With the district's emphasis on post-secondary readiness, SBISD wants to ensure that we best position our students for college admissions. The Task Force will report its findings and any recommendations to the SBISD Board of Trustees.

Executive Limitations

The scope of the committee's work is to focus on class rank calculations and not to make recommendations on grade point average calculations or valedictorian and salutatorian calculations.

Other issues that are related but not within the scope of this task force charge are:

- Impact of the State of Texas' ten percent legislation
- Changes to our current system of calculating grade point average
- Changes to our current system of determining which courses receive weighted grade point credit

Meetings & Procedures

The Task Force will begin in January 2011 and complete its work in May 2011. The Chairperson will send the list of meeting dates, times and locations to all Task Force members in advance. Task Force updates to the Board of Trustees, as well as the Leadership Team will be sent out once a month in the form of Friday Notes. Additionally, the Task Force Chairpersons will prepare and distribute to all members a summary of each meeting.

Task Force members will not receive pay, allowances or benefits for their service on the Task Force. Meetings will be placed on the Professional Development Learning Center (PDLC) for non-contract professional development credit for SBISD teachers and administrators. Parents and students that elect to serve will do so voluntarily.

Task Force Members:

Task Force Facilitators

- Pamela Butler, Executive Director
- Lance Stallworth, Principal

Central Office

- Laura Prati
- Stephen Shorter
- Hortencia Vega
- Patricia Waldrop

Campus Administrators

- Chris Juntti
- Lance Stallworth

Counselors

- Sheila Cooper
- Beverly Litton
- Beverly Martin
- Deepa Ozarkar
- Farah Ranjbaran
- Darla Shirley
- Michael Strait

Registrars

- Andrea Andrews
- Teresa Decker
- Regina Landry
- Gene Rutland
- Tyita Webb

Parents & Community

- Betty Arnold
- Jana Dundas
- Keith Little
- Becky Neumann
- Sandra Newton
- Sophie Haci
- RoseAnn Schneider
- Sarah Katy Smith

Board Members

- Pam Goodson
- Teresa Kosmoski



Products:

- The Task Force will present any findings and/or recommendations to the Board of Trustees.
- The members of the Class Rank Task Force will be informed of the time and location of the Board Workshop where the presentation is to be given so that they may be in attendance.

Thursday, January 27, 2011

4:00-6:00 PM

Ad Bldg, 275

Thursday, February 10, 2011

4:00-6:00 PM

Ad Bldg, Board Room

Thursday, February 24, 2011

4:00-6:00 PM

Ad Bldg, Board Room

Thursday, March 10, 2011

4:00-5:30 PM

Ad Bldg, 275

Thursday, March 24, 2011

4:00-6:00 PM

Ad Bldg, 275

Thursday, March 29, 2011

4:00-6:00 PM

Ad Bldg, 275



Task Force Study Process:

During the spring semester of 2011, the Task Force met to review and analyze data to respond to the Task Force charge. The agenda for the first meeting included:

- Establishment of group norms & procedures
- Review of the charge to the Task Force
- Review of the current SBISD class rank process
- Formulation of the questions to study and the information to be gathered

Focus Questions

- Does publishing class rank for all students help or hinder the SBISD students not in the top ten percent?
- Given that the competition for class rank may look very different at each SBISD high school (for example: a given grade point average may result in a top ten percent ranking at SWHS, but that same grade point average may fail to reach the top ten percent ranking at MHS), does publishing class rank for all student advantage SBISD students at some schools but not others?

In an effort to thoroughly address the focus questions above, the committee examined the following data and research:

Research & Review of the Data

The Task Force's discussion of the critical (focus) questions led to the identification of several data sources. In addition, the Task Force facilitators had prepared in advance key research. Among the data and research the Task Force reviewed were:

- Several key research articles on the topic (see appendix)
- Analysis of SBISD grade point averages over two years ranked by deciles (ten percent groups)
- SBISD on-line Student Survey results
- Results of a poll of 39 colleges and universities, public and private, in- and out-of-state
- Results of a poll of Texas school districts as to their current class ranking practices
- Results of phone conferences with individual Texas public high schools whose populations & demographics mirror those of the five SBISD high schools, as to their current class ranking practices
- Results of phone conferences with Texas private high schools, as to their current class ranking practices and underlying rationale
- Studies & committee work done on class rank by other Texas school districts
- The Task Force hosted a speakers' panel of college admissions advisors from several Texas universities
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Task Force Study Process:

Research & Review of the Data (cont.)

SBISD Clearinghouse data for 2008 - 2009 and 2009 - 2010 school years to examine where SBISD students attended college after high school graduation. These data did not include the number of colleges where students were accepted but did not attend. Among the indicators examined for each student:

- SBISD high school attended
- Class rank
- GPA on 4-point scale
- GPA on 6-point scale (weighted GPA as per SBISD current practices)
- ACT scores (where applicable) - reading & math
- SAT scores (where applicable) - reading & math
- SAT essay score
- SAT score with essay score included
- College or university where student enrolled



Task Force Findings & Recommendations:

Research & Review of the Data (cont.)

Findings from Conversations with 39 Universities, Public & Private, In- and Out-of-State

PUBLIC, IN-STATE

- Automatic admission to Texas public universities(1) if student is in top ten percent of high school graduating class
- If a Texas high school college applicant does not report a high school class rank, the college or university will assign a class rank to that student(2)

PRIVATE, IN-STATE

- Analysis of the alignment between SAT/ACT scores and student GPA
- Analysis of the student transcript as compared to the high school profile
- If a Texas high school college applicant does not report a high school class rank, the college or university will assign a class rank to that student(3)
- In general, the universities in the category use a holistic review process for admissions decisions

PUBLIC, OUT-OF-STATE

- Colleges and universities contacted stated that a student's class rank did not inform their admissions decisions
- Student GPA is re-calibrated to a 4-point scale
- SAT/ACT, student transcript, school profile, essay, recommendations, etc. are considered in a holistic review process

PRIVATE, OUT-OF-STATE

- Colleges and universities contacted stated that a student's class rank is not the sole factor that determines admission decisions
- In general, the universities in the category use a holistic review process for admissions decisions
- SAT/ACT, student transcript, school profile, essay, recommendations, etc. are considered in a holistic review process

1- As authorized by June 2009 revisions to Texas Education Code Title III Higher Education, Subtitle A Higher Education in General, Chapter 51, the University of Texas at Austin automatic acceptance may be limited to 75% of the incoming freshman class and therefore may result in UT admitting a percentage of highest performing students between the first and tenth percentile.

2- Based on GPA, SAT/ACT, student transcript, and an analysis of the high school profile to include higher-level coursework offered.

3- Based on GPA, SAT/ACT, student transcript, and an analysis of the high school profile to include higher-level coursework offered.

Task Force Findings & Recommendations:

Concerns & Considerations

- Should we consider ranking the top quarter instead of ranking all students?
- Students and committee members note that nearly all academic scholarship applications require that the student enter their class rank. The application is considered to be incomplete if the class rank is not entered.
- Other Texas districts that have elected to rank the top ten percent only are: Highland Park ISD, Eanes ISD, Coppell ISD. Round Rock ISD convened a task force to consider ranking the top ten percent only, but elected to continue publishing the class rank for all students.⁽⁴⁾
- A concern was expressed by several people on the committee that it is critical that we report class rank for students who do not score well on SAT/ACT but have a high GPA - so that these students may not be disadvantaged in the college admissions process.
- A concern was expressed by several people on the committee that students whose class rank is in the bottom quarter of their graduating class may be disadvantaged in the college admissions process if that class rank is reported.

Findings from the Examination of SBISD GPA & SAT/ACT Data

- An examination of GPA and deciles data⁽⁵⁾ for the Class of 2009 and the Class of 2010 from all SBISD high schools revealed that:
- There is considerable variability between SBISD high schools in the GPA necessary to achieve class rank in the top ten percent

Questions Asked by Committee Members Upon Reviewing these Data:

- Does SBISD policy require that all schools use the same class ranking practices?
- Would it be possible for students to choose whether or not to report their class rank on their transcript?

4- Round Rock ISD elected to suspend the publishing of class rank past the top 10% during the time the issue was studied in that district.

5- These data sources were chosen for review, based on those sources reviewed by the Highland Park ISD Class Rank Task Force

Task Force Findings & Recommendations:

Findings from Parents & Student Interviews

- Members of the task force requested that they have an opportunity to interview members of their communities including current students, recent graduates and parents of these students to gauge the student and parent perceptions of the impact of class rank in college admissions.
- Memorial High School: Students in top 10% and top 25% want to keep the current system of class rank in place
- Northbrook High School and Spring Woods High School: Class rank matters because they felt it helps them get into universities - their SAT/ACT scores are not as high as are found at MHS or SHS and class rank helps them qualify for scholarships.
- Stratford High School: If given the choice, they would choose not to rank beyond top 10% and exclude rank from the transcript because there is so much competition for a high GPA. Many students at SHS choose to take advanced coursework which raises the level of competition for a high GPA. Students as a result feel that ranking does not truly reflect their hard work in rigorous classes.
- Westchester Academy: The comments were very diverse, and there was no one theme among comments.

On-line Student Survey results mirrored earlier comments from students and parents.



Survey
 Excellent
 Very Good

Task Force Findings & Recommendations:

Findings from Interview with A Panel of Texas Public University Representatives

University Representatives on the Panel:

- University of Texas at Austin
- University of Houston, main campus
- Sam Houston State University
- Stephen F. Austin University
- Texas A & M University in College Station

Overview of their Standard Admission Processes:

- Universities automatically admit students from top 10 percent (see earlier statement regarding UT)
- Class rank is an important consideration
- A holistic review process utilized when class rank not available
- If no class rank is provided, the university creates a class rank for the student based on historical data from the high school, GPA, transcript, and school profile
- If no class rank is provided, the admissions process is delayed and this may impact application for financial aid, scholarships and housing.
- The concern was expressed about allowing students to choose to include class rank on their transcripts, as this may be construed as an incomplete application (if the admissions office is aware that the high school does in fact publish class rank).

Findings from Literature Review

- If high school does not provide class rank, the colleges/universities will find a way to rank
- Class rank may serve as an extrinsic motivator for students to take more challenging coursework and to improve their performance
- Many factors influence acceptance into universities

Task Force Findings & Recommendations:

Findings from Other Districts

Districts Contacted:

- Coppell ISD - 1 high school - Only top 10% - beginning 2010-2011
- Round Rock ISD - 6 high schools - Rank all students
- Highland Park ISD - 1 high school - Only top 10%
- Eanes ISD - 1 high school - Only top 10%
- Plano ISD - 6 high schools - Rank all students
- Richardson ISD - 4 high schools - Rank all Students
- Carrol ISD- one high school - Only top 10% - beginning 2010-2011
- McAllen ISD - 3 high schools - Rank all students
- Carrollton Farners Branch ISD - 5 high schools -Rank all students
- Mesquite ISD - 5 high schools - Rank all students

Themes from Conversations with Other Districts:

- Colleges/universities will rank when high school does not provide class rank. Some districts reported student ranking is higher when completed by the college/university while other districts stated it was detrimental.
- Not having class rank on the transcript may cause some colleges and universities to delay the admissions process
- Districts eliminating class rank beyond top 10% were districts with one high school. These districts are similar in demographics to SBISD Memorial High School and many Houston-area private high schools
- School Profile is very important to ensure that universities get a quality “picture” of the high school program

Recommendations:

More time must be spent to perform an in-depth study of the available data.

After careful consideration of both qualitative and quantitative data, the Task Force recommends that:

- More time should be spent on this topic. The Task Force members believe that they did not have enough time for a sufficiently in-depth study of the data available on this topic.
- There be dialogue and conversation by the SBISD Board of Trustees on this issue, particularly as it pertains to a policy change.

The Task Force was not able to reach consensus on a recommendation to be presented at this time.

