

APPENDIX Q

November 27, 2013

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In accordance with the charge issued to this group on October 11, 2013, the task force appointed to research and make recommendations concerning calculation and determination of high school Grade Point Averages (GPA) respectfully submits the attached discussion, analysis, and recommendations for consideration.

Respectfully,

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## GPA Recalculations Task Force

### Members of Task Force:

Bryan Ryan, Wake Technical Community College, Co-Chair  
Lloyd Scott, Appalachian State University, Co-Chair  
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### Charge to the Task Force:

#### Charge to the GPA Calculations Work Group

North Carolina Statute G.S. 116-11 (10a), states that “the grade point average and class rank shall be calculated by a standard method to be devised by the institutions of higher education.” Therefore, North Carolina post-secondary institutions are responsible for determining the weight of college, AP and Honor courses for high school grade point average calculations. Currently, students receive different quality points depending on the level of the high school course they are taking. A regular high school course is worth four quality points, an honors course is worth five quality points, and an advanced placement course is worth six quality points. Two and four year college courses are worth five quality points.

For a number of students who are required or choose to take certain elective courses (band, ROTC, etc.) they typically receive four or five quality points since these classes are usually not offered at the advanced placement level. This means that a student taking certain elective courses may end up with a weighted GPA or class rank lower than a student who has taken a course schedule that does not include additional elective courses. (See example below)

Because of the kinds of concerns enumerated above, the Legislature recently passed a statute requiring a comprehensive review of how weighted grade point average and class rank are calculated on high school transcripts. The Chief Academic Officers from both postsecondary agencies have met and a work group consisting of members from NC Community Colleges, admission directors from UNC institutions, and representatives from DPI will review the course weighting issues and make recommendations. The work group is expected to conclude its work by November 2013.

Issues to consider:

- Is the current weighting system appropriate or fair?
- Should AP courses carry more weight than college level courses from four and two year colleges?
- What are the gpa and class rank implications for students who are not afforded as many AP opportunities as others?
- Should changes be made to the current GPA weighting system?
- What recommendations should be considered by UNC and NCCCS to ensure a fair and equitable grade point average calculation?

**Example: Jane and John are enrolled in the same classes except Jane has decided to take band as an additional elective. She is being recruited for a band scholarship and wants to improve her chances by enrolling in band every semester to hone her skills. Because band is only worth**

**4 quality points, her possible maximum gpa is less than John's. If both students made As in all if there courses, Janes's gpa would be lower.**

Jane Doe Sample Schedule	John Doe Sample Schedule
AP Course--6 quality points AP Course --6 quality points AP Course--6 quality points Honors Course-- 5 quality points Band—4 quality points  GPA calculation: $27/5=5.4$	AP Course 6 quality points AP Course 6 quality points AP Course 6 quality points Honors Course 5 quality points  GPA Calculation: $23/4=5.75$

## Discussion:

The group met a total of four times over the course of the last month. The group quickly determined that the two key questions to be addressed from the charge (notwithstanding that we had to address all of them) were:

- Is the current weighting system appropriate or fair?
- Should changes be made to the current GPA weighting system?

In the limited time available, we worked to gather data and input from the following sources/organizations/offices, in addition to input provided by the task force members:

College Foundation of North Carolina  
 College Board  
 UNC Schools  
 NC Community Colleges  
 Various offices within the NC Department of Public Instruction

Within the context of the study, we asked the following questions of the schools in the University of North Carolina System:

- Does your school recalculate HS GPA for any high school transcripts you receive and how and when is that done?
- Do you have and can we get data about the number and percentages of students who apply and are admitted to your university who present AP credit and the average number of AP classes taken by your incoming freshmen?
- Can we get data about how many incoming students at your school bring in college credit as a new freshman direct from high school, and the average number of credits?
- Are there agencies and groups (Community College Research Center, NCAA, etc.) who have done similar work and may have related data and conclusions that could help to guide our own work?
- Do you have data at your school concerning the performance of students who are admitted and enrolled:
  - 1) With AP/IB credit
  - 2) With college credit

In the time available, we received a limited amount of input and response to the above questions.

**Discussion of First Question** – Is the current weighting system appropriate and fair?**Current Weighting System:****Grade Point Values**

**Standard high school courses** will award grade points on a standard scale with a 4.0 maximum.

Standard high school courses are those recognized by the North Carolina State Board of Education and local boards of education as having the content, rigor, learning outcomes, and assessment criteria necessary to meet high school graduation requirements.

**Honors high school courses** will award grade points on an honors scale with a 5.0 maximum.

Honors high school courses are those recognized by the North Carolina State Board of Education and local boards of education as having the content, rigor, learning outcomes, and assessment criteria necessary to meet the requirements of the NC Department of Public Instruction's "Honors Course Implementation Guide."

**Advanced courses** will award grade points on an advanced scale with a 6.0 maximum.

Advanced courses are those recognized by North Carolina colleges and universities as having content, rigor, learning outcomes, and assessment criteria that warrant course consideration for college and university credit. Advanced courses will include AP Courses (College Board reviewed), IB courses (International Baccalaureate authorized), AICE courses (Cambridge University sanctioned), university courses (SACS and other regional accreditation), and North Carolina community college transfer courses from the Comprehensive Articulation Agreement (SACS accreditation).

To summarize, the current system in place at all public high schools in North Carolina weights courses with additional quality points (qpts) above a standard class as follows:

- |  |                  |
|--|------------------|
| • Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) Course | 2 Quality Points |
| • Honors designated class  | 1 Quality Point  |
| • College-level course   | 1 Quality Point  |

**Current NC High School Class Rank Policy**

High school class rank will be determined by student performance in the North Carolina Public Schools Future-Ready Core Course of Study Requirements. The core requires 22 credits: 4 credits in English, 4 credits in mathematics, 3 credits in science, 4 credits in social studies, 1 credit in health and physical education, and 6 elective credits. Elective credits taken beyond the core 22 credits will not be included in calculating class rank.

**GPA Weighting Policies of Other States:****West Virginia:**

- By rule, AP/IB receives 5 qpts for an A.
- Local boards are permitted to issue weighted grades “for other advanced high school courses.” The rule established a weighted scale, but it seems districts can equate their own advanced courses to AP/IB weight.
- There does not appear to be an “Honors” weight - just the 5 quality points for any advanced/AP/IB course.
- The policy is silent on college courses/dual enrollment.

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**Virginia:**

- AP/IB “shall be weighted;”
- Local boards may determine what other courses receive weight, how much weight they receive, and how weights calculate into student GPAs; state policy does require 3 general elements be present in a course in order to receive additional weighting.
- The policy is silent on college courses/dual enrollment.

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**Tennessee:**

- State statute allows only a 4.0 scale, so Honors/NIC (National Industry Certification) courses are allowed to add 3 points to the grades used to calculate the semester average. For example, for an Honors/NIC course, a grade of 92 on an assignment used to calculate the semester average becomes a 95, e.g. a B becomes an A.
- AP/IB courses “that have end-of-course national examinations” also may add 5 points to these grades. For example, for an AP/IB course, a grade of 88 on an assignment used to calculate the semester average becomes a 93, e.g. a B becomes an A.
- The effect is that a high “B” in an Honors course could become an “A” and, therefore, ultimately bump up GPA; that presumably is more likely in an AP/IB course since the added points are greater.
- The policy is silent on college courses/dual enrollment.

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**South Carolina:**

- “College Prep” courses receive a minimum 4 qpts for an A (the lowest “A” - a 93 - gets 4.0; the highest - a 100 - gets 4.875). They have a scale that goes from 100 down to 62 and assigns quality points for each numeric score; anything from 61-0 gets 0.000 qpts.
- “Honors” courses receive .5 more qpts than a College Prep course (the scale provides these as well).
- AP, standard-level IB, and dual credit college courses receive 1 qpt more than College Prep courses.
- Higher-level IB courses (240 hours of instruction or more) may receive 2 qpts above College Prep level.

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**Georgia:** To date, unable to locate / gain definitive guidance / information from their Dept. of Ed site or SBE site. The only state-level grading policy that exists in GA is in relation to how the GA HOPE Scholarship GPA is calculated. Beyond that, each school district determines its own weighting policy.

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**Florida:**

- School districts may give additional weight to dual enrollment, AP, IB, honors, AICE, and pre-AICE courses.
- College courses must receive the same weight as AP/IB courses.
- The Florida DOE has assigned a maximum of .5 additional weight to these courses, presumably making the maximum course weight 4.5.
- For purposes of calculating the GPA to be used in determining initial eligibility for a Florida Bright Futures Scholarship, Florida law requires the DOE to assign additional weights to grades earned in courses identified in the course code directory as academic dual enrollment courses, AP, pre-IB, IB, pre-AICE or AICE.

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**Advantages and Disadvantages of Weighted GPA**

There has been a considerable amount of research conducted on the advantages and disadvantages of weighted GPA's. According to research conducted by **The Principals' Partnership**, sponsored by the Union Pacific Foundation, a summary of the advantages and disadvantages are as follows:

**Advantages:**

1. More students take rigorous courses.
2. More challenging courses can be offered.
3. It increases a student's GPA.
4. Higher class rankings for those who take more demanding courses.
5. Students are more competitive with peers from other schools with weighted grading for first-choice and more elite college acceptance.
6. Better chance for students to receive more in scholarship monies.
7. More likelihood for students to have higher self-esteem

**Disadvantages:**

1. Lack of consistency from school to school as to what courses are weighted and how much they are weighted.
2. Not all courses, even honors and AP, are equally demanding.
3. It may send a message to those who are taking regular courses, that their work is not as highly valued as weighted classes, which may lower self-esteem and attempts to strive for high grades.
4. College admissions offices tend to look at the overall GPA and not if the grades had been weighted.
5. If a student is afraid of getting a low grade in a more rigorous course, he/she may opt to take a less demanding course in order to earn a higher grade.
6. Tracking of students could become more common.
7. Students at the lower academic end of the spectrum would not have equal opportunities to take a more engaging academic program.
8. Litigation by parents may occur if they believe the system is hindering their child(ren) from equal access to the curriculum.
9. Smaller schools have fewer opportunities to offer a wide array of weighted and non-weighted courses.

Discussion About Weighting for AP or IB courses

A clear incentive for students to take what is perceived (particularly by parents and students) as a more rigorous curriculum – i.e., AP or IB – is the extra weighting assigned to such courses in calculation of the high school GPA. In the description of Advanced Placement provided by the College Board, they describe AP as follows: “The Advanced Placement Program® (AP) provides opportunities for motivated and prepared students to experience college-level courses while in high school, thereby fostering critical thinking and college persistence and success.”

The concept of using AP courses to award bonus points to such courses has nationally not been without controversy. In their 2004 paper “The role of Advanced Placement and honors courses in college admissions,” Saul Geiser and Veronica Santelices of the University of California, Berkeley addressed the use of Advanced Placement Program (AP) and honors courses as a criterion for admission at the University of California system and suggested that the policy for awarding bonus points to such courses “has little, if any, validity with respect to prediction of college outcomes” (p.24). They found that the number of AP or honors courses taken is not a statistically significant predictor of college outcomes, while performance on AP Examinations is strongly related to college performance

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College Board research, published in 2005 as “AP Use in Admissions: A Response to Geiser and Santelices,” cited the following: In 1982, the University of California instituted a policy of awarding one bonus point to AP and honors courses taken in the last two years of high school. Similar policies exist in many states and schools today. Admission Offices may consider students’ advanced-level courses by examining the number of these courses on transcripts and/or through the bonus weight given to them in the calculation of the high school GPA, as in the case of the University of California. The College Board identified several reasons why the policy of assigning extra weight for these courses as important:

- Access to AP or honors level courses may not be equal for all students; there may be disparities often related to socioeconomic variables; their conclusions were that the disparities are not as great as might be expected.
- The policy (of weighting GPA with bonus points) may encourage schools to offer more rigorous courses and students to enroll in them. However, students may casually take the course without evidence of mastery of the material. In the case of AP classes, enrolled students may not take the end-of-course exam. For admissions purposes, enrollment in these courses during the senior year of high school suffices, because admissions applications and decisions are made before the end of these courses. Thus, there is no control over student performance and no guarantee that the student had a “truly” rigorous, college-level experience in the course.
- At the time of the study, there was a lack of research on the validity of advanced-level courses as an admission criterion. The authors of the study presented some data attempting to show that the number of AP courses taken and the performance on the end-of-course exams did provide some predictive validity for college-level performance.

More recent studies under the auspices of the College Board (The Development of an Index of Academic Rigor for College Readiness, 2011) have concluded, while not looking specifically at AP course-work, that “The results indicated that students who took more rigorous courses in high school attained better grades, achieved higher SAT scores, and were more likely to enroll in college. Moreover, these students were also more likely to matriculate to a four-year college, attain higher college grades, and be retained to their second year.”

Also in 2011, the College Board published a study that examined the effects of Advanced Placement (AP) exam participation and performance on college grades for courses taken in the same subject area as students’ AP Exam(s). Students’ first-year college subject area grade point averages (SGPAs) were examined, and the researchers concluded that as average AP Exam score in each subject area increased, expected SGPA increased. While this doesn’t specifically address the weighting provided in North Carolina for taking an AP test, it does provide some validation of the above premise that taking a more rigorous course-load in high school does provide some validity for college-level performance.

In College Board-sponsored studies in 2008 and a 2009 study, “Performance of Matched AP and non-AP Student Groups,” researchers compared the college performance of three groups of AP students who took the AP Exam and either earned course credit, did not earn course credit, or earned course credit but elected to take the entry-level college course to three groups of Non-AP student groups matched on SAT scores and high school rank in 10 AP subject areas. In addition, the performance of the AP groups was also compared to matched groups of students who were concurrently enrolled in a college course in the same subject area as the AP students. Students’ records for four entering classes (1998–2001) at the University of Texas at Austin were analyzed. The results showed AP students who earn course credit consistently outperform their matched Non-AP group on most of the college outcome measures. The College Board has sponsored, conducted, or presented other research studies comparing performance on AP exams with student performance in college, with similar findings.

In recent years, the College Board has done an excellent job promoting AP and the trends show that an ever-increasing number of students in recent years have taken AP courses and have performed well

(defined as a score of 3 or better on the actual AP end-of-course test). With strong encouragement and promotion by the College Board, Advanced Placement courses are viewed by students as substantially more rigorous than standard high school courses and worthy of “extra credit” in the calculation of the GPA.

As part of the work of this task force, we received some feedback from Admissions and Enrollment Management professionals from within the UNC system about the current GPA weighting system, which awards 2 extra quality points for every AP class taken. We quote one Admissions Director, who felt that “the weighting scale providing 2 extra quality points to a student’s GPA is misleading. At the highest weighting thresholds, it gives A-level recognition for C-level performance. NC gives greater weight than do most other states so some would argue it’s akin to grade inflation. There are other potential incentives for taking challenging courses such as A.P., I.B., or dual enrollment courses (such as the potential to receive college credit), but calling a “C” an “A” isn’t really reflective of the caliber of work or the potential performance level of the student in college. The college GPAs, on average, will be much lower than the high school weighted GPA averages of entering students (and often will be lower than the high school unweighted GPAs of entering students). The state should be able to see the gaps with some of the data already at its fingertips. For example, compare the high school weighted GPA to the Early College transcript GPA and then to the performance data (UNC GPA) of those students when they enter the system.”

#### Discussion About Weighting for College-level courses

We also examined and discussed the weighting for college-level courses; currently those are weighted as one extra quality point toward the calculation of the high school GPA. More and more high school students are taking college classes. There are a number of reasons why students today opt (and should opt) to take college-level courses in high school (using [Collegedata.com](http://Collegedata.com) as a resource).

- Not only can this be an inexpensive way to earn college credit, but it can also help a student’s admissions chances
- Taking a college class while in high school shows colleges that students are serious, motivated, and willing to challenge themselves. Even better, it offers an invaluable advance look at college academics and college life
- The high school might not offer a wide selection of honors and AP courses
- Students might be interested in advanced work in a subject that interests them
- Students might want to build up college credit before starting college

In the short time available, we found limited research that directly addressed the college-level performance of students who took college-level classes while in high school.

In 2012, the Community College Research Center sponsored a research study titled “Predicting Success in College: The Importance of Placement Tests and High School Transcripts.” This study, while not specifically looking at any of the factors (AP/IB, Honors, college-level course-work) by which high school GPA might be weighted, concluded that “...high school GPAs are useful for predicting many aspects of students’ college performance. High school GPA has a strong association with college GPA; students’ college GPAs are approximately 0.6 units below their high school GPAs. Other information from high school transcripts is modestly useful; this includes number of math and English courses taken in high school, honors courses, number of F grades, and number of credits. This high school information is not independently useful beyond high school GPA, and collectively explains less variation in college performance.”



Based largely on this study, the NC Community College System decided to use unweighted GPA as the primary measure of college readiness.

#### Use of Weighted vs. Unweighted GPA at UNC Schools

Based on a survey conducted last summer, the following shows the use of high school GPA (weighted or unweighted) in admissions review and decisions at each of the UNC system schools (W=weighted and UW=unweighted):

#### Weighted or Unweighted GPA UNC System Schools

ASU	W
ECU	UW
ECSU	W
FSU	W
NCAT	W
NCCU	W
NCSU	W
UNCA	W&UW
UNCCH	W&UW (preference is for W)
UNCC	W
UNCG	W
UNCP	W
UNCW	W
UNCSA	W
WCU	W&UW
WSSU	W

It is evident that colleges and universities within the UNC system consider the GPA factor differently. As a side note here, we did not poll private institutions, within or outside of North Carolina, many of whom use different policies for GPA calculation and re-calculation. Nor did we formally poll public colleges or universities outside of North Carolina as to how they use high school GPA or class rank within their admission decision-making process. But as one limited example showing how one school uses high school GPA and/or class rank, Clemson University uses primarily high school class rank as an admission factor, instead of high school GPA, and in fact calculates a class rank for every student, whether the high school provides / determines class rank or not. So as we determine weighting factors for North Carolina public high schools, we need to continue to be cognizant that whatever system is used, we want our students to continue to be competitive in those college/university admission pools outside of the UNC System.

We had considerable discussion and received input from several UNC Admissions professionals on the question “Is the current weighting system fair?” or more specifically discussion of the current system weighting GPA by one extra point for a college course and two extra points for AP/IB.

- UNC-Chapel Hill recently conducted a study looking at the college performance of students who entered with college credit – whether from AP, IB, or college course-work. *“The study looked at first-year GPAs of students and then considered how many college-level courses each student had taken in grades 9-12. It’s important to note that for the purpose of this study, college-level courses were defined as AP, IB and dual enrollment (DE) at a community college, two-year or four-year institution. No distinction was made between AP, IB and DE courses.*

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- *The study found that as students increased the number of college-level courses taken from 0-5, their UNC GPA also increased. For students taking 6 or more of these courses in high school, there was a leveling off of the GPA. The UNC GPA fluctuated between 3.2 and 3.4. If you take the number of college-level courses further across the scale, there was a slight up-tick in performance for students taking 11-13 of these courses. That upward trend was followed by a sharp decline in GPA for those taking 14 such courses. The decline was followed by higher GPAs for those taking even higher numbers of such courses.*
- *“Following the study, we (Chapel Hill) hired a consultant to conduct focus groups with students and counselors around the state. The counselors applauded the study but were not sure how much impact it would have on their students. The students were mixed about the results. Some embraced the potential outcome of UNC-CH putting less emphasis on strength of academic program. Others felt they would be disadvantaged if we went in that direction. Those in the latter group voiced a concern that if they were not enrolled in college-level courses, there would be no challenging course work for them to pursue. They also felt that if they were taking those courses, they should receive “credit” for doing so.”*

Another UNC respondent addressed this question in detail:

- *No courses should carry two extra weighted points, period. For example, no student who earns a grade of D (1.0), regardless of the rigor of the course (whether AP, IB, or college), should receive weighting so as to imply that he or she performed B (3.0) work. Students have bought into this illusion that they truly have “earned” a 3.00 for such a course. Consider the mixed messages: an early college/AP/IB student takes a course and earns a D; the student’s high school GPA reflects C or B level performance. The student believes they earned a C or B because the course was tougher. But, high school records eventually fade into the sunset as a student earns college credit. And the fact of the matter is that this student has a grade of D on their permanent, lasting record. And that performance threshold places them below academic good standing on college campuses, doesn’t generate any college credit in transfer, potentially disqualifies them from entrance into competitive academic programs, doesn’t fulfill articulation agreements, etc. In fact, we encounter numerous early college records where the weighted HS GPA looks very solid; however, because the great majority of the courses are technically dual enrollment courses, they have a healthy amount of college credit with a very poor higher education GPA. Personally, I think the extent and pervasiveness of weighted courses has created undue pressure on students, parents, counselors, etc., to allow a lot of students whose performance, test scores, etc., argue strongly that they have no business enrolling in honors, AP, IB, or dual enrollment courses, yet their transcripts are chocked full of courses that give weight while their grades are poor. We’ve created a culture where course selection has become a true dilemma for students, parents, and counselors alike—where they obsess more over the weight that a given course may garner than the grade that they may actually earn. I frequently receive this question from students, parents and counselors alike: “Is it better to take a tougher course and make a lower grade or to take a lower course and make a better grade?” How do you answer this predicament? Here was my response:*
  - *As important as high school is, high school grades are not forever.*
  - *Once someone earns a higher education degree, high school, in essence, disappears. It is no longer the measuring stick.*

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- *Most undergraduate colleges will waive high school credentials after a student has passed a certain threshold of college-level work.*
- *Graduate schools don't ask to see high school records.*
- *Employers will look at college performance and records.*
- *For most colleges, there is no time limit on undergraduate coursework. In other words, college coursework is forever.*
- *A student who did poorly on high school courses (i.e., lack of motivation) has the chance to wipe the slate clean by performing well on college courses and using that performance as a basis of transfer.*
- *A student who does poorly on college courses (even if taken while in high school) has etched those courses and grades in stone (or, at least, on a permanent transcript).*
- *The high school component of college courses taken while in high school will eventually fade into the sunset:*
- *Accrediting boards, federal financial aid policies, university policies, etc., require that a student submit official college records of all work attempted when being considered for admission.*
- *Many individual academic programs have minimum college GPA thresholds for consideration for admission to their programs that exceed the requirements of merely remaining in good standing at a university.*
- *Doing poorly in the college courses of a high school career can make it more difficult, or even close access, to certain programs or opportunities after one has already enrolled in college.*
- *I've thought recently of how best to answer the question, "Is it better to make a B in an honors course or an A in standard course?" I think this particularly holds true for dual enrollment courses because the lasting GPA that will go on the college record is the unweighted as opposed to the weighted, GPA*
  - *It's best to make an A or B in the most difficult or challenging course (i.e., dual enrollment, honors, AP, or IB)*
  - *It's better to make an A or B in a standard course than it is to make a C, D, or F in a more rigorous course*
  - *It's not ideal, for college purposes, to rack up a lot of Cs in any courses*
  - *Ds and Fs hurt you, regardless of the level/rigor of the course:*
  - *A D or an F in a supposedly less rigorous course (i.e., a P.E. course, an elective course, or an activity-type course) casts a lot of doubt on motivation and determination ("Will you do the work?" as opposed to "Can you do the work?").*
  - *A D or an F in a rigorous course makes me question whether that is the level of performance I'd see were the student admitted to my university.*
  - *At most colleges, credits will not count/transfer for any college-level course in which a student earned a C- or lower. In that regard, a student has wasted the potential benefit of having taken a college-level course, dug a hole with the course on a college transcript, and negatively impacted the high school credentials.*
  - *Even with the high school weighting that rigorous courses receive (i.e., AP, IB, dual enrollment), think about it this way. What is that course supposed to be? Answer: it is supposed to be the closest thing possible to reflecting the rigor and expectations of a college course. Now, weighting may give bonus points for such rigor, but if my real question is, "How do I believe the student may perform in the college classroom?" then the more accurate reflection is the unweighted GPA as opposed to the weighted GPA." If a student takes a college course in high school and earns a D, am I supposed*

*to believe that the student would have made a B in the course had the student taken it on our campus with a full load of other college courses? No.*

**Discussion of Second Question** – Should changes be made to the current GPA weighting system?

What recommendations should be considered by UNC and NCCCS to ensure a fair and equitable grade point average calculation?

The task force considered several basic options/recommendations:

- 1) Do nothing – keep the current system
- 2) Don't weight at all – use only unweighted GPA
- 3) Weight all courses equally – adjust the weighting factors for calculating weighted GPA
- 4) Adjust the weighting factors on a more modest scale, similar to what is done in other states
  - a. Weight only those high school courses identified as core
  - b. Weight only college credits/coursework that is generally transferable to college/university

**Discussion of Options:**

**1. Do nothing – keep the current system**

- Students and parents of students interested in AP continue to be satisfied with the extra weighting given for taking an AP course.
- Students taking college courses continue to be frustrated that their college-level work is not weighted (read valued) as highly as AP work, even though they will have a permanent college transcript showing their performance and achievement of credit for college courses.
- Concern that if we recommend do nothing, the legislature may weigh in early in the spring in a direction we may not want to go.

**2. Don't weight at all – use only unweighted GPA**

We will quote a response from an Admissions Director

*“To me, the most obvious answer is: don't give weight to college courses, even if they are taken in high school. The payoff for taking a college course in high school and earning a C or better is that the student receives college credit. That should be reward in and of itself. A student taking an AP or IB course has no assurance of receiving college credit based upon receipt of a grade. They are at the mercy of standardized test results. Supposedly, because of the rigor of AP and IB courses, and based upon examination results, those data are supposed to give an idea as to how that given student may have achieved in the actual college course had they taken it. Now consider that same line of thought: a student takes a college course while in high school and earns a D. Am I to infer that this student took a rigorous course, is deserving of a higher grade, and may have performed at a C or B level had the student taken it as a degree seeking student on an residential, four-year college campus? No. On the contrary, given the other transitions to college, the independence, and norms, I would more likely guess that the student may have made a letter grade lower as opposed to a letter grade higher. So what message is the weighted GPA on a college course actually sending? To me, it's sending a grade inflation message because when I'm holding the high school transcript in one hand and the college transcript in the other, I'm going to put more faith in the actual college GPA than in the high school one.”*

Advantages

- The potential of grade inflation would be greatly reduced.

- Students may be more inclined to take more diverse courses (ROTC, band, art, etc.) because academic weight is no longer a consideration.

#### Disadvantages

- This course of action may affect the ability for North Carolina students to compete on a national scale with their peers from other states. When applying to out of state schools, a NC student would be competing with thousands of other students who may have weighted GPAs, thus potentially putting them at a disadvantage for admission as well as for scholarship dollars.
- There is a lack of incentive to take courses that are considered “highly rigorous”.
- Students may opt to take courses that do not “show” colleges/universities that they can be academically challenged.

### **3. Weight all courses equally – adjust the weighting factors for calculating weighted GPA**

- Increase weighting for college courses to match that currently given for AP/IB or
- Decrease weighting for AP/IB courses to match the weighting given for completion of college courses

By weighting all college-level coursework equally (IB, AP, college), students would receive equal credit for taking rigorous classes. These three types of classes essentially have the same goal – provide students with college-level work and have them perform at a college level, ultimately experiencing a college course. Whether or not a student ultimately receives college credit (for example some students choose not to pay for the AP exam or may not receive a transferrable score). This helps ensure fairness to all students by not making the weighted credit contingent upon the exam.

The key to this recommendation is to decrease the weighting for AP/IB courses to match the weighting for college courses. This would help address the issue of “grade inflation.” With the current weighting scale, students who earn a D in an IB/AP/college class are essentially awarded a B. By lowering the quality points of the IB/AP class, students would not receive such an extreme inflation of GPA but would still be given “credit” for their more rigorous work.

Further, if the Advanced Placement Program® (AP) provides opportunities for motivated and prepared students to experience college-level courses and extra weight is assigned to the GPA of those students who take these courses, it makes sense to assign extra weight to the GPA of a student who takes an actual college course (which an AP course seeks to emulate).

### **4. Adjust the weighting factors for calculating weighted GPA and weight high school courses on a more modest scale (more in line with other states).**

#### Potential Options:

- a. Continue to weight all high school courses (standard, Honors, AP/IB, college / dual enrollment coursework), but use a revised scale designed to make the differences more modest
- b. Weight only high school courses used to satisfy core graduation requirements but continue using the current scale
- c. Weight only high school courses used to satisfy core graduation requirements and implement a revised scale

Option “a” would continue the weighting for courses as it exists today, with 4 quality points given for standard courses and additional weighting for Honors, AP/IB, and college / dual enrollment coursework. However the scale would be revised to make the differences in course weights less dramatic and more

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similar to those found in other states. For example, an Honors course might earn a maximum of 4.25 quality points and AP/IB and college courses might earn a maximum of 4.5 quality points, similar to the Florida model. This option, because it duplicates the current system with only a scale revision, would involve the least amount of change for students, parents, teachers, and school administrators

Option “b” represents a major change to the current weighting system, but arguably does the most to address a major concern around the current system (the disincentive to take “regular” or standard courses for fear of not remaining competitive for honors and scholarships) by focusing course weighting on a core of required courses and leaving a block of courses unweighted. Students could use this block of unweighted courses to take classes based on their interests rather than a GPA maximization calculation. Such a system could operate as follows:

The NC State Board of Education requires students to complete a core of requirements for graduation from high schools. This core varies slightly based upon a student’s year of entry into 9th grade; for example, students entering high school in 2012-13 must complete the Future Ready Core of 22 credits as follows:

- English - 4 credits
- Math - 4 credits (including Math I, II, and III)
- Science - 3 credits
- Social Studies - 4 credits (including 2 credits of US History *or* AP US History + one other social studies credit)
- Health/Physical Education - 1 credit
- Electives - 6 credits

In addition to these 22 credits, most North Carolina school districts require an additional 5-6 credits to graduate, for a total of 27-28 credits. A student’s unique combination of courses depends upon the student’s interests and post-secondary plans.

This option (“b”) would not change the current weighting scale but would weight only the *highest-level courses* used to complete the SBE-required core for graduation; generally, electives would not be included, though a student could take an additional higher-level math to displace an earlier math such as Math I. For all students, a base of 16 credits would receive weighting for the purpose of calculating the weighted GPA on the transcript. In addition, students who take world language courses would have those included as well, bumping up the number of credits included to 18. The other 6 credits (or 4 if the student takes two world language courses) would remain unweighted, even if AP/IB courses were taken.

Use the following college-bound student transcript as an example:

- **English**- I, II, AP III, Honors IV (4 credits)
- **Math** - I,II, III, AP Statistics (4 credits)
- **Science** - Honors Biology, Chemistry, AP Environment Science (3 credits)
- **Social Studies** - World Civ, Civics and Econ, AP US History, Psychology (4 credits)
- **Health/physical education** (1 credit)
- **Electives** - Pre-calculus, AP Calculus AB, CTE courses (4 credits), Russian I, II, III, and IV, Band I and II (12 credits)

Under option “b,” only the courses in bold italics below would be included in the calculation of weighted GPA.

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- **English- I, II, AP III, Honors IV** (4 credits)
- **Math - I,II, III, AP Statistics** (4 credits)
- **Science - Honors Biology, Chemistry, AP Environment Science** (3 credits)
- **Social Studies - World Civ, Civics and Econ, AP US History, Psychology** (4 credits)
- **Health/physical education** (1 credit)
- **Electives - Pre-calculus, AP Calculus AB, CTE courses** (4 credits), Russian I, II, **III, and IV**, Band I and II (12 credits)

The committee believes this option would help address the fairness issue in the scenarios provided during the charging document and could allow students some option to take a variety of classes (to include non-AP/IB) without penalizing themselves. We think this proposal allows for weighting rigor as appropriate, allows highly motivated students to pursue additional weighted credits by adding higher-level courses in core subject areas, and creates a safe-zone that lets students take other courses as electives. However, there was also concern raised in the group the fact that some AP/IB courses would be unweighted for some students who choose courses that don not satisfy a core requirement.

Option “c” above effectively combines options “a” and “b,” changing both the weighting scale and implementing a core-only application of weights. Potential changes to the weighting scale are discussed in greater detail below. If option “b” or option “c” were to be implemented, unweighted GPA would be calculated using the same courses.

### Potential Weighting Scale Adjustments:

After the committee reached agreement / consensus that AP, IB, and college-level / dual enrolled course work should be weighted equally (and that is our recommendation; see below), we addressed whether to and how to adjust the weighting scale. Following is the suggestion / recommendation, based on a desire to reduce grade-inflation but to still recognize and reward students who take a rigorous course-load.

- Standard high school courses would receive quality points on the standard scale, with a 4.0 maximum . Standard high school courses are those recognized by the North Carolina State Board of Education and local boards of education as having the content, rigor, learning outcomes, and assessment criteria necessary to meet high school graduation requirements.
- High school Honors courses would receive quality points on an Honors scale, with a 4.25 maximum. Honors high school courses are those recognized by the North Carolina State Board of Education and local boards of education as having the content, rigor, learning outcomes, and assessment criteria necessary to meet the requirements of the NC Department of Public Instruction’s “Honors Course Implementation Guide.”
- Advanced courses would receive quality points on an advanced scale with a 4.5 maximum quality points. Advanced high school courses are those recognized by North Carolina colleges and universities as having content, rigor, learning outcomes, and assessment criteria that warrant course consideration for college and university credit. Advanced courses include AP Courses (College Board reviewed), IB courses (International Baccalaureate authorized), and AICE courses (Cambridge University sanctioned)
- College / university courses (SACS or other regional accreditation required), and North Carolina community college transfer courses from the Comprehensive Articulation Agreement (CAA) (SACS accreditation) or other courses recognized from previous university-level articulation would receive quality points on an advanced scale with a 4.5 maximum.

The committee also considered a weighting scale that was not quite so narrow. This scale would award grade points for AP/IB/College-level work with a 5.0 maximum, Honors course-work with a 4.5 maximum, and standard courses at a 4.0 level, but opted to recommend the more narrow scale to bring it

into a range comparable to a number of the states at which we looked, but also in order to limit the grade inflation that would ensue at this level.

The committee also considered the possibility of weighting only college credits / coursework that is generally transferable to a college / university. This could be complicated, based on differences among UNC schools (and other colleges and universities) in how they articulate college course-work beyond that defined in the Comprehensive Articulation Agreement (CAA). This could be even further complicated based on the fact that AP/IB courses are generally deemed suitable for receiving college credit, but only under certain circumstances – usually based upon having taken the associated examination (which not all students do) and achieving a minimum threshold score on the examination. These additional conditions would have to be discussed in much greater detail to determine how, if at all, it would affect weighting for these courses.

### **Discussion about Class Rank**

The group generally felt that class rank was an issue that is more properly addressed within the Department of Public Instruction, as most UNC universities either don't use class rank within their admissions rubric or use class rank on a lesser scale than other factors (GPA, test scores). DPI also provided specific legislative language, from GS 116-11 (10a) which states "The Department of Public Instruction shall generate and the local school administrative units shall use standardized transcripts in an automated format for applicants to higher education institutions. The standardized transcript shall include ...class rank..." For all other purposes other than how class rank appears on the transcript (i.e., determination of valedictorian / salutatorian), each individual school district is allowed flexibility in determining class rank for a student.

### **Recommendations of Task Force:**

With the below recommendations, the group felt that there were several key elements that needed to be maintained:

- 1) We want to continue to promote rigor and encourage high school students to take a rigorous schedule, whether Honors, AP/IB, or college.
- 2) We recognize that there is (and should be) a difference between a Standard level course and those designed and taught at the Honors or higher (AP/IB/College Dual Enrolled) level.
- 3) We want to make recommendations that reward rigor and yet are perceived (by students, parents, teachers, administrators) as fair.
- 4) We want to create a system and make recommendations that recognize that students should be encouraged and allowed to take a variety of courses; at this juncture, we're not convinced that we've recommended a system that overtly or implicitly promotes this concept. In the time allotted, we're not sure that this is resolvable while still recognizing and rewarding rigor similar to what is currently happening.

The task force hereby recommends the following:

Change the current system to weight high school courses on a more modest scale, more in line with other states (see pages 4-5 above); several specific recommendations:

- 1) Assign the same weighting calculation for college-work/dual enrollment college credit as is assigned for AP or IB
- 2) Narrow the grade / weighting scale from the current weighting to assigning/awarding:
  - a. 4 points for a standard course
  - b. 4.25 for an Honors course
  - c. 4.5 points for an AP/IB/College Course



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- 3) As a final recommendation, because of the time spent researching these issues and gathering data and then developing this document and recommendations, the task force has not staffed this document widely and recommends that this document be thoroughly vetted with the Enrollment Management / Admissions Directors at all UNC Schools, within the NC Community College System, and with critical administrators/leadership within DPI and the public school system. We would like to suggest that we (the task force) immediately begin the research and vetting process for the discussions and recommendations included above and that we provide an amended report and / or additional recommendations to you by December 20, 2013. As part of this additional staffing, we recommend also vetting this paper and proposals with Admissions and Enrollment Management leaders for selected private colleges and universities in North Carolina, as well as with selected colleges and universities (public and private) regionally outside of North Carolina. A key factor to address will be to determine if narrowing the weighting scale for the high school GPA for students at North Carolina public high schools will in any way disadvantage North Carolina high school students in the admissions and/or scholarship process at these private or out-of-state colleges and universities.