

Eliminating Class Ranking A Recommendation

At their September 3, 2003, meeting high school principals agreed to recommend that class ranks be eliminated beginning the 2004-2005 school year. Below is a brief summary of the arguments in favor of abolishing class ranks.

- 1) The main purpose for calculating class ranks is to present this data at the time a student applies for college admission. However, the practice benefits very few students. Many colleges actually screen students out, based upon class rank, early in their admission process. Schools who have eliminated class ranks report a higher percentage of acceptance as colleges are forced to take a harder look at the students and consider other factors, such as test scores and higher level courses attempted. Interestingly, schools who have given students the option of having their class ranks reported to colleges report less than 5% of students making the request.

- 2) The practice of reporting class ranks causes poor decisions in course selection and results in an unhealthy competition among top students. Advanced students avoid worthwhile courses that are not grade weighted. They search for summer school courses that offer weighted grades in order to gain a competitive advantage on their peers. Band students, and others who participate in a four-year elective program, suffer a disadvantage to those able to enroll in weighted courses.

- 3) School practices are also impacted negatively when every challenging course must offer a weighted grade in order to attract the best students. Advanced courses, with no external standard of performance, proliferate, many of which compete with Advanced Placement classes for student enrollment. Advanced Placement teachers are pressured into deemphasizing the A.P. tests in order to entice students into their classes. Other worthwhile academic electives, unable to qualify for weighted grades, die from lack of enrollment.

- 4) Several schools have reported increased achievement from all students after class ranking was eliminated. Numerous students feel as if they are "back in the game" for college admissions. It is no surprise to learn that ranking 100th in a class of 500 fails to have an impressive ring or any motivational impact. It does, however, represent fine work, with the student in the top 25th percentile with a grade point average of 3.50 or higher.

- 5) This is a growing movement across the country. Motivated by the need to increase college enrollment for their students, a growing number of schools and school districts have taken this action. To date, no school has returned to ranking students. This action benefits the majority of students without hampering the success of those at the top. Many schools eliminate class ranking completely while others substitute percentile ranks, stanines, deciles, or another grouping of students. For Paradise Valley, the principals recommend replacing class rankings with percentile ranks. This action was taken in Scottsdale over twenty years ago with no apparent negative results. Incidentally, two other school districts in the valley now follow that practice, Glendale and Phoenix Union.