

## **Proposal for Elimination of Class Rank**

### **Grafton High School Current Rank Policy**

Grafton High School numerically ranks students at the end of their junior year by comparing Grade Point Averages (GPAs). This information is documented in Naviance for use in the college application process and does not appear on the student transcript. Students will self-report their rank to colleges and counselors may/may not include the information in a college letter of recommendation. Class rank is re-calculated at the end of senior year for purposes of naming a salutatorian and valedictorian. These designations and honors can still be calculated without the formal use of class rank.

It has been noted that academic competition and an undue emphasis is placed on where a student stands in their class and is believed to be a contributor to the stress and anxiety our students display and report. Add to that the challenges that COVID had on grading and resulting GPAs/rank. A shift toward eliminating class rank would address the social/emotional well being of our students, and keep with the trend in rank reporting.

### **Neighboring Districts Without Rank**

The following is just a small sampling of area high schools in Massachusetts that do not report class rank and the year they eliminated class rank:

- Acton-Boxborough (2012)
- Andover High School (2009)
- Concord-Carlisle Regional High School (1997)
- Dover-Sherborn Regional High School (2002)
- Duxbury High School (2006)
- Hingham High School (2006)
- Hopkinton High School (1999)
- Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School (2004)
- Nashoba Regional HS (2013)
- Newton North High School (2011)
- Newton South High School (2010)
- Shrewsbury High School (2016)
- Wachusett Regional High School (2015)
- Wayland High School (2011)
- Wellesley High School (2004)
- Westborough High School (2006)
- Westford Academy (2007)
- Weston High School (2003)
- Westwood High School (2003)

[HERE](#) is a spreadsheet of further research from surrounding towns.

**Impact on Class Valedictorian and Class Salutatorian**

Elimination of class rank would not change the policy of determining the class valedictorian and class salutatorian. Calculation of the valedictorian and salutatorian is based on the top two highest weighted grade point averages. In order to be considered for Valedictorian and/or Salutatorian students must be enrolled as a Grafton High School student for 8 consecutive semesters. Final determination of these distinctions will be made at the conclusion of quarter 3 of students’ senior year.

**Class Rank and College Selectivity: Trends and Research**

Class rank in any form is simply used as another piece of data to help describe a student, as are other Standardized test scores, grades, and strength of program/course load, and other criteria. Some colleges report that they “like to see it” for very competitive programs, scholarship consideration, or for Honors College qualification. However, those same colleges stated that they cannot eliminate a candidate from consideration if they do not report rank because so many high schools are not reporting class rank information. Additionally, in the case where rank is absolutely required, school counselors could still provide that information in the form of the letter of recommendation or the secondary school report.

**Data from a 2016 Shrewsbury High School Survey**

| College/University        | Is class rank required for admission?* | Notes  |
|---------------------------|--|--|
| Cornell University        | No                                     | 72.5% of admitted students did not provide rank  |
| University of Vermont     | No                                     | 63% of admitted students did not provide rank  |
| Brandeis University       | No                                     | Well over half of admitted students did not provide rank   |
| Columbia University       | No                                     | ‘Columbia uses a holistic review process when evaluating applicants for admission; admission to Columbia is not based on a simple formula of grades and test scores.’    |
| University of Connecticut | Like to see it                         | Rigor of transcript is used first, then grades in those courses. Some kind of grade distribution is helpful for determining scholarship and Honors College qualification |
| Brown University          | Like to see it                         | If rank is not provided, a grade distribution chart is beneficial and would be used when reviewing an  |

|                           |                |  |
|---------------------------|----------------|--|
|                           |                | applicant  |
| Boston College            | No             | Rank is only looked at in the context of that student's school. 'Plenty of our applicants come from schools that do not provide rank'. Rigor of transcript and grades are paramount. Test scores next. |
| Assumption College        | No             | 60% of admitted students did not provide rank  |
| Northeastern University   | No             | Performance in high school is the most deciding factor-a competitive schedule with good grades. Test scores next.  |
| College of the Holy Cross | Like to see it | Prefer to have some idea of where a student stands in their class.   |
| WPI                       | No             | Rigor of curriculum is preferred; could be considered for scholarship if student is #1 or #2 in class-reported from the counselor is sufficient.   |
| Drexel University         | No             | Rank is not the first thing looked at for a student. If a school provides it, it's just one more piece of data. If not, a more holistic approach is used. Grade distribution is helpful.               |
| Dartmouth College         | No             | 65% of admitted students did not provide rank  |
| Johns Hopkins University  | No             | Rigor of secondary school records and grades are the primary focus.  |
| Boston University         | No             | 'A majority of applicants apply with no rank reported'   |

***\*All schools confirmed that not providing rank does not hurt a student, because so many private and public high schools have eliminated rank reporting.***

According to annual surveys of colleges conducted by NACAC, the importance of rank on college admissions has declined significantly since 1993. The most recent survey released indicates that class rank is of "considerable importance" to only 9% of colleges in 2018 down from 14% in 2014.

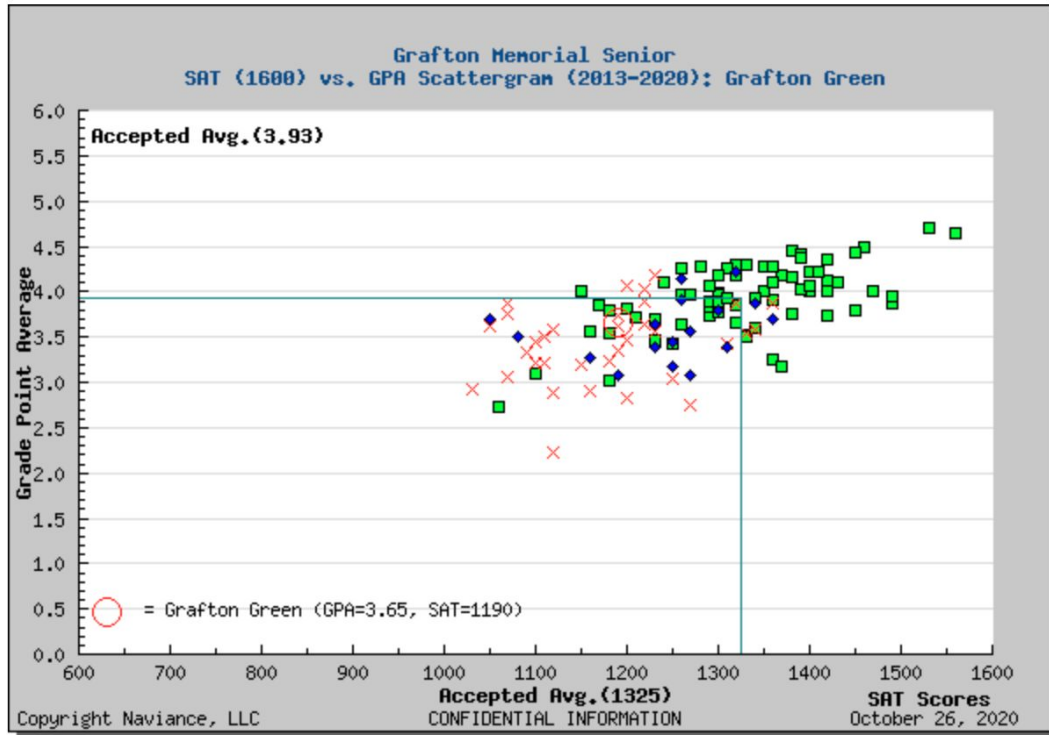
### **How Colleges Handle Class Rank When it is Not Provided:**

While some colleges may attempt to estimate a student's class rank given the information provided, the majority of colleges and universities will focus on other elements of a student's profile. In addition, colleges are provided the student's weighted GPA and school counselors can emphasize and highlight a student's academic strengths and potential in the letter of recommendation.

### **How Class Rank Can Hurt**

Some colleges today recalculate a student's GPA according to their own standards in order to place students on a more even playing field. However, "colleges vary how they use class rank in admission, based on a combination of institutional characteristics" as cited in NACAC's research of class rank. For example, large colleges and universities may not have the man-power to recalculate GPA and will take a student's reported GPA and rank at face value. Unfortunately, this practice compares students from high schools that can be radically different from one another. A student from GHS can have a lower class rank than a student at a different high school even though the GHS student has a stronger program of studies and school record. While class rank is one factor in the admissions process, it can be used to eliminate students from consideration if a student is below a threshold set by the college or university.

In assisting students with the college search process, the scattergram in Naviance is a widely used record of the history of college decisions of GHS students based on the grade point average and standardized test scores. It is meant as a guideline, not to be interpreted as a definitive college decision in the college search process. You will notice the percentile rank is not used to inform this aspect of the college search. A sample scattergram is displayed below:



### **Impact on Scholarship Considerations**

An important consideration in the elimination of reporting class rank to colleges is the impact of a student's ability to qualify for scholarships. Due to the number of high schools that are no longer reporting rank, colleges have responded in kind. For instance, at the University of New Hampshire, the wording for the criteria that included rank for the presidential scholarship at UNH states, "Rank in top 10% of graduating class (or equivalent level of unranked schools as determined by GPA and/or information on the school profile)". Many college/university merit based scholarships have set their criteria to be based on GPA, SAT/ACT, and other criterias and determined by individual institutions.

### **Social and Emotional Implications Associated with Class Rank**

Students and families that focus on hard statistics such as rank, GPA, and standardized test scores to gain admittance to highly selective schools often put great pressure on the student to choose a competitive course schedule and achieve at the highest grade possible in their classes. Often, the

pressure to perform and achieve academically is combined with a full complement of activities to build a strong student profile for colleges and universities leaving little time and energy for students to genuinely develop an interest and passion in their studies. As a result, a student's health and emotional well being can be compromised.

### **Further Reading**

[\*The Case for Abolishing Class Rank, Washington Post, 2016\*](#)

### **Data from The 2019 National Association of College Admissions Counseling (NACAC)**

TABLE 7. PERCENTAGE OF COLLEGES ATTRIBUTING DIFFERENT LEVELS OF IMPORTANCE TO FACTORS IN ADMISSION DECISIONS: FIRST-TIME FRESHMEN, FALL 2017

| <b>Factor</b>                    | <b>N</b> | <b>Considerable Importance</b> | <b>Moderate Importance</b> | <b>Limited Importance</b> | <b>No Importance</b> |
|----------------------------------|----------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|
| Grades in All Courses            | 220      | 74.5                           | 15.0                       | 5.5                       | 5.0                  |
| Grades in College Prep Courses   | 220      | 73.2                           | 16.8                       | 5.9                       | 4.1                  |
| Strength of Curriculum           | 219      | 62.1                           | 21.9                       | 8.7                       | 7.3                  |
| Admission Test Scores (SAT, ACT) | 221      | 45.7                           | 37.1                       | 12.2                      | 5.0                  |
| Essay or Writing Sample          | 220      | 23.2                           | 33.2                       | 24.1                      | 19.5                 |
| Student's Demonstrated Interest  | 218      | 16.1                           | 23.9                       | 28.0                      | 32.1                 |
| Counselor Recommendation         | 218      | 15.1                           | 40.4                       | 26.6                      | 17.9                 |
| Teacher Recommendation           | 219      | 14.2                           | 40.2                       | 26.5                      | 19.2                 |
| Class Rank                       | 220      | 9.1                            | 29.1                       | 34.1                      | 27.7                 |
| Extracurricular Activities       | 219      | 6.4                            | 42.9                       | 32.0                      | 18.7                 |
| Portfolio                        | 219      | 6.4                            | 11.9                       | 26.9                      | 54.8                 |
| Subject Test Scores (AP, IB)     | 219      | 5.5                            | 18.3                       | 35.2                      | 41.1                 |
| Interview                        | 219      | 5.5                            | 16.4                       | 28.3                      | 49.8                 |
| Work                             | 217      | 4.1                            | 28.6                       | 36.9                      | 30.4                 |
| State Graduation Exam Scores     | 218      | 2.3                            | 8.7                        | 18.8                      | 70.2                 |
| SAT II Scores                    | 216      | 1.9                            | 5.6                        | 14.8                      | 77.8                 |

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2018–19.

TABLE 8. PERCENTAGE OF COLLEGES ATTRIBUTING “CONSIDERABLE IMPORTANCE” TO FACTORS IN ADMISSION DECISIONS: FIRST-TIME FRESHMEN, FALL 2007 TO FALL 2018

|                                | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
|--------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Grades in College Prep Courses | 80%  | 75%  | 87%  | 83%  | 84%  | 82%  | 82%  | 79%  | —    | 77%  | 71   | 73   |
| Grades in All Courses          | 52   | 52   | 46   | 46   | 52   | 50   | 52   | 60   | —    | 77   | 81   | 75   |
| Strength of Curriculum         | 64   | 62   | 71   | 66   | 68   | 65   | 64   | 60   | —    | 52   | 51   | 62   |
| Admission Test Scores          | 59   | 54   | 58   | 59   | 59   | 56   | 58   | 56   | —    | 54   | 52   | 46   |
| Essay or Writing Sample        | 26   | 27   | 26   | 27   | 25   | 20   | 22   | 22   | —    | 19   | 17   | 23   |
| Class Rank                     | 23   | 19   | 16   | 22   | 19   | 13   | 15   | 14   | —    | 9    | 9    | 9    |
| Counselor Recommendation       | 21   | 20   | 17   | 19   | 19   | 16   | 16   | 17   | —    | 15   | 11   | 15   |
| Demonstrated Interest          | 22   | 21   | 21   | 23   | 21   | 18   | 20   | 17   | —    | 14   | 16   | 16   |
| Teacher Recommendation         | 21   | 21   | 17   | 19   | 17   | 15   | 14   | 15   | —    | 11   | 7    | 14   |