



October 20, 2008

Dear Parents of Middle School Students:

During the 2007 legislative session, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) was charged with developing a method of calculating the grade point averages (GPA) of Texas high school students to ensure a uniform standard for admissions for public colleges and universities in Texas.

Notable proposed preliminary changes from the current method of calculating the high school GPA for students seeking admission to a Texas general academic teaching institution include the following:

- All academic high school level courses (Math, Science, Social Studies, English/Language Arts, and Foreign Language) would be part of a student's GPA, regardless of when the course was taken.
- A four-point scale shall be used in computing the uniform GPA, with the exception of identified advanced academics courses.
- All academic high school Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), and academic Dual Credit courses shall be weighted equally with an additional weighting of 1.0 points in the calculation of the uniform GPA.
- No grade points shall be awarded for courses that do not result in credit awarded.

As a result of recent focus group meetings with educators, parents, and other interested parties, the Commissioner of Higher Education, Dr. Raymund A. Paredes, has made some adjustments to the preliminary recommendations, such as the consideration of the arts in the GPA calculation. Attached is a letter written by Dr. Paredes outlining his position for the decisions that have been made in relation to the current uniform GPA proposal.

It is expected that Dr. Paredes will make a final recommendation regarding the calculation of high school GPA for admission to Texas universities at the October 22 meeting of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. The recommendation will affect incoming high school freshmen starting in 2009-10.

For additional questions or clarifications on how this decision impacts your student, please feel free to contact me at 830-221-2015.

Sincerely,

Dr. Jodi Duron
Assistant Superintendent for Academics and Student Services

Enclosure

High GPAs without rigor are meaningless

Guest column by Raymund A. Paredes, Ph.D.

Commissioner of Higher Education

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

In the 2007 legislative session, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) was charged with developing a method of calculating the grade point averages of Texas high school students for use in admission decisions at state universities. Recently, editorial staff at an area newspaper took exception to my early conclusions on the matter. One of their readers later wrote in and accused me of “dumbing down” Texas education and wondered out loud if I was “completely nuts.”

The source of this agitation is my expressed concern about the practice in some Texas high schools of giving extra grade-point credit to certain courses labeled “pre-Advanced Placement.” There are no statewide standards for such courses and they vary widely in quality and rigor. Selective universities around the country almost never give weighted credit to pre-AP courses and, in a recent meeting of admission directors and officers from Texas public universities hosted by THECB staff, the consensus was against bonus points for pre-AP courses. This was mostly because of the absence of consistent standards but also because the admissions officers felt that receiving bonus points for actual AP courses, which will be weighted and are standardized, should be incentive enough to take pre-AP. Rigor in pre-AP courses is a genuine concern. I recently received a letter from a pre-AP English teacher who argued passionately for the extra effort of her students who were required to read two novels over the summer and thus far in the academic year had “annotated” the two novels. However, research shows that children must read steadily over the summer—typically, five books or more—simply to maintain prior reading levels. As a university English professor for 30 years, I can say that, whatever the merits of annotation, we prefer that students come to our beginning classes with ample experience in writing sustained, thoughtful and lucid essays.

The argument for extra credit for pre-AP that was expressed in the editorial and echoed by some critics is that without this incentive, students will not take rigorous courses but simply inflate their GPAs by taking, as one teacher put it, the “regular, easy” courses. This strikes me as an argument that misses the larger issue: what we need to do in Texas is not create artificial incentives for students to take rigorous courses but establish rigor across the entire high school curriculum. The evidence for this strategy is overwhelming. ACT, which tests over 70,000 Texas students every year, concludes that only 20 percent of Texas high school graduates are college-ready. THECB data show that 50 percent of entering Texas college students require remedial education and a just-released report by a coalition of Texas business leaders and education reformers calls for much higher levels of rigor in our schools. A recent national report by the Strong American Schools organization carries the title “Diploma to Nowhere” and warns that American high schools “profoundly fail” to prepare students for post-secondary work. The report further notes that nearly 80 percent of college students who required remediation had a B average or higher in high school. Let me be clear: if Texans want our state to be nationally and globally competitive and if we wish to assure a high quality of life for future generations, we must not give our children a choice between rigorous courses and “easy” ones. All courses

should be rigorous and we should give bonuses to students only for doing well in courses of demonstrable exceptional rigor such as actual AP courses. This is not “dumbing down” but the opposite.

The College Board, which administers the AP program, takes the sensible position that its pre-AP instructional practices and content should be imbedded in all courses prior to AP and warns that designating only certain courses as “pre-AP” can lead to “tracking,” a practice through which only a minority of students are exposed to rigorous courses and the rest, often poor, often students of color, are left to languish in courses that lead to nowhere. This is at odds with every fundamental principle of American democracy.

The newspaper editorial was correct in its assertion that many parents (and students, for that matter) are more concerned about high GPAs than they are about the quality of education and the preparation it provides for life beyond high school. Parents and students need to understand that high GPAs without rigor are meaningless. Just think of all those B students in college remediation courses.

At an October 22 meeting of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, I will make a final recommendation regarding the calculation of high school GPA for admission to Texas universities. As a result of recent meetings with educators, parents and other interested parties, my colleagues and I have already adjusted some preliminary recommendations; for example, we have sharpened language to assure that the critical role of the arts is considered in the GPA calculation. Over the next several weeks, we will consider further adjustments, all with one goal in mind: how to calculate GPA in a manner that promotes excellence and rigor for all Texas youngsters.

Raymund A. Paredes, Ph.D.

Commissioner of Higher Education
Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

Commissioner's Preliminary Recommendation on Methodology for Calculating Uniform GPA

- The methodology for calculating a uniform GPA for public university admissions will begin with students entering the 9th grade on or after May 1, 2009. All academic courses in the Recommended High School Program shall be used in calculating the uniform GPA regardless of when the course was taken.
- On a 4.0 scale, a weight of 1.0 will be given to Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB) and academic dual credit, including career-oriented, courses listed in the Lower Division Academic Course Guide Manual (available online at <http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/reports/PDF/1252.PDF>). In addition to the career-oriented courses listed in the Lower Division Academic Course Guide Manual, high school career and technical education (CTE) courses aligned with university programs of study will be counted.
- Pre-AP and pre-IB courses will be weighted at .50. Within four years, all pre-AP courses will be expected to meet Laying the Foundation (or comparable) standards and pre-IB courses will be expected to be part of an approved IB program. After four years, the weighting of pre-AP courses will be reviewed by the GPA Advisory Committee (referenced below) as appropriate.
- The Coordinating Board will establish a 15-member GPA Advisory Committee, which will include representatives from public education, higher education and the workforce sectors, to oversee implementation of the GPA standards, to develop a GPA conversion model, to assure rigor across all courses included in the GPA calculation and to make adjustments in the courses counted in the GPA calculation as curricula in high schools and universities change. Another key responsibility of the GPA Advisory Committee will be to ensure institutional compliance with Coordinating Board rules (§4.85) which specify requirements for dual credit courses.

Courses that are under consideration to be included in the uniform GPA calculation

Social Studies – 3.5 CREDITS

World History Studies (one credit)
World Geography Studies (one credit)
U.S. History Studies Since Reconstruction (one credit)
U.S. Government (one-half credit)

English – 4 CREDITS

English I, II, III, IV
English I and II for Speakers of Other Languages (SOL) may be substituted for English I and II only for immigrant students with limited English proficiency

Mathematics – 4 CREDITS

Algebra I, II, & Geometry. The fourth credit may be selected from the following: Mathematical Models with Applications, Pre-calculus, Independent Study in Mathematics, Advance Placement Statistics, Advanced Placement Calculus AB, Advanced Placement Calculus BC, IB Mathematical Studies, IB Mathematics Standard Level, IB Mathematics Higher Level, IB Advanced Mathematics Standard Level, AP Computer Science

Science – 4 CREDITS

Biology, AP Biology, or IB Biology
Integrated Physics and Chemistry
Chemistry, AP Chemistry, or IB Chemistry
Physics, Principles of Technology I, AP Physics, or IB Physics. A fourth credit from the courses listed in 19 TAC 112 approved for science credit, which includes the following: Astronomy, Aquatic Science, Environmental systems, Earth and Space Science, Advancement Placement courses in Biology, Chemistry, Physics B, Physics C, and Environmental Science. The following health science technology education courses: Scientific Research and Design, Anatomy and Physiology of Human Systems, Medical Microbiology and Pathophysiology, Principles of Technology 1 & 11 and Engineering.

Language Other than English – 2 CREDITS

(must consist of Level I and Level II in the same language).

Fine Arts – 1 CREDIT

A single year-long approved arts course from a fine arts discipline: dance, drama/theater, music or visual art as listed in TAC 117.

College-Preparatory Electives – 3.5 CREDIT

One year (two semesters), in addition to those required above, chosen from the following areas: Visual and Performing Arts (non-introductory level courses), History, Social Science, English, Advanced Mathematics, Science, and language other than English.

CTE Courses – Those courses with a “university” content connection such as Accounting maybe included in the GPA calculation.