PROBLEMS WITH CLASS RANK

- Class rank doesn’t tell the whole story of a student.
- A student ranked in the middle of his class, but goes to one of the best high schools in the country, can be made to look average when he/she is phenomenal.
- Class rank hurts more than it helps. It can hurt students’ admissions prospects, disqualify them from scholarships, or nix their chances of being accepted into a college honors program.
- Class rank is a practice designed to select talent rather than develop talent.
- Class rank causes students to design their educational program / select courses around class rank, not aligned with their interests, passions, and talents.
- Class rank breeds unhealthy competition, pitting students against one another for the top spot in the class - a distinction that can be determined by as little as “one hundred thousandth of a decimal point” in a weighted GPA.

WHAT ADMISSIONS COUNSELORS SAY

- According to a 2016 analysis from the National Association for Colleges Admissions Counseling (NACAC), fewer than half of U.S. high schools still report class rank.
- Almost half of admissions officers in the latest NACAC survey said class rank is of “limited” to “no importance.”
- Admissions at Yale, Stanford, Harvard, and other top schools is shifting toward a more “holistic evaluation” that looks at a host of factors beyond class rank.
- When class rank is reported on high school transcripts, admissions counselors dig deeper to figure out how it got created.
- When class rank is reported on high school transcripts, it is usually one of the last things admissions counselors look at.

ALTERNATIVES TO CLASS RANK & SINGULAR VALEDICTORIAN

- In a “criterion-based Latin honor system” students are competing against a challenging curriculum, not against their classmates.
- In a “criterion-based Latin honor system” students are recognized for educational excellence, but not at the exclusion of all but one student.

WHY KEEP CLASS RANK

- Some states require schools to report class rank to select students under their guaranteed college-admissions policies.
- Military academies require class rank.

WHAT TO CONSIDER BEFORE PROPOSING A CHANGE

- Look at postsecondary institutions where our students typically apply and ask admissions counselors, “If we stopped reporting class rank, how would it affect our students?”
- Ask other school districts:
  - Why did they do away with class rank?
  - Why do they STILL do class rank?
  - Why did they keep class rank (if they looked into doing away with it)?
PROBLEMS WITH CLASS RANK

- Class rank is a practice designed to select talent rather than develop talent.
- Class rank and selecting a singular valedictorian are grounded on norm-based criteria in a standards-based environment.
- When a student’s grade depends on his/her relative standing among classmates, learning becomes a competition.
- Excellence should be defined in terms of rigorous and challenging learning criteria -- a standard of excellence -- not in terms of a student’s relative standing among classmates.
- Evidence indicates that ranking students may diminish motivation.
- Class rank and selecting a single valedictorian pits students against one another, resulting in aggressive and sometimes aggressive competition among the highest-achieving students to attain that singular distinction.
- Class rank helps nobody but perhaps the very top ranked students, and could be hurting the majority.
- Some past valedictorians report having felt victimized by the competition to maintain the highest GPA and that it made high school an unpleasant experience.
- Follow up on success of valedictorians after they have graduated.
- Inherent flaws in calculating class rank with weighted GPA result in students selecting courses based solely on how they will impact their class rank.
- “Gaming the System”: Early in their high school careers, top-achieving students analyze their school’s selection procedures for picking the valedictorian. Then, often with the help of their parents, they find ingenious ways to improve their standing in comparison to classmates.

WHAT ADMISSIONS COUNSELORS SAY

- The belief that selective colleges and universities require information about class rank on applications may have been true in the past, but it is not nearly as prevalent today.
- In a 2012 survey
  - Only 19% of colleges and universities give class rank “considerable importance” in the application process.
  - Most admissions officer expressed serious skepticism about the meaningfulness of class rank.
  - Class rank was widely described by admissions officers as the “fuzziest” among the traditional measures of student quality.
- The procedures used to calculate students’ GPA vary from school to school.
- Schools vary widely in their ranking procedures.
- Striking differences in student populations at different high schools and the tremendous variation in the way high schools compute class rank results in GPA and class ranks reflecting different levels of achievement.
- Some people do not support “multiple valedictions” because they believe that colleges and universities give preference to students who earn the singular distinction of valedictorian. Current evidence indicates that this is not the case at the most selective institutions.
- A 2012 NACAC report shows that colleges and universities are more interested in the rigor of the curriculum students have experienced. The top 2 admissions factors were grades in college prep courses (AP) and the strength of the curriculum.
ALTERNATIVES TO CLASS RANK & SINGULAR VALEDICTORIAN

- Honoring the “Top 10” or the “Top 10%” is arbitrary.
- Colleges and universities use the criterion-based Latin system; a student selection process determines who gives the valedictory speech. Only high schools maintain the competitive practice of selecting the valedictorian based solely on GPA.

WHY KEEP CLASS RANK

- Some scholarships are based on class rank.
- Some states guarantee admission to a state university to students who are in a specified top percentile of their graduating class. This practice allows policy makers to ensure that students from all high schools are equally represented in their colleges.
- Class rank helps admissions officers at selective colleges and universities do their jobs more easily.

National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)
Class Rank, GPA, and Grading
March 2010
https://www.nassp.org/who-we-are/board-of-directors/position-statements/class-rank-gpa-and-grading?SSO=true

PROBLEMS WITH CLASS RANK

- Past methods of sorting and comparing students are obsolete.
- A system of class rank should not carry with it an underlying assumption that academic success is a scarce commodity available only to a select few students.
- The success of one student should not be at the expense of another student.
- Small differences in GPA could lead to large differences in class rank.

WHAT ADMISSIONS COUNSELORS SAY

- Class rank can hurt student prospects for college admissions.
- Class rank has limited value in admissions to college because it can only show how a student compares with other students at a particular school.
- Colleges and universities have developed their own systems of ranking students and recalculating GPA.

WHY KEEP CLASS RANK

- Using class rank as one factor for admission to competitive colleges increases diversity and results in a wider range of high schools (low-performing, high poverty, mostly urban schools) sending students to those universities.

WHAT COURSES SHOULD / SHOULD NOT BE WEIGHTED?

- AP vs. DE
- AP Core Classes vs. AP Non-Core Classes
- Transferable DE Courses vs. Non-Transferable DE Courses
- Core Academic Classes Only vs. Include Elective Courses
- Honors? Do these differ substantially in their level of academic challenge from non-honors?
- Only Externally-Moderated Courses (like AP & DE)?
- Should weighted credit for AP only apply to achievement of a certain score on the AP exam?