



Skaneateles
Central School District

The Skaneateles School District

***Ensuring Opportunity and Excellence
for
All Students***





What Is Our Mission?

The mission of the Skaneateles Central Schools District is to provide *positive and successful learning experiences for all students*. The schools will also strive to *provide the students with knowledge and problem solving skills necessary to contribute and adapt to an ever changing world*. Within a caring and student-centered environment, the schools will offer a balanced educational program with *high expectations to challenge and motivate each student*. The school staff, students, parents, Board of Education and community share the responsibility for this mission.



Guiding Questions

- Is our current system equitable for ALL of our students?
- Is our current system a level playing field for ALL of our students?
- Is our current system disadvantaging any of our students?
- Is our current weighting system benefitting ALL of our students?
- What level of high achievement would be equitable to celebrate and recognize?
- What do colleges say about our current system?
- What do our most progressive peers utilize for their system?
- Do colleges use their own formula for admissions for our students?
- What does the research say about best practices?



What are the Implications?

For policy

- Weighting and Ranking – *to foster student choice based on course value to the student (2014-15)*
- Course availability – *to offer rigorous options to all students (Ongoing)*
- Assessment and Grading – *to ensure that our assessment and grading practices are aligned with research and best practices (2015-16)*

For practice

- Identifying and protecting “bright spots” in the District that support the model – *to celebrate those things that we do well and continue our practice of them (Ongoing)*
- Assessment Development Training - *to assist staff in the development, administration, and effective use of resulting data (2014-15 and Ongoing)*
- Data supported Professional Learning Opportunities – *to ensure that we are meeting the needs of all students (Ongoing)*



Decisions to Be Made

1. Should the District discontinue the current course weighting system effective July 1, 2015 and implement a new system wherein no courses are weighted and all student Grade Point Averages are recalculated based on this system?
2. Should the District discontinue the current course ranking system effective July 1, 2015 and implement a system wherein rank of students is no longer calculated and used for academic recognition?



Weighting History at SCSD

- Current system has been in place since 1986
- Current weighting system:
 - **Level I** 1.15 x Advanced Placement, Honors, Accelerated and College Courses
 - **Level II** 1.08 x New York State Regents Course
 - **Level III** 1.03x General level courses which require preparation outside of class
 - **Level IV** 1.0 x General level courses which emphasize primarily classroom performance
- Currently 90 out of our 100 courses are weighted



Ranking History at SCSD

- SCSD recognizes only the Top 20 students in each graduating class based on cumulative GPA
- The difference between the student ranked 20th and the student ranked 21st is .1%
- Currently 84 students have averages above 90% and of those, only 20 are recognized
- Of those unrecognized, 21 students have an average of better than 100



Theory of Action

By removing weighting from all high school courses and by moving to a criterion-based recognition system, all Skaneateles students will be challenged to take a broader range of rigorous courses based on the content of the course; the student's likes and dislikes; the student's future aspirations; and the guidance of parents, faculty and school counselors, and will be **ready** for success in their post secondary choices.



What Does the Data Tell Us?

We conducted an analysis of 4 graduating classes (cohorts) of students from 2012-2015 where we unweighted all courses. The results are as follows:

Class of 2012 (n=126) - 3 students fell out of the Top 20

Class of 2013 (n=137) - 1 student fell out of the Top 20

Class of 2014 (n=126) - 2 students fell out of the Top 20

Class of 2015 (n=116) - 1 student falls out of the Top 20



What Does the Data Tell Us?

Based on questions received, we further reviewed the data to see the impact on the top 10% of students from each cohort where we again unweighted all courses. The results are as follows:

Class of 2012 (n=126) - 1 student fell out of the top 13

Class of 2013 (n=137) - 1 student fell out of the top 14

Class of 2014 (n=126) - 2 students fell out of the top 13

Class of 2015 (n=116) - 0 students fall out of the top 12



What Does the Data Tell Us?

By moving to a criterion-based system (e.g., Latin-based system with Summa, Magna and Cum Laude):

- Students would be evaluated against a district established standard and not against one another
- A number of students would still be recognized as the highest performing
- More students would be recognized for their hard work and accomplishments
- Students would be familiarized with the system utilized by colleges and universities



What Do our Alumni Tell Us?

From a December 2012 survey administered to alumni of SCSD, graduates were asked, “Tell us what you believe are the most important areas we should focus on to best meet the goal of college and career readiness both academically and socially/emotionally”. Sample responses included:

- Focus on what they are passionate about, but also challenge them to get out of their comfort zone
- SHS already does a great job, but one thing that could be improved is to encourage kids to take AP courses in the area they plan on studying in
- Students should take courses for college credit
- I think it is important to prepare students to be self reliant & accountable for what they do
- Promote and have more hands on experiences
- Focus on technology – in the work world, young people are expected to have more proficiency in these areas
- Introduce areas outside of the core – psychology, sociology, international relations
- I feel like Skaneateles already does a great job at providing a well rounded education. In my career, arts, music, and literature are very important, but everything factors in.



What Does the Research Tell Us?

The research suggests that providing real academic challenge for high school students and communicating with them about what is needed for future success helps to better prepare grads for the road ahead

- **Set** rigorous expectations and students will rise to the challenge
- **Encourage** all students to take the most advanced classes
- **Ensure** the rigor of classes offered; reliance on course titles can lead to watered down courses
- **Communicate** with students early in high school (if not before) about the expectations and skills (including courses) needed for future success—including college admissions and career interests
- **Connect** learning in high school to life outside the classroom by providing real-world learning opportunities



What Does the Research Tell Us?

Rigor and Access

- Taking an AP/IB course in any subject improves persistence in college, ***whether or not the student passes a test for that course*** isn't as important
- AP/IB courses should not just be for the students with the highest academic achievement; ***even students with the lowest academic achievement in their sophomore year benefit from AP courses whether or not the student passes a test for that course***
- Taking a more challenging math course improves persistence 10-20% of students with lower prior academic achievement



What Do College Admissions Advisors Tell Us?

If you challenge yourself by taking the toughest classes you can handle, especially in your areas of strength and interest, colleges will pick up on what you have accomplished. They will reward you for stretching yourself, and will find a way to give you "credit" for doing well in a strong academic program. <http://www.petersons.com/college-search/college-admission-requirements-gpa.aspx> (2013)

Because of this problem with different high schools weighting grades differently, most colleges get rid of the problem by stripping out all weighting from your GPA. Does that mean it doesn't matter whether you take AP classes? Not at all. Because colleges look not just at your grades but also the classes you take to get those grades. If you aren't taking challenging classes like AP's, your 4.0 GPA won't impress anyone. <http://www.collegeadmissionspartners.com/college-admissions-counseling/whats-your-gpa/> (2012)

College admissions counselors don't care whether or not a school weights or doesn't weight GPA. They can easily level the playing field. What they do care about is the competitiveness of the high school (i.e., schools that have impressive numbers of students who score well on AP or IB exams...not just who take the exams), the rigor of the course selection, and the grades in those courses. <http://theivycoach.com/the-ivy-coach-blog/admissions-process/weighted-vs-unweighted-gpa-is-there-an-advantage/> (2009)

For additional information, please see "What do college admissions advisors tell us?" on our website



What Do College Admissions Offices Tell Us?

The admissions committee does not prefer weighted or unweighted GPAs, instead they prefer to see that students have challenged themselves with the strongest curriculum possible at their high school.

<http://admissions.yale.edu/bulldogs-blogs/noam/2011/12/29/top-10-yale-college-admissions-questions>

Other sample colleges and universities that reflect this approach:

- Cornell University
- SUNY Geneseo
- SUNY Binghamton
- Williams College
- University of Rochester
- University of Buffalo
- Clarkson University
- University of Vermont
- Syracuse University
- St. Lawrence University



Recommendation

1. Administration recommends that the Board act to discontinue additional weighting of current courses such that all SCSD courses are weighted at 1.0 effective July 1, 2015.
2. Administration recommends that the Board act to discontinue the ranking of students for academic recognition effective July 1, 2015 with the following provisos:
 - Valedictorian and Salutatorian status will remain for the 2015-16 and 2016-17 school year.
 - An ad hoc committee will be established consisting of parents, students, alumni, faculty, staff, and administration to develop a criterion-based recognition system that will be recommended to the Superintendent for review with the Board by fall, 2015.



Next Steps

- Post information on the District Website for parents and community to review on March 12, 2015
- Present to the Board of Education for action on March 17, 2015
- Develop communications strategy for parents and students
- Convene an ad hoc committee to develop a criterion based recognition system
- Return to the Board of Education for discussion of criterion-based recognition system