

## **Elizabethtown Area School District**

### **Class Rank Frequently Asked Questions**

This information was compiled for board members to assist in the discussion of class rank and represents the questions most often asked by parents as well as information determined essential to the understanding of the issues surrounding class rank.

#### **Q. Why eliminate class rank?**

- A. A high-achieving student population such as ours at Elizabethtown Area High School results in high grade point averages (GPAs) for a large majority of our students. Thus, in the ranking system students will have these high GPAs but often have a low rank. This results in an inequitable distribution of rank. Therefore, eliminating class rank will allow more students to compete for admission to selective colleges.

Also, students often select courses based on their weighting value and impact on GPA and rank. These choices are sometimes made without regard to their actual interests or career aspirations.

Finally, ranking promotes competition among students that results in unhealthy relations with teachers and students as it creates an inordinate amount of pressure.

#### **Q. Why is reporting class rank a problem?**

- A. Class rank is best used to compare students in the same school to each other. When class rank is used to compare students from different schools, the college assumes that the schools are the same in their rigor, expectations, and student achievement. A student who ranks in the top 5% of one school may be ranked much lower in another.

#### **Q. Will eliminating class rank negatively affect students?**

- A. No. Our research and contacts with many colleges that currently attract Elizabethtown Area High School students shows that some of the best colleges in the country regularly accept students from schools that do not rank their graduates. A recent report by the National Association of College Admissions Counseling states that 55% of public and private high schools do not report class rank. Specific contact with Yale University yielded the response “while we would like a class rank, if we don’t get it we will use other data.” Harvard’s response was “we don’t use class rank anyway and all you will be doing is joining most of the better private schools and some public schools similar to Elizabethtown.”

#### **Q. Can reporting class rank hurt our students?**

- A. We found there are two ways that ranking can hurt students:
  1. At some colleges they are routinely eliminated in early consideration because of a rank.
  2. A student’s rank is used in statistical comparisons of colleges whereas students who apply from schools without rank are not used in those studies. Thus, there may exist greater flexibility in admitting students from schools that do not rank since these will not effect a college’s admissions statistics.

**Q. What do competitive colleges want?**

- A. Our research and discussions with numerous college admissions counselors revealed a multitude of factors that competitive schools consider in their admissions processes. These schools look at the following:
- A candidate's intended major and how their school matches a student's career aspirations.
  - The curriculum of the high school from which the student is graduating. This is separate from a student's grades; colleges focus on graduation requirements and strength of offerings.
  - The candidate's grades; however, schools would rather see lower grades in challenging courses than high grades in low-level courses.
  - Recommendations are important and should contain evidence of the student's achievements.
  - Extracurricular activities are important but should show a focus on an interest as opposed to a "laundry list" of clubs and activities.

**Q. What will we share with colleges to ensure our students receive proper consideration?**

- A. Schools routinely provide a profile to college admissions offices as part of the information supporting a student's application. With the elimination of class rank this profile becomes increasingly important in that it provides the information colleges require to determine a student's relative strength within the class. We have already secured several samples of profiles used by schools that have previously eliminated ranking. Counselors will be developing a profile that includes a distribution of GPAs which meets the needs of the admissions counselors. This document will be field tested prior to use with colleges in order to develop the strongest profile.

**Q. Are we doing this because everyone else is doing it?**

- A. No. We can, however, gain insight from other schools' experience with eliminating class rank. As stated in the NACAC report [The State of College Admission 2016](#), the elimination of class rank continues to increase, particularly among private and suburban high-achieving schools. At the same time, we find the number of colleges rating rank of "considerable importance" in admissions decisions falling consistently over the past 10 years. The same report also indicates a high level of importance placed on grades in college preparatory courses and grades in all courses.

**Q. How will students be selected for scholarships or awards that ask for rank?**

- A. Very few scholarships require rank. However, for those colleges or selection committees that do require a rank, they can refer to that particular student's GPA and the percent of students in that range.

**Q. Who will speak at commencement?**

- A. Whereas traditionally the valedictorian and salutatorian spoke at commencement, through our discussions the question of commencement speakers will be addressed separately from ranking. Schools use a variety of methods for choosing speakers and the administration is currently researching possible alternatives, such as picking from students graduating with Summa cum laude honors.

**Q. How will students be recognized for academics?**

- A. Elizabethtown Area HS would like to recognize all of our top students and to do that would go to a collegiate recognition format for graduating with honors. We would recognize students as Summa Cum Laude (4.0+), Magna cum laude (3.8-3.9), and Cum laude (3.5-3.7).

**Q. Will GPA no longer be kept?**

- A. GPA will be kept internally through the counseling department.