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**Uniform Grading Policy**

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**The Background:**

Public Chapter No. 679 directs the State Board of Education to establish a task force to make recommendations to the State Board by December 31, 2004, including, but not limited to the following:

- A. Consistent numerical breaks for letter grades.
- B. Considerations of standards to define an honors course.
- C. Appropriate weighting of courses.
- D. Determination of courses and weights to be used to calculate class rank.

The legislation also directs each school system to adopt and use the uniform grading scale to report student grades for the purpose of application for postsecondary financial assistance administered by the Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation.

The Task Force on the High School has developed a recommendation to the State Board of Education for a uniform grading scale as well as standards for honors and advanced placement courses and weightings for courses.

**The Recommendation:**

The Board adopted the recommendations on final reading.

**STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION**

**UNIFORM GRADING POLICY**

**April 15, 2005**

## **Uniform System of Grading**

### *Introduction*

The Task Force on the High School is committed to establishing a level playing field for recipients of the lottery scholarship. Public Chapter 679 directs the Task Force to make recommendations on consistent breaks for letter grades; the consideration of standards to define an honors course; the appropriate weighting of courses; and the determination of courses and weightings to be used in the calculation of class rank.

To fulfill this charge, the Task Force recommends that a uniform system of grading include the adoption of a common grading scale, and additional standards to define and appropriately weight courses of increased academic rigor. Local education agencies have the flexibility to differentiate among regular, honors, and Advanced Placement (AP) courses, with additional standards applied to International Baccalaureate (IB), National Industry Certification (NIC), and college-level courses. Specifically, AP, IB, and NIC courses include the administration of an independent, third party exam. For the purposes of the lottery scholarship, each of these course types are factored into the calculation of a grade point average.

Although a statewide survey of Tennessee's local education agencies reveals that 95 percent of the districts differentiate among standard, honors, and AP courses, the Task Force strongly recommends that all courses be taught at a high level of academic rigor. Tennessee's curriculum content standards, learning expectations, and performance indicators establish a framework for achieving such rigor.

Differences in grading scales also contribute to variations in calculating grade point averages throughout the state. A survey of districts, conducted by the Tennessee School Boards Association, reveals there are currently 5 different percentage grading scale ranges used in the determination of an 'A' letter grade and 16 different percentage grading scale ranges used in the determination of a 'B' letter grade. Such variation complicates the prospect of providing an equal opportunity for students.

A follow-up survey performed by the State Board of Education reveals that approximately 30 percent of districts use a weighted 5.0 scale, while the remaining 70 percent use a traditional 4.0 scale. These differences become significant in the calculation of the General Assembly Merit Scholarship, which allows for the evaluation and comparison of grade point averages using a weighted scale.

After extensive deliberation regarding each of the identified factors, including the classification of dual enrollment courses, weighting for class rank, and grading policies throughout the Southeast, the Task Force formed a consensus regarding recommendations.

## **Task Force Recommendations**

The Task Force on the High School developed recommendations regarding the implementation of a uniform system of grading, including the weightings of honors, National Industry Certification, Advanced Placement, and International Baccalaureate courses. The Task Force recognized the current need to identify honors courses and to assign weight to those courses to encourage students to become engaged in a more rigorous curriculum. However, the Task Force also stated the belief that all courses should be of such rigor, and that delineating the honors courses should not be needed. The Task Force recommends that the issue of rigor be revisited in five years to determine if the weighting of honors courses is still needed.

**Recommendation 1:** For the purposes of the HOPE scholarship, Tennessee Code Annotated 49-4-902 should be updated to allow for internal percentage point weighting in the calculation of grade point averages, using a 4.0 scale.

The rationale for an unweighted grade point average is defined in the statute's section on definitions, as "the average on a 4.0 scale calculated without additional points awarded for advanced placement, honors, or other similar courses." The statute specifies that HOPE scholarship eligibility shall consist of a final overall unweighted high school grade point average of at least 3.0.

As the charge of the Task Force includes the recommendation of a common statewide grading scale, it is essential to emphasize that the isolated adoption of a statewide scale under the current statute would have an unintended effect on students pursuing courses of increased academic rigor.

Absent a change in the statute, the percentage score used to determine a letter grade could not consider the additional rigor of Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), National Industry Certification (NIC), honors, or college level courses.

A common grading scale, adopted in isolation of a change in statutory definitions, would prohibit the local recognition of grade percentage incentives for students taking AP, IB, NIC, honors, or college-level courses.

**Recommendation 2:** For the purposes of determining eligibility for the lottery scholarships, Tennessee’s Uniform Grading System should consist of the following, effective July 1, 2006:

<b>Uniform Grading System</b>					
<b>Grade</b>	<b>Scale</b>	<b>Percentage Range</b>		<b>Weighting for Honors Courses and National Industry Certification</b>	<b>Weighting for Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate Courses</b>
<b>A</b>	<b>4.0</b>	93	100	May include the addition of 3 points to the grades used to calculate the semester average.	May include the addition of 5 points to the grades used to calculate the semester average.
<b>B</b>	<b>3.0</b>	85	92		
<b>C</b>	<b>2.0</b>	75	84		
<b>D</b>	<b>1.0</b>	70	74		
<b>F</b>	<b>0.0</b>	0	69		

As originally adopted by the General Assembly, the statute governing HOPE scholars did not allow the assignment of additional quality points above 4.0 for honors, AP, IB, and NIC courses.

All course types, as defined below, shall be used for reporting student grades for the determination of eligibility for HOPE scholarships.

**State Approved Courses**

State approved courses shall meet all appropriate content standards, learning expectations, and performance indicators as approved by the State Board of Education and are eligible for the points listed above.

**Honors Courses and National Industry Certification courses**

Local education agencies may elect to offer honors courses and National Industry Certification (NIC) courses. Local education agencies electing to offer honors courses will ensure that the approved honors courses substantially exceed the content standards, learning expectations, and performance indicators as approved by the State Board of Education. Further, each local education agency offering honors courses will ensure that additional rigor is being provided by implementing the framework of standards for honors courses listed below:

**Framework of Standards for Honors Courses**

Honors courses will substantially exceed the content standards, learning expectations, and performance indicators approved by the State Board of Education. Teachers of honors courses will model instructional approaches that facilitate maximum interchange of ideas among students: independent study, self-directed research and learning, and appropriate use of technology. All honors courses must include multiple

assessments exemplifying coursework (such as short answer, constructed-response prompts, performance-based tasks, open-ended questions, essays, original or creative interpretations, authentic products, portfolios, and analytical writing). Additionally, an honors course shall include a minimum of five of the following components:

1. Extended reading assignments that connect with the specified curriculum.
2. Research-based writing assignments that address and extend the course curriculum.
3. Projects that apply course curriculum to relevant or real-world situations. These may include oral presentations, power point presentations, or other modes of sharing findings. Connection of the project to the community is encouraged.
4. Open-ended investigations in which the student selects the questions and designs the research.
5. Writing assignments that demonstrate a variety of modes, purposes, and styles.
  - Examples of mode include narrative, descriptive, persuasive, expository, and expressive.
  - Examples of purpose include to inform, entertain, and persuade.
  - Examples of style include formal, informal, literary, analytical, and technical.
6. Integration of appropriate technology into the course of study.
7. Deeper exploration of the culture, values, and history of the discipline.
8. Extensive opportunities for problem solving experiences through imagination, critical analysis, and application.
9. Job shadowing experiences with presentations which connect class study to the world of work.

All course types which meet the above framework will be classified as honors, eligible for additional percentage point weighting.

Technical courses that offer a National Industry Certification through a nationally recognized examination may be weighted by adding 3 points to all grades used to calculate the semester average.

If honors courses and courses that offer National Industry Certification are offered, the local education agency shall annually approve the list of such courses. This list of National Industry Certification courses and of approved honors courses with a complete syllabus for each course shall be approved by the local education agency and made readily available to the public.

Each local education agency shall adopt policies for honors courses and technical courses that offer national industry certification that may allow for the addition of 3 points to all grades used to calculate the semester average.

### **Advanced Placement Courses and International Baccalaureate Courses**

Local education agencies may elect to offer Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses. If Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses are offered, the local education agency shall annually approve a list of such courses. This list of approved courses shall be made readily available to the public. Local education agencies will ensure that approved courses substantially incorporate the learning objectives and course descriptions as defined by the College Board or International Baccalaureate Agency.

Each local education agency that elects to offer Advanced Placement courses and International Baccalaureate courses shall adopt policies for the approved courses that may allow for the addition of 5 points to all grades used to calculate semester averages. Only Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses that have end-of-course national examinations qualify for the addition of 5 points.

**Recommendation 3:** The Task Force recommends that no action be taken on how a local education agency determines class rank. The issue of class rank is not related to the calculations for the lottery scholarships and should be left to local discretion.