

REPORT OF COMMITTEE ON GRADING SCALE

INTRODUCTION

Earlier this school year, several parents expressed concern to Mountain Brook Schools Superintendent Dr. Charles Mason that our current high school grading scale is placing our students at a disadvantage for college admissions, scholarship consideration, and entry into college honors programs.

Dr. Mason convened a committee of parents, teachers, counselors, and administrators to study this issue in depth. The committee met for over twelve hours to review all available data relevant to this issue. The first task of the committee was to make findings of fact that seemed important to consider. After teacher input, the committee finalized its findings for review by parents.

FINDINGS OF GRADING SCALE COMMITTEE

1. Mountain Brook Schools use four different grading scales:

Kindergarten: Satisfactory/Needs Improvement

Grades 1-3: Satisfactory/Progressing/Needs Improvement

Grades 4-6:

A - 90-100

B - 80-89

C - 70-79

D - 60-69

F - Below 60

Grades 7-12:

A - 92-100

B - 83-91

C - 74-82

D - 65-73

F - Below 65

2. Letter grades do not currently appear alongside the numerical grades on the MBHS transcript. The grading scale does appear on the transcript.

3. A survey of six area high schools found:

Vestavia, Hoover, Indian Springs and John Carroll use a 10-point scale. Homewood uses a 9-point scale.

Altamont uses:

**High Honors - 92-100
Honors - 82-91
Satisfactory - 71-81
Poor - 60-70
Failing - Below 60**

4. A survey of six other Alabama high schools with high percentages of students attending college (Auburn, Austin, Decatur, Huntsville, Opelika, and Sparkman) found:

Five use a 10-point scale for grades of A, B, and C. Of these five, 2 provide for a differentiation between low and high grades within a 10-point range (pluses and minuses). (Decatur and Austin) Two use below 65 as an “F”. (Huntsville and Sparkman)

One uses the same scale as Mountain Brook currently uses. (Auburn)

5. In 26 nationally recognized public high schools (*) surveyed:

Nineteen use a 90-100 grading scale for an “A”. Of these 19, six provide for a differentiation between low and high grades within a 10-point range (pluses and minuses).

4 allow teachers or departments to set their own grading scale.

2 use a 4.0 GPA scale.

1 uses:

**A – 93-100
B - 85-92
C - 77-84
D - 70-76
F - Below 70**

Nationally recognized high schools surveyed included Palo Alto, La Jolla, Piedmont, Saratoga, Sunny Hills, University High School, Cherry Creek, Glenbrook North, Glenbrook South, Lake Forest, Naperville Central, Naperville North, New Trier, Needham, Winston Churchill, Walt Whitman, Thomas Wooten, Edina, East Chapel, Princeton, Chappaqua, Scarsdale, Indian Hill, Orange, Plano West, and Wellesley.

6. From 1999-2003, 479 out of our 1,057 graduates enrolled in Alabama or Auburn.
7. MBHS College Advisor Karen Bogenschutz reported that the prevailing practice among colleges is to use the grading scale the high school reports in their consideration of applicants. Eight colleges surveyed confirmed that this is their practice. (Schools surveyed: Florida State, Indiana University, Kansas, Georgia, Tennessee, Texas, Tulane, Auburn, Miami)
8. At Mountain Brook High School, numerical GPA's and class rank are currently calculated on weighted grades of "academic classes" on a 100-point scale. For a complete explanation see the addendum at the end of this document.
9. For priority admission, Auburn has an initial minimum standard of a 3.0 GPA as computed on the sending high school's grading scale. In other words, if a student applies to Auburn in October with a 3.0 GPA and an acceptable ACT score, he/she will be admitted. If the student does not have a 3.0, he/she may or may not be admitted later in the admissions process depending on the qualifications of applicants to Auburn in that year.
10. Admission to most colleges has become more competitive in recent years. Of 15 major universities surveyed, the average GPA (as reported by the college) of the incoming freshman class ranged from 3.10 to 4.14. (Schools surveyed: Alabama, Arkansas, Auburn, Colorado, Florida, Houston, Georgia, Kansas, Maryland, Michigan, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia) The average core weighted GPA for the current MBHS junior class is 3.034.

While MBHS provides a numerical GPA to colleges, many colleges recalculate a student's grades on a 4.0 scale. They do this in a variety of ways.

11. If nothing else changed except adopting a 10-point grading scale, the average MBHS GPA would increase and grade distribution would change. Some teachers believe that more students in their classes would receive higher grades. However, other teachers indicated this would not be the case. Some things would change. These changes could include:
 - 1) Some teachers would "grade to the scale" so grade distribution would not change. This means there would be the same number of A, B, C, D, and F's awarded in a class.
 - 2) Some teachers assign letter grades to essays and projects. They then assign a numerical grade to this letter grade. So, if a student received a C+ on a project on the current scale this would be an 82. On a 10-point scale a C+ would be assigned a 79. Therefore, some students' numerical grades would be lower.
 - 3) If this change happens (# 2), the C- student would be penalized more than the A- student. The C- student's grade drops 4 points (from 74 to 70) and the A- student's grade drops 2 points (from 91 to 89).

- 12. Mountain Brook High School has an excellent reputation among colleges nationwide.**

- 13. College admissions officers or deans at sixteen of seventeen selective colleges responded that changing our grading scale would not affect their consideration of our students. Schools surveyed indicating no effect included Yale, Centre College, Carleton, VMI, Columbia, Notre Dame, Wofford, Furman, Georgia Tech, Illinois Wesleyan, Richmond, Chicago, Rhodes, Penn, Florida State, and Oberlin. University of Georgia admissions officers have indicated that they would respond to a change in our grading scale by eliminating an advantage they currently afford our students based on the historical performance of Mountain Brook students at UGA. They would re-evaluate that practice after four years.**

Officials from Centre, VMI, Georgia Tech, Richmond, and Florida State observed that they would not expect substantial change in grade distribution if the grading scale were changed because they believe “teachers grade to the scale.”

ANALYSIS OF PROS AND CONS

Once this analysis of the available data was complete, and after much discussion, the committee generated the following list of pros and cons regarding a change in the Mountain Brook Schools grading scale.

PROS

- 1. Because admission to most colleges has become more competitive, a change in our grading scale may create a “level playing field” with respect to GPA as our students compete for admission, scholarships, and honors programs with students from other Alabama high schools, students from neighboring states, and students from outstanding high schools around the country who use a 10-point grading scale.**
- 2. The change might increase student motivation to achieve at higher levels.**
- 3. This change might encourage some students to attempt advanced and Advanced Placement classes by reducing concern about the impact on their letter grades.**
- 4. This change would provide uniformity in grading scales in grades 4-12, eliminating the grading transition that currently occurs from 6th to 7th grade.**

CONS

- 1. This change could negatively impact the image of the school system if the perception is that the school system has lowered its standards.**
- 2. The change might diminish student motivation to achieve at higher levels.**
- 3. The distribution of grades might not change substantially. Numerical grades could actually be lower.**

NEXT STEPS

The committee agreed that the next step in the process was to obtain input from parents regarding this issue. To do so, the committee felt it was necessary to suggest what an alternative grading scale would be, if adopted. If a change were made, the majority of the committee agreed the modified scale should be the following standardized grading scale for grades 4-12:

A	90-100
B	80-89
C	70-79
D	65-69
F	Below 65

The effects of this scale would be that it would:

- 1. Raise the passing grade for grades 4-6 from 60 to 65 to match grades 7-12**
- 2. Change A, B, and C grades in grades 7-12 to a 10-point scale**
- 3. Maintain 65 as the minimum grade for passing in grades 7-12.**

A decision on this issue will be made by the school system administration sometime before the end of the current school year.

If you wish to share your views with Dr. Mason on this issue, please click on the e-mail link below and send your message.

comments@mtnbrook.k12.al.us

Addendum

The courses listed below are used to compute grade point average (GPA) and class rank. The rank in class is based on the weighted 100-point numerical system. Eight points are added to final grades earned in AP classes; four points are added to final grades earned in advanced classes. (Example: English AP=90. This grade of 90 will appear on the transcript as the raw and unweighted grade. The computer will add eight points to the grade so that it will be computed as 98. English Advanced=90. The computer will add four points so that it will be computed as 94, but once again, the raw, unweighted grade of 90 will appear on the transcript.) To compute GPA's on a 4 point scale, the chart below is used to convert the unweighted numeric grade. An extra point is added for AP courses and 0.5 point is added on the 4.0 scale for advanced courses. An 85 in an AP class is a B (3.0), a point is added giving it a value of 4.0.

A=5.0 (AP)	B=4.0 (AP)	C=3.0 (AP)	D=1.0 (AP)
A=4.5 (Adv)	B=3.5 (Adv)	C=2.5 (Adv)	D=1.0 (Adv)
A=4.0 (Reg)	B=3.0 (Reg)	C=2.0 (Reg)	D=1.0 (Reg)

If a student's grade drops lower than 74 in an advanced or AP class, the extra points for class rank and GPA are not awarded.

Courses Used In Computation of GPA and Class Rank

English

English 9, 10, 11, 12 (Reg, Adv, AP)
Creative Writing I & II
Forensics
Public Speaking

Social Studies

World History & Geography (Reg, Adv)
U. S. History & Geography to 1900 (Reg, Adv)
U. S. History & Geography, 1900-Present
U. S. History AP
Government & Politics (Reg, AP)
Economics (Reg, AP)
Psychology
Critical Film Studies
Humanities
Contemporary Issues
Twentieth Century World Affairs
World Geography

Math

Algebra I
Algebra I-A
Algebra I-B

Science

Anatomy & Physiology (Reg, Adv.)
Biology (Reg, AP)
Chemistry (Reg, Adv, AP)
Chemistry II
Physics (Conceptual, Reg, AP-B, AP-C)
Environmental Science (Reg, AP)
Physical Science
Astronomy
Geology
Genetics
Marine Biology

Foreign Languages

All foreign languages (Reg, Adv, AP)

Fine Arts

Art AP

Professional Studies

Business Principles & Management
Accounting Principals
Business Law
Personal & Business Finance

Mathematics in Society
Algebra II (Reg, Adv)
Algebra III
Geometry (Reg, Adv)
Trigonometry & Analysis (Reg, Adv)
Calculus (Reg, AP-AB, AP-BC)
Applied Mathematical Concepts