**Will Changes to the Grading Scale Lead to Grade Inflation?**

The Dean of Admissions for George Mason University, Andrew Flagel, told the audience at the FCPS-sponsored Roundtable on 8.25.08, that that the grading scale changes being proposed for Fairfax County are "extraordinarily reasonable" and that, "I don't think you will see a radical shift in grades coming out.  I think you will see a moderate one."

Does grade inflation occur around the country?  Admissions officers who participated in the 8.25.08 FCPS-sponsored Roundtable told the audience that they do see grade inflation but they also know which school districts are doing it and they in fact, "disadvantage those school districts quite heavily."  (Andrew Flagel-Roundtable 8.25.089)

Current grade distributions for FCPS clearly show FCPS students' grades are depressed, so adjusting the grading scale isn't expected to "inflate" grades.  It is going to bring FCPS students' grades into balance relative to their peers in surrounding school districts and around the country - the majority of whom are under a 10 point scale.

FAIRGRADE makes this analogy:  Women receive 78 cents to the dollar compared to the wages men receive.  When a woman's wages are increased relative to a man's salary, it is not "inflation".  It is called "fair" compensation.

**Don't Current Grading Scale Policies Make FCPS Students Try Harder?**

FAIRGRADE believes the opposite may actually be true.  Under current grading policies, some FCPS students are foregoing honors classes because they receive no additional weight towards their grade point, and it's easier to get an A in a non-Honors course.  FCPS current policies may, in effect, be deterring students from "upping their game" when they should serve as an incentive for students to take more challenging courses.

FAIRGRADE supporters want to see FCPS grading scales in line with other comparable school districts nationwide who have implemented the more commonly used 10-point grading scale with added weights for Honors and AP/IB classes or a straight numeric scale with added weights for Honors and AP/IB classes.

**Don't All Colleges Know FCPS' Reputation?**

*"I do think though that there is the danger that the farther away you get from the state of Virginia, the less likely it is that people are going to be familiar with the caliber of the students."*

*Source:  Shannon Gundy, Director of Undergraduate Admissions*

*University of Maryland*

*8.25.08 - FCPS Roundtable on FCPS Grading Policies*

Fairgrade acknowledges that FCPS' current 6-point scale and weighting policy is generally taken into account for admissions to Virginia public colleges.  But with increased competition for seats in Virginia's public colleges, more FCPS students must consider going out-of-state for college.  FAIRGRADE's extensive research shows that many out-of-state colleges and universities do not know FCPS' grading policy nuances, nor do they necessarily make adjustments to FCPS students' GPA's for admissions decisions.

Many universities have told FAIRGRADE they take GPA scores directly off a student's transcript when evaluating students for merit scholarships.  As a result, FCPS students are losing out on thousands of dollars in merit scholarship awards to students whose school systems use the traditional 10-point grading scale and give more weights for Honors and AP courses.

**What is the most common GPA scale in the United States?**

*"If I were a parent in Fairfax County, I would want it changed."*

*Source:  Shannon Gundy, University of Maryland*

*Director of Undergraduate Admissions*

*(referencing FCPS' current grading policies)*

*Washington Post - 8.25.08*

The most common GPA scale in the United States and comparable school districts to FCPS is the 10-point grading scale.  But in Fairfax County, FCPS grades are based on a 6-point grading scale.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 10-point Grading Scale | 6-point Grading Scale |
| 90-10 = A | 94-100 = A |
| 80-89 = B | 90-93 = B+ |
| 70-79 = C | 84-89 = B |
| 60-69 = D | 80-83 = C+ |
| Below 60 = F | 74-79 = C |
|  | 70-73 = D+ |
|  | 64-69 = D |
|  | Below 64 = F |
|   |   |

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**How Does FCPS Compare to Montgomery County Schools?**

In 2007, only 5% of graduating seniors at Langley High School had a weighted GPA of 4.0 or higher.  At Montgomery County's Churchill High, 36% of graduating seniors had a weighted GPA of 4.0 or higher.

Fairfax students taking Honors classes receive NO extra GPA weighting. Their counterparts in Montgomery County receive an extra 1.0 for Honors classes.

Fairfax students taking AP/IB classes receive only an extra 0.5 weight in computing GPAs. Their counterparts in Montgomery County receive any extra 1.0 weight for AP/IB classes.

Consider this example of how a Fairfax County (FCPS) student and a Montgomery County (MOCO) student with the exact same courseload and exact same percentage grades for each class end up with incredibly divergent GPAs:  FCPS Student Final GPA = 3.5, MOCO Student Final GPA = 4.6

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**Will a 10-point Grading Scale Lower Standards or "Dumb Down" Fairfax County Schools?**

No.  Other elite school districts, like neighboring Montgomery County, have the standard 10-point scale and give more weight  to grades for Honors and AP courses.  These elite schools carry no stigma of having "lowered their standards" or "dumbed down" their schools.  Transforming current grading policies would not change the rigorous academic curriculum and high test scores that have given FCPS its elite status among school districts.

In a FCPS sponsored Roundtable Panel discussion on 8.25.08, that included four admissions officers from area colleges, all of the college admissions panelists agreed that changing to a 10-point grading scale would not have a negative impact on the FCPS reputation and that some benefits could in fact result from this change.

**What is the History of FCPS' Grading Scale?**

The outdated, 6-point grading scale currently in use in Fairfax County public schools was implemented back in 1962 - that's 46 years ago!

**What is the Current Status of the Grading Policies Issue with FCPS?**

In Spring '08, FCPS Superintendent Jack Dale agreed to take FAIRGRADE's research under consideration and assemble an FCPS research team to provide analysis about how FCPS grading policies compare to other school districts regionally and non-regionally, the impact of these policies division-wide and to determine what, if anything, supports current FCPS grading policies.

During the summer of '08, the FCPS research team defined the scope of their research to include two components:

1. An FCPS prepared survey sent to college admissions offices.
2. An FCPS-sponsored Roundtable consisting of a few college admissions officers, FCPS representatives and members of the public.

A FCPS designed survey, that will be sent to 104 of the existing 3000 college admissions offices located in the United States, is still being refined.  The data collected from this survey will be included in an FCPS report to the FCPS School Board this fall.  FCPS officials are on the record as saying they will present their research findings and recommendations by late fall, '08.

On August 25, 2008 FCPS held a Roundtable panel discussion at Luther Jackson Middle School in Falls Church to discuss FCPS' grading policies, their impact on the college admissions process and the effects of these policies with regard to lost scholarship and honor's program opportunities.  Four admissions officers from area universities and FAIRGRADE President Megan McLaughlin were among the panelists participating in this public discussion.

FAIRGRADE was extremely pleased that the admissions officers serving on the panel attested to the fact that the FCPS' grading policies can put its students at a disadvantage and that they acknowledged FCPS' sterling reputation would not suffer if FCPS changed its grading policies to a 10-point grading scale.

Throughout the research process, FAIRGRADE has expressed several concerns to FCPS officials about FCPS' research and analysis methods for the FCPS survey, the selection of participants for the Roundtable Panel, and the manner in which the material obtained from the Roundtable will be used in FCPS' final report.

Despite these obstacles, FAIRGRADE continues to work diligently with FCPS in a collaborative manner on behalf of FAIRGRADE's membership to ensure an unbiased, final report.  FAIRGRADE is also working diligently to obtain a commitment that FCPS officials will follow School Board Chairman Daniel Storck's request for a question and answer opportunity with members of the public when the report is presented in October '08.

Depending upon FCPS' final decision, FAIRGRADE is prepared to organize its 6000+ members to become active at the state and local levels to ensure FCPS students a level playing field.