

MIDDLETOWN TOWNSHIP

BOARD OF EDUCATION

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Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 6, 2008

Middletown School District to Offer Student Choice in Reporting High School Rank to Colleges

Middletown: The Middletown School District has recently adopted a new policy on school rank which affects the current senior class of 2009. Students and their parents will now have the choice on whether or not to report rank on their official transcripts sent to colleges. Rank choice is being implemented on an “opt-out policy,” whereby a student’s rank will automatically *not be reported* on his or her transcript unless that student or their parent/guardian (if the student is below 18 years of age) requests that rank be reported.

Rank choice was recommended by the committee of teachers, guidance counselors and administrators convened last spring by the Board of Education to study the system of ranking at the high school level. The Ranking/GPA (Grade Point Average) Committee’s guiding principle was to recommend policy that was in the best interest of all of Middletown’s students in the increasingly competitive college application process. A rank will still be calculated internally for the traditional announcement of the Top Ten Students at graduation and for the New Jersey Star’s Program which requires it.

Middletown Superintendent Karen Bilbao states of the decision, “We believe this is a win-win option for all our students. National trends and our own research support that the absence of a rank will require college admission counselors to look more closely at a student’s transcript if rank is not reported, thereby, enhancing every student’s application potential. Additionally, those very high achieving students, who believe the reporting of their high rank benefits them, will still have the opportunity to report their rank on their high school transcripts.”

Middletown joins Red Bank Catholic as the only Monmouth County high schools currently allowing a rank choice. Red Bank Catholic has experienced very favorable results with this policy. Most area private schools and the county’s magnet schools do not report rank. The public school districts of Holmdel, Rumson-Fair Haven and Allentown have all eliminated rank reporting, which colleges have noted as an increasing trend over the past few years. For instance, Boston College reports that among its accepted students last year, 50% were not ranked by their high school.

According to High School South Guidance Supervisor Bob Busler, a member of the Ranking/GPA Committee, the overriding premise that guided the committee was that a student owns his or her GPA, and that the rank is arbitrary and may relate to decisions other students may make on course selection due to the current weighted GPA. An example of the aforementioned would be choosing a language in high school like Italian or Latin which does not have an AP level as is the case with Spanish or French.

Bob Busler emphasizes, “The difference between rank numbers could be one tenth of a hundredth of a point. Additionally, the way Middletown currently calculates rank {which is based on a weighted GPA with a higher point value assigned to honors and Advanced Placement (AP) classes} could inflate a GPA from the current 4.5 scale to 5.5. Therefore, a student with a GPA of 4.5 or all A+s, could hold a rank of 60. This misfit information could automatically eliminate students from a college’s acceptance pool. We want colleges to look at everything about our students, not to take the quick route and eliminate an applicant immediately based on a rank number.”

After surveying over 60 colleges and universities to which Middletown students traditionally apply, the committee concluded that the absence of rank will not negatively impact a student’s college application, nor will a rank choice. However, one important issue that parents and students should weigh in their decision process on rank choice concerns merit scholarship opportunities.

Bob Busler emphasizes, “Our research did uncover that most colleges require a rank when considering merit scholarships. Therefore students who are strong contenders for merit scholarships need to determine if the schools they are applying to require that rank be reported.”

The committees charge also prompted a closer scrutiny of the district’s current cumbersome weighted GPA formula. This resulted in the Board of Education adopting several other recommendations which will be implemented with the current freshmen class which graduates in 2012. They include:

- Starting with the class of 2012 the grading scale will be based on the traditional 4.0 versus the current 4.5 (this gives an A and A+ the same point value for GPA calculation purposes)—this was recommended to align with the scale that colleges use and most people understand. (It was noted that colleges always recalculate a GPA anyway based on a 4.0 scale.)
- Starting with the class of 2012, the GPA will no longer be weighted eliminating the inflation for AP and Honors classes. However, transcripts will show the AP and Honors classes to delineate the rigor of the courses. A+ will further distinguish student achievement from an A.
- Rank will continue to be at the student’s option to report and will be weighted with higher values for Honors over CP (College Prep) classes and AP over Honors classes again to distinguish the rigor of the classes taken.

The Committee believes the long-term changes will reap other benefits for students. First, it will stem the intense competition that some students experience with a weighted GPA and mandatory rank reporting. Secondly, it might encourage students to take courses they would love to explore, but would be reluctant to take if a weighted GPA was reported.

The Middletown guidance counselors are meeting with the class of 2009 on an ongoing basis to help them make the best decision on whether to report their rank. The district believes that an equitable solution has been achieved on what has traditionally been considered a contentious issue and works to the benefit of every student.

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