



***Improving College
Acceptance, Strengthening
Academic Culture &
Expanding Opportunities
for All Students***

December 12, 2019

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Summary of Plan

Through inquiry and investigation, school officials believe they can better position Kingsway students to compete for college acceptance to colleges of their choosing, strengthen academic culture and enhance scholarship opportunities for all students; and, streamline high school-to-college transitions when necessary and specific changes to ranking and grading policies are made. Therefore, in an effort to increase opportunity for student acceptance to competitive state colleges and universities, Kingsway officials are planning to make the following changes:

1. Eliminate class rank.
2. Shift away from our 8-point grading scale in favor of a 10-point grading scale.
3. Realign grade point average (GPA) from our 100-point scale to the traditionally used 4.0 scale, while maintaining weighted grading in advanced courses like honors and Advanced Placement (AP).
4. Eliminate valedictorian status and introduce an Academic Distinction Program based on the customary Latin Honors Program used by colleges and universities.

Kingsway believes that the changes will: (1) equalize college acceptance and scholarship opportunities for our students; (2) generate a strong academic culture focused on the learning rather than strategic course selection for the purposes of class rank; and, (3) streamline students' transition to college by way of common language and achievement measures.

Implementation Plan

The planned changes will take effect in September 2020 and will apply to students entering grades 7 through 12. The application of GPA will remain in the high school only. This would require school counselors to amend historical grades to the new weighted system. For example, students who earned between a 60-64 would now receive a letter grade of a "D" with a corresponding weight and credit.

The following items would require adjustment:

- Graduation Progress page
- GPA formula
- Retroactively award credit to all historical grades between 60-64
- Credit to all historical grades to reflect 1 or .5
- School Profile
- Create new Grade scales
- All courses to include appropriate Grade scale
- Honor Roll calculation
- Renascence calculation
- Update NCAA

Policy Changes

Amend the following policies and/or regulations to reflect this plan.

- Policy & Regulation 2624 – Grading (Grading Scale, Grading Periods). Last updated 6/23/08
- Policy 5430 – Class Rank (Unweighted & Weighted GPA, course levels). Last updated 4/17/07



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- Policy 5460 – High School Graduation (Credits, assessment, Option 2). Last updated 12/20/18

Eliminate Class Rank

Kingsway plans to eliminate the long-standing method of ranking students based on cumulative GPA. Our research on the factors influencing college acceptance⁵ points to an immediate need to end ranking methods at the high school. While the factors used by college admissions officers stress the importance of academic achievement, they focus more attention on overall high school GPA and not class rank. Despite this, Kingsway’s current system is class rank focused; promoting academic achievement measures that encourage our students to strategize boosting class rank. This is in contradiction of factors emphasized by the National Association of College Admission Counseling, such as overall high school GPA, strength of curriculum, and SAT scores. We believe our current class rank method creates a disadvantage for our students as they compete for admission to their college or university of choice.

As it stands, class rank is a metric used to evaluate how students perform in relation to their peers. However, high schools throughout the country have not standardized the use of grade point scales, class rank procedures, class weighting, etc. Therefore, when a college admissions officer evaluates a student’s academic performance, he/she does so without any guarantee that the measures used are the same from school-to-school. Moreover, it is widely reported that class rank is not a priority factor for college admissions and, in fact, gives way to the following in admission decisions for first-time freshmen⁵ according to the National Association of College Admission Counseling’s [2019 State of College Admission](#) report.

1. Grades in all courses/overall high school GPA (75% of colleges)
2. Grades in college preparatory courses (English, math, science, history & foreign language) (73% of colleges)
3. Strength of curriculum at the applicant’s high school (60% of colleges) as evidence by rigorous course choices¹³
4. Admissions test scores (ACT, SAT) (>50% of all colleges)

Another set of moderately important factors used to gain insight into the personal qualities and interests of college-bound students are as follows.⁵

5. Writing sample (college essay)
6. Demonstrated interest
7. Counselor and teacher recommendations

While academic performance remains a top factor for college admission, a student’s cumulative GPA (grades in both college preparatory courses and grades in general)¹³ is a more important factor when compared to a GPA that represents only grades in college preparatory courses.⁵ Conversely, the NACAC Admission Trends Survey (2018-19) demonstrates that class rank has become much less important over the decade and reports only 9 percent of colleges rated rank as considerably important, compared to 23 percent in 2007. In a recent survey conducted by Kingsway Regional School District, Ramapo College reported, “Only about 40% of high schools even provide a class rank. If rank is not provided we consider other data points to gauge rigor and high school context.” This declining use of class rank throughout high



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schools only compels college admissions to prioritize academic performance, which is a common trend throughout the survey.

The effort to move away from class rank has hit home as a number of New Jersey Schools are removing the practice, recognizing that the minuscule differences separating top students has rendered ranking useless while driving up student stress.⁹ Washington Township (Gloucester County) announced they were doing away with the practice for the Class of 2023. Vineland Public Schools will do the same in 2020, and Ocean City High School graduated its first class without the use of rank in 2019. The West Chester Area School District eliminated the practice when it was reported to them by a University of Pennsylvania Admissions Officer that a student ranked 15th out of 320 students “would have gotten in” had she not been ranked, according to a statement released by the school superintendent.¹⁰ In a phone interview with Garnet Valley School District in Pennsylvania, school officials reported that they are eliminating their class rank practice beginning with the Class of 2020.¹² Their decision stems from of a University of Delaware admissions officer who noted that the practice of ranking students from best to worst is disadvantageous for high school graduates, hurting the chances of students’ acceptance, when compared to students from other schools who are not ranked in this manner.

If class rank is not necessary to open doors to colleges and universities, and may end up putting students at a disadvantage, the only purpose of ranking is for local comparison. As a select group of students progresses through high school, class rank becomes the largest motivator behind their course selection process, exposing a rivalry among students as they vie for the top spot. Throughout the competition to outperform one another, the process of learning, exploring and challenging oneself gives way to calculated efforts to boost rank. Alfie Kohn, author of *Beyond Measure*, writes: “The vicious rivalry and inevitable resentment on display as a handful of overachievers battle it out over tiny differences in GPA has led some schools to stop ranking... a tiny step in the right direction.”²

Lastly, Kingsway surveyed approximately two dozen college admissions officers and found that the elimination of class rank will not affect our students in a negative way, nor will it dissuade a college from accepting the applicant.¹¹ We best captured the irrelevancy of class rank and the most important factors influencing college admission decisions during a conversation with Rutgers, in which the Director of Campus Programs replied:

“This (elimination of class rank) will not negatively impact your (Kingsway) students. Many schools have eliminated class rank and our primary focus is on overall GPA and the level of courses and grades a student achieves. That combined with standardized test scores and supplemental information (activities, leadership, essay) provide the necessary information for us to review a student for admission to Rutgers.”¹⁶

Melissa Welch, Director of Campus Programs
Rutgers University-New Brunswick

To further illustrate this point, Brown University’s admission advisor reports, “Half our applicants now come from schools that don’t have rank,” while Rutgers University-New Brunswick claims, “Due to the number of high schools who do not rank their students, we have not required class rank from applicants



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for several years.” The University of Delaware admissions office reported to Kingsway personnel, “It (class rank) is not something we take into consideration for admissions because class rank looks different at all schools. For example, a student may be ranked third in their class, but the highest GPA is a 3.5.”¹¹

The following colleges and universities made similar claims during our survey. Temple, Duke, Georgetown, Harvard, University of Pennsylvania, Stanford, Randolph Macon College, Lafayette College, West Virginia University, Ramapo College, Roger Williams University, Liberty University, Quinnipiac University, Holy Family University, Rowan University, Penn State University, Rider University, and more.

Shift to a Modified 10-Point Grading Scale

Kingsway’s plan shifts our current eight (8)-Point Scale to a modified ten (10)-Point Scale. See Table 1 below. Adoption of a modified 10-point scale eases the transition our students will experience as they move to the college or university setting. We believe that the shift will:

1. Improve the college admission opportunities by creating a fairer opportunity to apply for college admissions and scholarships, given a number of states and high schools throughout the country that utilize a 10-point grading scale.
2. Align to colleges, who predominantly favor the 10-point scale, creating a seamless transition.
3. Maintain current rigor and teacher standards.

For example, the North Carolina State Board of Education began full implementation of a 10-point grading scale in 2015³, moving away from the long-standing 7-point scale, because they believed it created a disadvantage for North Carolina students in applying to colleges when other high schools were using a 10-point scale. The following year the State of South Carolina would shift to a 10-point scale, for similar reasons⁴. The State’s Superintendent Molly Spearman said, “A 92 is a ‘B’ in South Carolina, while it’s an ‘A’ for students in North Carolina and Georgia. This means a South Carolina student gets a 3.0 for his GPA while students from North Carolina and Georgia get a 4.0 for his GPA, putting South Carolina Students at a disadvantage when it comes to admission and scholarships.”

The arguments for a 10-point scale hold true for a Kingsway student, as they too will compete for acceptance to colleges and universities with students from Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina. Additionally, Kingsway students compete locally with student from Lenape, Seneca, Shawnee, Williamstown, Garnet Valley, Lower Merion, Radnor, and Marple Newtown, to name a few, all of whom implemented a 10-point scale.

Realign Grade Point Average (GPA)

Kingsway’s plan includes a change from our 100-point Grade Point Average (GPA) to a more commonly used 4.0 GPA model. This is the standard scale used at most colleges, and many high schools use it (College Board, 11/30/19) with corresponding grades to match.⁸ Collegevine.com reported that students who attend schools using another grade point scale, such as Kingsway, are required to convert their GPA to a 4.0-scale-equivalent. This is a critically important step for our high school students when completing their college applications. In fact, the National Association of Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), as reported on NCAA.org, calculates on a 4.000 scale and sets 2.3 and 2.20 GPA to determine eligibility for Division I and Division II athletes for NCAA approved core courses, respectively.^{14, 7} Again, requiring



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Kingsway students to convert its 100-point scale to a 4-point scale for a number of students during the college application process. Eliminating this step would make for an easier process for our students, who often have to refer to online conversion calculators.

This shift will continue to incorporate a weighted option, so that we take into account a course’s rigor, such as with honors and Advanced Placement (AP). The following local schools utilize a traditional 4.0 GPA model: Salesianum, Garnet Valley, Shawnee, Cherokee, Lenape, Rancocas Valley, Williamstown, and more. See Table 1 below.

Table 1: Kingsway’s shift to a modified 10-Point Grading Scale, which includes “plus” and “minus” designations for each letter grade. (i.e. 90-100 = A), (>60 = F)

Grade	Current 8-Point Scale	New 10-Point Scale	New “Unweighted” GPA	New “Weighted” GPA (Honors = +0.5)	New “Weighted” GPA (AP = +1.0)
A+		97-100	4.0	4.5	5.0
A	92-100	93-96	4.0	4.5	5.0
A-		90-92	3.7	4.2	4.7
B+		87-89	3.3	3.8	4.3
B	83-91	83-86	3.0	3.5	4.0
B-		80-82	2.7	3.2	3.7
C+		77-79	2.3	2.8	3.3
C	74-82	73-76	2.0	2.5	3.0
C-		70-72	1.7	2.2	2.7
D+		67-69	1.3	1.8	2.3
D	65-73	63-66	1.0	1.5	2.0
D-		60-62	0.7	1.2	1.7
F	64 and below	59 and below			

Incorporate Academic Distinction Program (Latin Honors Program)



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As we delve deep into the class rank discussion, and argue the reasons to eliminate rank, we must reevaluate the use of the traditional titles of valedictorian and salutatorian implemented by Kingsway. These titles are reserved for those students ranked first and second in the class, respectively. In reality, it is a mere hundredth of a tenth of a point that may separate student GPAs for ranking purposes and often the culprit of tremendous angst among our students.

As a result, many students overload their high school schedules with high-level courses while taking multiple college classes in an attempt to boost class rank and get to the top. Tom Guskey, an Educational Psychologist at the University of Kentucky reported on this phenomenon in a 2015 Kappan Magazine article and writes, “It is true in many schools incorporating a ranking system that students analyze their school’s selection procedures for picking the class valedictorian. With the help of their parents, they find ingenious ways to improve their standing in comparison to classmates. Stories abound of students gaming the system in order to gain some advantage such as avoiding classes in dance, music or the arts because the ‘A’ in an unweighted class can bring down their GPA.”¹⁷ This occurs under the misguided belief that the higher one is ranked, the better the odds will be for acceptance into a top college or university. In this flawed system, ranked first is a guarantee; however, fifth, sixth or seventh is often deemed “not good enough.” In fact, the University of Pennsylvania and Duke University rejected more than 60 percent of valedictorians who applied for admission.⁶

This strategy distracts from the true purpose of education - the learning process - and does little to improve a student’s chances for college acceptance. Kingsway’s experience is, in fact, similar to what one Cincinnati, Ohio high school reported last spring, “Kids were using their summers, using time during the year, to stack themselves up with even more classes,” said Tracey Carson of Mason High School.¹⁵

We believe in recognizing academic achievement, and Kingsway intends to celebrate students for their outstanding achievement at their commencement ceremony (OR upon graduating) The Academic Distinction Program, adapted from the traditional Latin Honors Program often used by colleges and universities, will recognize students as follows:

- Summa Cum Laude – Awarded to students who achieve an weighted GPA of 3.90 or higher
- Magna Cum Laude – Awarded to students who achieve an weighted GPA of 3.70 – 3.89
- Cum Laude – Awarded to Students who achieve an weighted GPA of 3.50 – 3.69

The Great Schools Partnership reports the advantages of a Latin Honors Program are as follows:¹⁹

1. **Latin honors recognize the academic accomplishments of more students.** Instead of honoring only a handful of students whose performance may be based on relatively small differences in GPA, Latin honors recognize all students whose performance exceeded high academic standards.
2. **Latin honors represent a much broader spectrum of academic accomplishment.** The three levels of Latin honors—*Summa Cum Laude*, *Magna Cum Laude*, and *Cum Laude*—can be adapted by schools to reflect their distinct academic standards, while also giving more students the opportunity to work hard and earn recognition for their achievements.
3. **Latin honors are more fundamentally equitable.** When academic recognition is based on relative measures and student-to-student comparisons, rather than the same consistent



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standards, one student's success is another student's failure, and vice versa. In addition, when "success" and "failure" are defined by fractionally small differences in GPA, the fundamental fairness of the system is called into question.

4. **Colleges, universities, and the public are familiar with Latin honors.** Instead of devising a new system of academic recognition that may be unfamiliar or confusing, schools can use Latin honors, which provide an established, understandable system with a long and storied academic tradition.

In the same article, Great Schools Partnership goes on to describe the disadvantages of class rank as follows:

1. **Class ranking only recognizes a comparatively small number of students**—the valedictorian, salutatorian, and top-performing percentiles—whose performance has been measured against other students, rather than the same consistently applied learning standards.
2. **In some cases, fractional differences in GPA often determine class rank.** For example, a mere thousandth of a point difference in GPA may determine which student becomes the valedictorian or which students fall within the top tenth percentile. Such vanishingly small differences in academic performance can render class-ranking comparisons essentially meaningless, including graduating classes with ten or twenty-five "valedictorians" who all achieved numerically perfect academic records.
3. **Students may decline to take educationally valuable courses or pursue personal interests** because certain courses may be considered too challenging (therefore presenting a greater likelihood of a lower grade) or because they present a mathematical disadvantage when it comes to calculating GPA and class rank (such as non-weighted arts courses, for example, in schools that use weighted-grade systems).
4. **Students may narrowly fixate on numerical indicators of academic performance and minuscule scoring discrepancies** that might adversely affect their GPA. Consequently, they may also experience greater anxiety, academic pressure, or feelings of failure, rather than enjoying learning, challenging themselves academically, accepting and overcoming failures, or focusing on the larger purpose and benefits of education.



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Endnotes

- ¹ [What students should know about the GPA scale](#): U.S. News & World Report (11/30/2018)
- ² [The case for abolishing class rank](#): Washing Post (12/16/2016)
- ³ [NC switching all high schools to 10-point grading scale this fall](#): The News & Observer (1/8/2015)
- ⁴ [10-Point uniform grading scale approved by State Board of Education](#): S.C. DOE (2016).
- ⁵ [2019 State of College Admission](#): National Association of College Admission Counseling (NJACA)
- ⁶ [Investigating who gets into Harvard and why](#): Patch (12/14/17)
- ⁷ [Academic Eligibility](#): NCAA (11/20/19)
- ⁸ [High School GPA Scales Explained](#): U.S. News & World Report, 11/30/18
- ⁹ [NJ high schools not ranking graduating seniors, naming valedictorian](#): MSN, northjersey.com (6/19/19)
- ¹⁰ [More top high schools drop out of class-rank system](#): by Kathy Boccella, Phila. Inquirer (10/30/16)
- ¹¹ Kingsway Regional Electronic Survey of College Admissions Offices (May, 2018)
- ¹² Kingsway Regional Phone Interview with Garnet Valley Personnel (10/18/19)
- ¹³ [Results from college survey on admission decision factors](#): Educational Advocates (11/16/19)
- ¹⁴ [Grade-Point Average](#): NCAA.org (11/26/19)
- ¹⁵ [Mason High will eliminate valedictorian honor in effort to improve students' mental health](#) (5/9/19)
- ¹⁶ Kingsway Regional Correspondence with Rutgers Admissions Offices (12/3/19)
- ¹⁷ [Class rank weighs down true learning, by Thomas Guskey, Kappanmagazine.org](#) (8/6/15)
- ¹⁸ [Grading Scale](#), Hunterdon Central Regional High School (12/3/19)
- ¹⁹ [Academic Recognition and Latin Honors](#), Great Schools Partnership (12/12/19)

Additional Resources

- [New grading system approved in Marple Newtown](#) (5/7/17)
- [Garnet Valley Class Rank, Grading Scale and GPA Scale Presentation](#) (11/7/18)
- [NCAA Eligibility Criteria](#)
- [Factors in Admission Decisions, National Association for College Admission Counseling](#) (NACAC)



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