

STUDY OF THE WEIGHTED QUALITY POINT SYSTEM FOR NORTH CAROLINA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Legislative Requirement

During the 2003 legislative session, the following provision was passed:

CREDIT FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS TAKING COMMUNITY COLLEGE COURSES

SECTION 7.36 The State Board of Education shall study the issues of weighted grades for high school students who take university and community college courses. The State Board of Education shall report the results of the study and its recommendations on the issue to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee by December 15, 2003.

Study Questions

Studying the issue of weighted grades for high school students who take university and community college courses is a complex undertaking. In order to address the specific provision about community college and university courses, all aspects of the weighted quality point policy must be considered. Such a study requires deliberation about the following questions.

1. How many high school students now take community college and university courses while enrolled in high school?
2. How are community college and university courses taken by high school students viewed when students apply for admission to colleges and universities?
3. How many community college and university courses are available to students throughout North Carolina, e.g. rural areas vs. urban areas?
4. What impact, if any, would the awarding of extra quality points to community college and university courses have on Advanced Placement courses offered at the high school level? How will elective high school courses be affected?
5. What should be the purpose of awarding extra quality points to any course, regardless of where it is taught?
6. How do you determine comparability between a class taken at a community college or university with a course taken at a high school?

Making recommendations about community college and university courses and weighted credit requires a simultaneous review of the current weighted quality point policy, statutorily developed by the institutions of higher education in the early 90s. Adjusting one aspect of the policy may create inequities to students, especially to those who are enrolled in small or rural schools.

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The Study Process

A series of steps were undertaken to address the issue of weighted grades for high school students who take university and community college courses. These steps included:

1. Review of enrollment of high school students in community college courses 1997-2002
2. Study of the Comprehensive Articulation Agreement existing between the Community College System and the University of North Carolina. This document lists 680+ courses eligible for transfer between community colleges and public universities.
3. Review of university admission procedures as related to the role of community college and university courses in determining admission to public universities.
4. Review of the current policy for weighted quality points.
5. Review of five previous studies about weighted quality points.
6. Establishment of a Weighted Quality Points Committee to recommend options and provide feedback.
7. Review of input from public school personnel, public and private universities, local boards of education, and students.
8. Extensive discussion and debate about proposed options at State Board of Education meetings in November and December 2003. Discussion will continue at the January 2004 State Board of Education meeting.

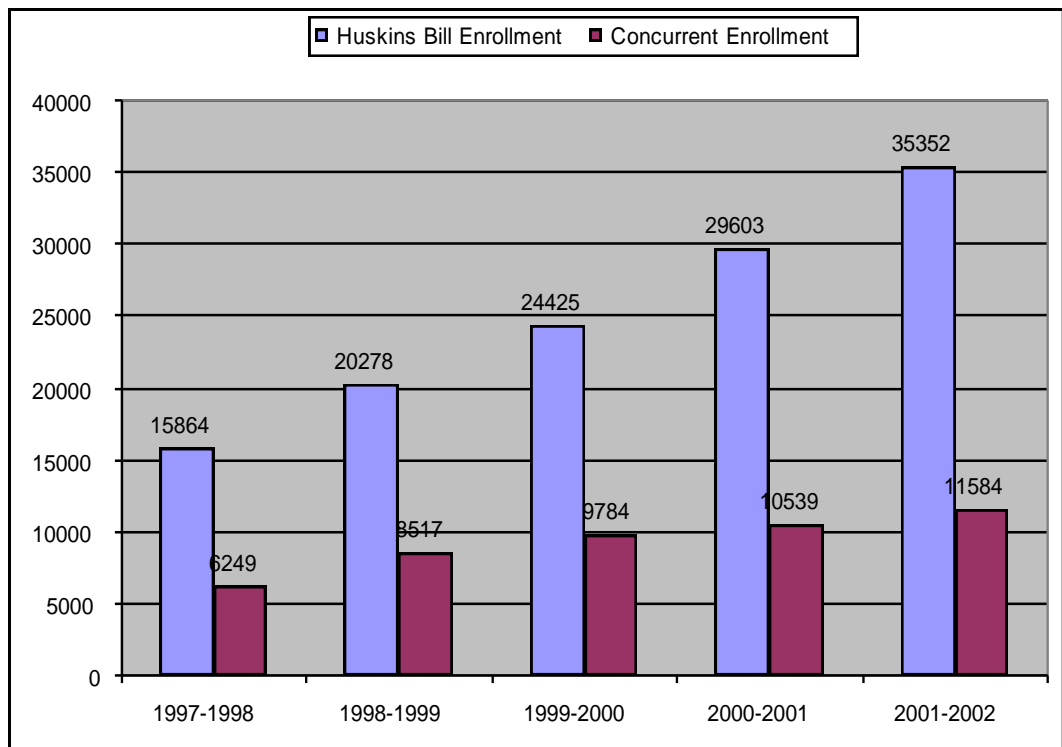
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Major Findings

Community College and University Enrollment of High School Students

According to the State's Common Follow-Up System, 23.2 percent of 2000-01 high school seniors enrolled in a community college course or public university course (22.6 percent were enrolled in a community college course.)



The enrollment of high school students in community college courses continues to grow - - from 22,113 students in 1997-98 to over 46,936 in 2001-2002, despite most community college and university courses being ineligible for weighted credit under current policies.

Comprehensive Articulation Agreement

Listed in the Comprehensive Articulation Agreement between community colleges and universities are approximately 680 courses. Community college students who take one or more of these courses are eligible to transfer these credits to a university, once they are accepted by a college or university.

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Major Findings, con't.

These courses reflect general education and pre-major requirements or electives and include an extensive range of curriculum areas. (See Appendix 1.)

In order to get one unit of credit for high school graduation, a course must have 135 hours of instruction for block schedules and 150 hours for traditional schedules. Each course in the *North Carolina Standard Course of Study* has competency goals and objectives that must be used to deliver the 135 or 150 hours of instruction.

College level courses at community colleges and universities have course descriptions but not standard objectives or course outlines.

Without substantial funds and research, it is impossible to do a study comparing the content of the 300+ high school courses to the 680+ community college courses and to the 600+ public and private university courses.

Use of Community College/University Courses in Determining Admission

The University of North Carolina General Administration has reported that community college and college courses taken by high school students are not considered as a part of the admission process. These courses are viewed as college level courses, not high school courses. As a result, these courses do not count “for” or “against” students when they are seeking college admission. Students receive college credit for these courses once they are admitted to a college/university.

Potential Impact of Extra Quality Points

Having a wide array of high school, community college, and university courses eligible for extra quality points favors students who attend large high schools or who live in proximity to community colleges and universities. The number of courses available for extra weight has a direct impact on students’ grade point averages.

On the other hand, Advanced Placement courses are available to all high schools through online opportunities. At least 13 Advanced Placement courses are available online to North Carolina high school students. Federal funds have been targeted to provide AP courses to rural schools.

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Major Findings, con't.

All Advanced Placement courses have standards and tests developed by the College Board. There is disagreement about whether students should be required to take the tests to get extra quality points. See Appendix 2.

Weighted Quality Points Committee Deliberations

In collaboration with the Community College System, UNC-General Administration, and the North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities, Superintendent Mike Ward appointed a committee to study weighted quality point issues. The committee had representatives of public and private universities, community colleges, superintendents, Department of Public Instruction staff, local school district central office staff, principals, arts education, and career-technical education directors.

After two meetings and extensive discussion, most of the committee members supported the recommendation of awarding weighted credit only to Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses.

Review of Input

Current Weighted Quality Point System

In 1992, the General Assembly passed legislation that requires a standardized transcript for all public school students. The transcript must include grade point average, class rank, end-of-course test scores and uniform course information. The legislation also requires that the “grade point average and class rank be calculated by a standard method to be devised by the institutions of higher education.”

The current system has these major components:

- Any AP/IB course is eligible for extra weighting of two points
 - Any high school course (except Algebra I, career-technical education, and most arts courses) are eligible for extra weighting of one point as long as the following conditions are met:
 - A standard of the same course is offered to students
 - The course has greater depth and breadth
 - Advanced Mathematics, non-AP/IB calculus, mathematics courses beyond the level of calculus, and foreign language courses beyond the second year are considered inherently honors. Therefore, they receive an extra weighting of one. (See Appendix 7.)
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Review of Input, con't.

Findings from Previous Studies

Counting the development of the initial weighted point policy, at least five studies have been completed to resolve the issues surrounding weighted grades. These studies have included:

1. Linking the Advanced Placement Examination to Weighted Credit, 2003 (Appendix 2)
2. Task Force Report for Cooperative High School Education Program, 2000 (Appendix 3)
3. Weighted Quality Points Study, 2000 (Appendix 4)
4. Honors Credit Matrix, 1998-99 (Appendix 4)
5. Report on Programs for High School Students Offered by the Public Schools, Community Colleges, and Universities, 2000 (Appendix 5)
6. Final Report for House Bill 1246, 2003 (Appendix 6)

See appendices for previous studies and their recommendations.

These studies have raised the following issues:

1. The purpose of weighted grades, e.g., recruitment, rigorous course work, predictability of student success in college.
2. The lack of standards for any honors courses.
3. Availability of honors courses in small school systems versus large school districts.
4. Role of community colleges and universities in offering honors courses that would count as meeting high school graduation requirements.
5. Exclusion of career-technical and some arts courses.
6. The requirements of offering a standard course as a condition for offering an honors course.

A common theme among all these studies is dissatisfaction with the current weighted point system. Another point of contention is the lack of standards for the 300+ high school courses eligible for honors credit. (Note: Some arts courses have established standards.)

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Options for Addressing Weighted Quality Points

Overview

Different options for weighted quality points have been discussed with student council groups, local boards of education representatives, Superintendents' Advisory Council, central office leaders, local superintendents, and the Weighted Quality Points Committee.

Proposals

As a result of feedback from these different groups, options have narrowed to the following proposals:

Proposal 1. Award an extra weighted quality point to AP/IB only and require students to take the AP test.

Proposal 2. Award an extra weighted quality point to AP/IB only without requiring the AP test.

Proposal 3. Award two extra weighted quality points to AP/IB courses and one extra weighted quality point to the minimum courses required for university admission.

Proposal 4. Award two extra quality points to AP/IB courses and require students to take the AP test. Award one extra weighted quality point to the minimum courses required for university admission.

Proposal 5. Same as #3, but add two arts education courses as being eligible for honors credit.

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Options for Addressing Weighted Quality Points, con't.

Feedback about Proposals

Feedback from the various groups is reflected in the pros and cons for each proposal.

Proposal 1. Award an extra weighted quality point to AP/IB only and require students to take the AP test.

Proposal 2. Award an extra weighted quality point to AP/IB only without requiring the AP test.

Pros

- Provide standard for performance.
- Specify exactly what courses are eligible for weighting.
- Have major support from the Weighted Quality Points Committee.
- Have substantial support from representatives of the local boards of education, Superintendents' Advisory Committee.
- Treat courses in community colleges, universities, and high schools in the same manner.
- Have support from private universities.
- Minimize students taking courses just to enhance GPAs.

Cons

- Test results not available until July of each year (Proposal #1).
- Costs for students from middle and upper income students (Proposal #1).
- Students' belief that weight should not depend solely on one grade (Proposal #1).
- AP courses typically not available until 11th grade.

Note: Proposal 1 has support from the Community College System President.

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Options for Addressing Weighted Quality Points, con't.

Proposal 3. Award two extra weighted quality points to AP/IB courses and one extra weighted quality point to the minimum courses required for university admission.

Pros

- Narrows number of courses eligible for honors, thereby minimizing inequities.
- Allows DPI to develop standards for 18 honors courses.
- Minimizes inequity between large and small districts.
- Aligns honors courses with minimum course requirements for university admission.
- Treats electives in all subjects the same (English, social studies, second languages, arts, career-technical education, JROTC, science, and mathematics).
- Has support from student council representatives, central office staff, and some local boards of education representatives.
- Makes GPAs more meaningful when reviewed by postsecondary institutions.
- Makes explanation of weighted system easier to explain and interpret.

Cons

- Lacks support from some arts education and other elective areas.
- May lack support from community college system.

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Options for Addressing Weighted Quality Points, con't.

Proposal 4. Award two extra quality points to AP/IB courses and require students to take the AP test. Award one extra weighted quality point to the minimum courses required for university admission.

Pros

- Provides standard for performance
- Specifies exactly what courses are eligible for weighting
- Treats courses at community colleges, universities, and high schools in the same manner

Cons

- Costs for students from middle and upper income families (Federal funds are available for students from low income families.)

Proposal 5. Same as #3, but add two arts education courses as being eligible for honors credit.

Pros

- Same as #3.
- Is acceptable to the public university system.
- Has support of some arts educators.

Cons

- Allows one elective area to receive weighted credit, while other areas would not have opportunity.
- Confuses issue about the treatment of arts courses offered through community college programs.
- Does not treat all electives in the same way.
- Lacks support from the Community College System.

Common Views

In all discussions, people agree that

- the current system is not serving high schools well.
- the list of eligible courses should be narrowed.
- lead time to implement any change should be sufficient to accommodate student scheduling and SIMS/NCWISE adjustments.

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Recommendations from the State Board of Education The State Board of Education is discussing and continuing to address the weighted quality point issue. A goal is to reach agreement among the institutions of higher education; therefore, the State Board will finalize recommendations in March and April 2004 after more discussions with the entities having the statutory authority to make changes in the current system.

The State Board of Education believes that high school students and public school personnel must understand how the Community College System and University of North Carolina System view college courses as admission decisions are made. This effort must involve public schools, community colleges, and public and private universities.
