

NPS High School GPA Committee Findings and Summary Decisions

As you may remember, during Spring of 2020, a joint Newton North and Newton South High School GPA Committee assembled with the task of examining how to report students' academic profiles on their transcripts due to the impact the pandemic has had on grades and the changing landscape with higher education admissions processes.

The Committee included:

Newton North:

Beth Swederskas, Director of Counseling (Co-Chair)
Pat Manning, School Counselor
Nancy Decoteau, School Counselor
Jillian Hall, College and Career Counselor
Melissa Hanenberger, College and Career Counselor
Henry Turner, Principal
Amy Winston, Vice Principal

Newton South:

Dan Rubin, Director of Counseling (Co-Chair)
Donna Segal, School Counselor
Kathy Sabet, College and Career Counselor
Hae-Kyung Choi, School Counselor
Mark Aronson, Interim Principal
Chris Hardiman, Interim Vice Principal

The Committee was specifically responsible for the following:

- Determine how to proceed in calculating and reporting GPAs for the Class of 2020 (due to the change in learning model as a result of Covid-19)
- Examine how colleges use GPAs in their admissions process so as to inform future reporting of GPAs
- Determine GPA calculation for NNHS and NSHS students starting with the Class of 2021.

To guide the discussions, the GPA Committee surveyed colleges and similar high schools to ascertain anticipated practices for pandemic admissions, but to also ask questions relative to typical circumstances. If you would like to review the GPA Committee survey results, the complete report is [HERE](#).

With this information, in November the committee determined the method for calculating the GPA for the Class of 2021 for college applications through January 15th. The work of the committee has continued in order to consider the impact of the grade changes in the 19-20 school year as well as the 20-21 school year. Given the pandemic and the changes made last year and this year, the committee has determined there are four different grading systems that need to be incorporated into the GPA when

including an anticipated grade system change for next year. You can find more information about how NPS is monitoring and addressing the grading system at the bottom of this report.

Below you will find a description of the changes to GPA calculation, which were informed by the work of the NPS GPA Committee.

Rationale for Changes to GPA Calculation

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the changing landscape of the college application process requires Newton North and South to make changes to how GPA is calculated. The summary below provides a description of the changes to the high school transcript for both high schools broken down by graduating class. These decisions were made based upon the following objectives:

- Summarize the student's academic experience in the clearest manner possible
- Respond to feedback from colleges and universities about the preferred format for GPA calculations at this time
- Adhere to the the district values of equity and excellence

As a result, some of these decisions are a response to changes in the grading system and some are a response to the college survey report.

It is important to keep in mind that the high school GPA calculation serves the purpose of helping students to understand their performance in high school and to provide clarity to colleges and universities about the student's grades. Currently, high schools across the country present their students' grades and calculate GPA in different manners, and we heard the feedback from colleges that they often have to recalculate GPA in their own way as a result. To underscore this point, in our own district, Newton North and Newton South have historically calculated GPAs differently using slightly different formulas and leaving out the ninth-grade grades.

Summary of Decisions made as a result of the GPA Committee's recommendations:

As a result of this joint GPA Committee's work, the following decisions have been made regarding the calculation and reporting of GPAs. There are four areas of impact:

- GPA Calculation in Response to 20-21 Grade System
- GPA Presentation on the Transcript
- Ninth grade GPA
- Unweighted vs. Weighted GPA

Attached to this report are more detailed descriptions about how these decisions will be reflected for each grade. Additionally, sample transcripts with these changes will be shared with you soon.

GPA Calculation in Response to 20-21 grade system

- The 20-21 school year grades will contribute to GPA calculations based on the following unweighted scale:

- A = 4.0
- B = 3.0
- P = 2.0
- NG = 1.0

GPA presentation on the transcript

Yearly GPA calculation will appear on the transcript instead of cumulative GPA. This structure will provide clarity for colleges as it allows for the different grade systems over the last few years to be accurately represented. Additionally, this new structure will benefit students in the following ways:

- Most students show progress over four years. This new format allows colleges to see student progress.
- This new format provides a more accurate description of a student’s experience as it pertains to each year and each grading system.

Ninth grade GPA

It has been policy for NNHS and NSHS to not include grades from 9th grade in cumulative GPA calculations. The rationale behind this custom was to allow students to transition without the stress of worrying about GPA. However, in our research with colleges, it is clear that all colleges do include 9th grade grades in their GPA recalculation. The Committee felt that it was important to include 9th grade in the GPA to provide students with a more realistic perspective on how their transcripts will be evaluated in the college admissions process.

As a result we will begin calculating GPA for 9th graders beginning with the Class of 2024. In alignment with previous practice, students will not receive their first GPA calculations until after the first semester of their Junior year.

Unweighted vs Weighted GPA

The high school transcript at NSHS and NNHS will report yearly GPAs unweighted. **We will no longer report a weighted GPA.** It is clear that colleges recalculate weighted GPA based on their own set criteria. Therefore, the Newton North and South weighted calculations serve mainly for informational purposes for students. Furthermore, the vast majority of 9th grade classes are ACP. Therefore, including a weighted GPA based while including 9th grade grades will hurt student GPA calculations. Finally, the disruption caused by the pandemic, forcing us to change grading systems and course recommendation processes for different school years, makes weighted GPA less reliable and accurate.

Impact of GPA Decisions on Current NNHS and NSHS Students

More detailed information for each grade is [attached](#) to this report. Examples of how GPA will appear on the transcript will be shared soon.

Current Seniors (2021)	<p>Currently have two GPAs: cumulative weighted GPA (5.0) and cumulative unweighted GPA (4.0). Weighted and Unweighted GPAs include grades from grades 10 and 11.</p> <p>After first semester of Senior year:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Additionally, calculate a specific GPA for fall grades of
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	<p>senior year, based on the new grading system.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● This senior year GPA will be unweighted (4.0). ● The mid-year transcript will include three GPAs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Grades 10-11, weighted (5.0) ○ Grades 10-11, unweighted (4.0) ○ Grade 12, terms 1 and 2, unweighted (4.0), based on new grading system
Current Juniors (2022)	<p>The following will be calculated and shared after first semester:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Grade 10, weighted (5.0) ● Grade 10, unweighted (4.0) ● Grade 11, in-progress, unweighted (4.0), based on new grading system
Current Sophomores (2023)	<p>Will earn a Grade 10 GPA. This is an unweighted GPA. It will not be published/shared/reported until January of Junior Year.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Going forward, an unweighted GPA is calculated each year. By the time of graduation, there will be three GPAs, one for each year, grades 10, 11, 12.
Current Freshmen (2024) and beyond.	<p>Will earn a Grade 9 GPA. This is an unweighted GPA. It will not be published/shared/reported until January of Junior Year.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Going forward, an unweighted GPA is calculated each year. By the time of graduation, there will be four GPAs, one for each year, grades 9, 10, 11, 12.

The Newton North and South Joint GPA Committee will reconvene to monitor these decisions and make any necessary changes.

Grade System Changes

To examine the future of grades in the district as a whole, we plan to establish a separate Grading Committee to determine the grading system for the 21-22 school year for grades 6-12 in Newton. It is important to note that Newton’s proactive approach in the summer and fall to revise our grading practices helped us to prevent a significant increase in low grades (namely D's and F's)--a crisis schools around the country are experiencing. If you haven't had a chance, these two articles show how schools around the country are experiencing an increase of D's and F's during this year:

- <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2020/12/06/more-students-than-ever-got-fs-first-term-2020-21-school-year-are-a-f-grades-fair-pandemic/>
- <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/12/06/nation/schools-confront-off-rails-numbers-failing-grades/>

A recent analysis of our high school grades for the first term in Newton showed that contrary to the national trends, students at NNHS and NSHS fared much better. Student grades are a result of many reasons, namely student work as well as strong instruction and support. However, our analysis showed that our revised grading system helped to prevent an increase in low grades for students as well.