

### Recognizing the Value of Accelerated Classes

Citizens For Education met with Joy McClendon, Director of Elementary Education/Curriculum, and Barry Desko, Director of Secondary Education, to discuss the rigor levels of courses in the two high schools. Currently, there are five different levels of classes given at the high schools (AP, Honors, Accelerated, Academic and Foundations), although not for all subjects, and not at every grade level.

Beginning with this year's sophomore class, the class of 2012, different weights are assigned to the grades earned in those classes, creating a weighted GPA. Below is a chart detailing how the weighted GPA is calculated for all letter grades.

Level	A	B	C	D	F
AP	4.8	4.3	3.3	1.8	0
Honors	4.5	4.0	3.0	1.5	0
Accelerated, Academic, Foundations	4.0	3.0	2.0	1.0	0

The vast majority of students are enrolled in either Academic, Accelerated or Honors/AP classes. Foundations, according to the Program Planning Guide, is one of the "alternative programs for regular and special education," and, on average, about 7.5% of the high school population is enrolled in these classes. Below is a chart detailing the number of classroom sections currently offered in the high schools, broken down by course rigor (for purposes of this article, Honors and AP classes have been grouped together).

School/Year	Academic		Accelerated		Honors/AP		Total
South 09-10	119	37%	108	34%	93	29%	320
North 09-10	128	36%	118	33%	114	32%	360

Historically, and as can be seen above, these three levels of classes have been nearly equally populated. It is a strong statement about the quality of the Council Rock School District that it recognizes the need to have three different tracks in many subject areas, allowing students the opportunity to learn with their peers at a challenging and appropriate level. With a total graduating class of over 1,000 students each year between the two high schools, the district doesn't limit choices that could lead to a student taking a class either above or below their academic comfort level.

It is interesting to note, however, that Academic and Accelerated classes, while having different rubrics and work expectations, are equally weighted. According to Mrs. McClendon and Mr. Desko, several aspects were considered two years ago, when the change to a weighted GPA was approved, including the following points:

- The primary function of the grading and weighting systems is for the college entry process. Council Rock wanted to be competitive with other schools that weight GPAs, which is a current trend among many high schools.
- Many other schools do not have an "accelerated" track. Council Rock provides an explanatory paragraph about this level in its profile, which is part of every student's transcript packet when applying to college. The administrators believe that by virtue of the delineation, colleges will recognize the increased degree of rigor, without the need

for an additional weight to be placed on the grade itself. Council Rock also does not offer Accelerated courses in every subject at every grade level and some Accelerated classes are not named as such.

Under the new grading system, counselors will be reporting only the weighted GPA to colleges, not attached to a "maximum" GPA. Instead of a class rank, the GPA will be divided into 10 percentage areas called deciles. A chart in the profile will show what GPA range is associated with each decile. It will be up to the colleges to determine in which 10% segment each student falls.

One concern about not weighting Accelerated classes differently from Academic classes is that students will "play the system" – taking an Academic class instead of an Accelerated class because there is no perceived advantage to taking an Accelerated course, while there is a risk of getting a lower grade in the Accelerated class. As a result, students could begin choosing courses less rigorous than their abilities in greater and greater numbers. Since the program has only been in effect for two years, it is too early to recognize any emerging trends.

A larger concern is that a student in Accelerated courses, doing work at a higher level of rigor, but receiving even one lower grade than their Academic counterpart, could end up with a GPA lower than the student in Academic level classes, where the course rigor is not as demanding. That student could also be in a lower decile that is reported to colleges.

Regardless of the college-motivated influences, students should be recognized for work performed. If the expectations of students in an accelerated class are consistently higher, sometimes even using the same textbook as honors classes, they should be rewarded for that increased level of expectation. **To fully recognize the additional work done by students in Accelerated classes, Citizens For Education recommends that the administration and School Board reconsider the current policy and assign a higher weight to Accelerated classes, above Academic and below the Honors level.**