



SHOREVIEW PRESS > NEWS

Mounds View School District makes class rank optional

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SHOREVIEW — Mounds View and Irondale High School student transcripts no longer will automatically list a class rank.

The Mounds View School District School Board last week approved a proposal to make class rank voluntary. Starting with the class of 2011, students will have to file a request to have their rank listed on their transcript.

The change was spurred by concerns that rank isn't always a fair measure of student performance. At high schools where a large number of students are high performers, class rank often comes down to minute differences in grade point average. At Mounds View High School this year, the top student had a perfect GPA of 12 while the student with a GPA of 11 was ranked 91.

"It really does become a distinction without a difference and I don't think that is healthy or meaningful in high schools like Irondale and Mounds View," said board Chairman Jon Tynjala.

For the mid-ranked students, their ranking could be a hindrance when applying to colleges. Most colleges don't require a ranking but will consider it as a factor if it is provided.

Julie Zimmerman, a North Oaks parent of a recent graduate, told the board she believe rank also doesn't fully acknowledge the rigor of the courses the students have taken. Along with eliminating class rank, she encouraged the board to redesign the district's weighted grade system.

"Class rank needs to be dropped until it can be calculated in a way that accurately reflects today's differentiated class schedules," Zimmerman said.

Parent Glen Shuldes of Shoreview expressed concern that elimination of rank would be a detriment for the top students.

"The top kids really deserve to be recognized somehow," he said.

When the board discussed the topic last month, the high school administrators proposed fully eliminating class rank. After focus groups with parents and students, the principals said the consensus was to allow students to file a request through their dean to keep their rank listed on their transcript. Board members concurred.

"We would not want to eliminate it as an option because we then might really be limiting our students in ways we certainly wouldn't intend to do," Tynjala said.

The high school principals next will bring the board recommendations on revising the honor student recognition programs, some of which currently are based at least partially on class rank.

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