

D-99 weighs changes to rank, AP grade weight

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DOWNERS GROVE – Some students in Community High School District 99 may benefit from a pair of changes the Board of Education is considering.

The board weighed the elimination of class rank in college transcripts and giving D grades a weighted benefit in AP and honors classes when calculating grade point averages.

Superintendent Hank Thiele said he and district staff believe the ranking system often hurts more than it helps.

“In high schools our size, rank tends to hold our students back more than it pushes them forward,” he said. “It’s just a numbers game. Our 50th best student might be better than the third best student at another school.”

According to board documents, the district determined class rank was no longer a significant factor in the college admission process and could even negatively impact students when applying to college, leading many schools across the country to drop it entirely from transcripts.

It also can lead to students focusing more on class rank instead of educational opportunities and interests.

The district also determined that a

number of area schools have eliminated reporting class rank and said doing so has not negatively impacted their students.

Thiele said the district still would find more constructive ways to honor its students who do well in the classroom outside of class rank.

“This is a long time coming and the rationale is terrific,” board member Mike Davenport said. “I’m 110 percent behind this.”

Thiele said the weighing of D grades in AP and honors courses can help curb punishing students who want to stretch themselves and try higher level class work. Those who make it to that level, even if they aren’t able to get higher grades, still learn invaluable study skills, he said.

“A student that stretches and passes and gets that D has stretched themselves,” he said. “We shouldn’t penalize them for that. Because now they can operate at that level and in the future they should be able to continue at that level and grow at that level.”

As more students beyond usual A and B students enroll in advanced coursework, policies should reflect changes in what students are getting out of the experience, he added.

Gina Ziccardi, assistant superinten-

dent for student learning, said students currently get an additional grade point for receiving A through C grades.

She said the district continues to see higher and higher enrollment numbers in those higher level courses, and said teachers and staff have seen students decline those opportunities out of fear of poor grades.

Ziccardi said the rigor of the honors and AP courses “far exceeds” the regular level course, and only around 3 percent of students taking those classes receive a D grade. The district also employs a number of resources and intervention tactics, although some still don’t make it.

“We don’t just let the student give up,” she said. “Part of what we value here is that perseverance.”

The 23 of 41 area school districts surveyed already weigh D grades, Ziccardi said, while a few only weigh A and Bs.

Davenport said he didn’t even realize the district wasn’t already weighing D grades, calling it “unfair” and “unfortunate.”

“The deal is that by taking on the challenge, there’s a reward there for the effort,” he said.

Both changes will be considered in a future board meeting for formal voting.