



## Moving Beyond Class Rank

Beginning with the 2020-21 school year, as with many schools throughout the nation, Bellingham Public Schools will no longer calculate class rank and will no longer record or share high school class rank on transcripts or with institutions of higher learning.

Class rank for high school students has been a longstanding tradition at many schools but provides little in the way of assessing student achievement. The class ranking model also contributes to peer competition and an unhealthy educational environment where we compare students *against* each other. No two students take all the same classes throughout their four years of high school. Last year, our district had over 50 students that qualified as “first in their class,” regardless of the combination of classes they took or what challenge their course load posed for them.

Framed in another light, at some schools, a student with even one A- in their grade point average did not mathematically land in the top 10% of their class.

Education is collaborative, not competitive; however, class rank contributes to anxiety and competition between students. It can also be inaccurate. Most colleges would consider a GPA of 3.5 to show excellent academic preparedness for college; however, a student with a GPA of 3.5 could be “ranked” in the bottom half of their classes, particularly if they are a part of community of learners committed to excellence.

Our district work in the area of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion clearly highlights the fact that not all students come to school with the same advantages, disadvantages or context for their academic achievement. It has been an unfortunate tradition that the systems within American schools are set up in ways that favor certain demographics. In addition, with our district decision in Spring 2020, based on state guidance, that all students receive ‘A’ grades or ‘I’ grades during the COVID closure, this brings up even more questions about a ranking scale.

Colleges and universities are well-versed in each of the variables above and understand that a student’s transcript, academic rigor of selected courses and grade point average speak for themselves as more compelling indicators of their readiness for the next steps in their learning. For more information and a sense of how class rank does or does not impact college admissions, please see [this report from the National Association For College Admission Counseling](#).

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