

The Georgia Student Finance Commission

Presents

A Fact Sheet Regarding HOPE Scholarship Changes for 2007

The standards for calculating the HOPE scholarship qualifying grade point average were changed in the 2004 session of the Georgia General Assembly. The new standards reflected in [O.C.G.A. §20-2-157](#) were largely taken from recommendations made by a Joint Study Commission on HOPE that met during the summer and fall of 2003. A summary of the most significant changes to the HOPE program follows.

Who is affected by the new standard?

The new standard for the calculation of HOPE scholarship qualifying grade point averages and subsequent determination of scholarship eligibility affects every Georgia student (public and private) in the graduating class of 2007 and those who graduated earlier but do not start a college career until May 1, 2007 or later.

What was the old standard and how was it calculated?

Prior to the 2006-2007 academic year, public and private high schools calculated summary grade point averages for graduating seniors and transmitted the list of HOPE scholarship eligible students to the Georgia Student Finance Commission in February (preliminary list) and in June (final list). In making these calculations, local schools counted only the highest grades for the required number of course credits in the areas of English, mathematics, science, social studies, and foreign language (for college preparatory only). Schools weighted grades as they deemed appropriate. Further, they could use a numeric (0-100) or a 4.0 scale to report (A=4, B=3, etc.) grades. If a student received a college preparatory diploma, the scholarship eligibility standard was 3.0 on a 4.0 scale or 80 on a numeric scale. If the student received a diploma type that was not college preparatory, the scholarship eligibility standard was 3.2 on a 4.0 scale or 85 on a numeric scale.

Why was the standard changed, and when is the change effective?

The Joint Study Commission in 2003 found shortcomings in the old HOPE scholarship eligibility standard. Locally determined and imposed weighting values for Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), and Honors courses resulted in unintended but very uneven and inherently inequitable access to the scholarship across the state. Omitting failed grades from the computation of grade point averages contributed to inflation of reported grade point averages for HOPE qualifying purposes. Consequently, freshmen applicants to college with grade point averages below 2.0 by Board of Regents grade point average calculation standards were qualifying for the HOPE scholarship despite the nominal “B” average requirement. Because the old scholarship eligibility standard was judged deficient in achieving its intended purpose of identifying “B” average students, the General Assembly adopted a new standard in 2004 that went into effect for the graduating class of 2007.

What is the new HOPE scholarship eligibility standard and how will it be calculated?

The new HOPE scholarship eligibility standard became law while the members of the graduating class of 2007 were high school freshmen. The new standard was covered extensively by the media in 2003 and 2004 and was debated by the General Assembly prior to passage in the 2004 legislative session. All schools, public and private, that had previously participated in the HOPE scholarship program were notified of the change by the Georgia Student Finance Commission (GSFC) when the new standard was signed into law in April of 2004.

Under the new scholarship eligibility standard, schools will no longer be required to calculate grade point averages but will transmit transcript and grading scale data for all seniors to the GSFC. As required by law, all high school attempted grades must be reported, whether or not credit was earned. GSFC will calculate student eligibility for the HOPE scholarship using **un-weighted** grades and will apply a 3.0 scholarship eligibility standard for college preparatory students and a 3.2 scholarship eligibility standard for students receiving other diploma types, both on a true 4.0 scale (no grades regardless of weighting will exceed 4.0). Earned Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) course grades will be un-weighted by GSFC, if weighted by the local school, and then uniform weights will be added by the GSFC to these courses before GSFC calculates each student's grade point average. Note that only courses for which a grade was earned will be counted in the GPA calculation, thus "incomplete" or "withdrawn" courses will not be considered.

High schools will be given reports that list both eligible and ineligible students (based solely on grade point averages) after the preliminary calculation in February in order to correct any mistakes in data. When students graduate, final HOPE scholarship eligibility will be determined based on the student's completed high school academic record and a revised list of students eligible for the scholarship will be made available to colleges following review and approval by the high schools.

Why were Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses weighted? Why were Honors courses not weighted?

AP and IB courses are linked to standards established by independent organizations at the national level. Both AP and IB require teachers to be trained in the curriculum standards of the courses they teach. Both AP and IB provide standardized tests designed to measure subject mastery. These standardized tests yield scores considered by colleges as part of the admissions process, and many of them award college course credits to students who perform well on them. Although scores on AP and IB tests are not used as a part of the student's course grade, these test scores do serve as a check on the assigned grades. That the rigor of these courses is well known is evidenced by the fact that colleges weighing freshman applicants for admission recognize the number of AP/IB courses taken by the student and often weight these courses when calculating applicant grade point averages.

Conversely, Honors courses are usually not weighted by colleges largely because the quality of these courses varies widely. As opposed to AP and IB courses, there are no standards for determining what categories of subjects can be taught as an Honors class. Further, there are no standards for determining appropriate course content, teacher training, or standardized testing for

Honors programs. Consequently, without a standard ensuring the quality of these courses, the General Assembly chose not to weight them.

How will local schools supply the transcript data to GSFC?

GACollege411.org is a web portal created by GSFC and education partners for the State of Georgia to help students plan, apply and pay for college. Xap Corporation is the vendor who has constructed this site for GSFC along the lines of successful sites in many other states including North Carolina, California, Colorado, and Kentucky. One feature of this portal is the transcript exchange process. This process allows local schools to send transcript data that is then housed in the GACollege411 transcript exchange database. The transcript exchange database will do two things: 1) It will provide GSFC with the data required to calculate grade point averages for HOPE scholarship purposes in the manner specified by law, and 2) It will permit students to release electronic transcripts to many Georgia colleges. The format for the transcript reports was developed jointly by representatives of the University System of Georgia, the Department of Technical and Adult Education, the Georgia Department of Education, and others.

GACollege411 offers students in Georgia the ability to explore career options, learn about Georgia colleges and their programs, apply online to Georgia colleges, and send their transcripts along with their applications to these colleges from a single integrated website. Students may also apply for student aid (scholarships, grants and loans) through the site. Schools and students may continue to send transcripts to colleges through other, more traditional mechanisms; however, the transcript exchange process will become the only mechanism for supplying data to GSFC to determine HOPE scholarship eligibility, as required by statute.

What assistance will local schools receive in complying with the new reporting process?

Schools will report data to GSFC electronically. For schools that use one of the commonly available student information systems, GSFC has been working with the software vendors to develop an automated means of extracting the relevant transcript information. Fortunately, the majority of students attend a school that uses one of these student information systems. For other schools that have unique or no electronic student information system, GSFC has developed a generic process into which schools can manually enter data. Instructions on how to prepare for both processes have been disseminated to all public and private schools in the state. Comprehensive details are available for downloading on the GACollege411.org website. In addition, dozens of presentations explaining the new transcript exchange process and HOPE grade point average calculation have been made and are ongoing to school groups, parent groups, counselors, information technology personnel, etc. Further, GSFC has field staff whose only mission is to provide direct hands-on training, testing and technical assistance to personnel at the 620 public and private high schools in the state who will be responsible for transmitting transcript data to GSFC.

Common misconceptions/misperceptions/questions about the transcript exchange and the HOPE grade point average calculation.

Will our school have to change its grading scale to conform to the new law?

No, the new method works with any existing public or private school grading scale.

My college preparatory student took Algebra in the eighth grade, not high school, so his grade in that course will not be used in calculating the high school grade point average for HOPE. Does this mean that my student must take a fourth mathematics course in high school in addition to the Algebra course?

No, the fact that the student is classified as college preparatory is enough to set the appropriate HOPE standard of 3.0. All coursework taken in high school in the areas of English, mathematics, science, social studies and foreign language courses will be included in the grade point average determination. Course numbers will identify these course types, although unlike the old HOPE standard, under the new standard there are no requirements as to a specific number of courses by subject type.

Won't the new HOPE calculation method make high schools stop weighting Honors courses and report only un-weighted grades for the student's transcript?

No, the new method will not change anything but the HOPE scholarship eligibility standard determination. Schools may continue to weight grades as they wish, and to report weighted grades as part of the transcript exchange process. All data provided by the high school will be reported to colleges through the transcript exchange process with no editing or alteration by GSFC. This includes grades, grade point averages, class rank, etc. The process of calculating the HOPE grade point average will not be reflected on the transcript itself.

Will parents be responsible for providing the grading scales for transfer students from their previous schools?

No, local schools are charged with awarding transfer credit to students, and the grades may be printed on the transcript. If the grading scales of the school providing the final transcript and the school from which the student transferred are different from one another, it is the responsibility of the school providing the final transcript to translate the grades to the school's own scale or to qualify that they should not be used in the student's grade point average calculation.

How will Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses in the core academic areas be identified?

All courses will be identified through the Georgia Department of Education's course numbering system. Private high schools will be required to equate their courses to courses on that list. The course names and numbers will not be altered on the transcript, but the course equation will be used in the grade point average calculation process.

This fact sheet can be accessed from the [Bulletin Board at GSFC's website](#) or on the [School Counselors section of the GAcollge411 website](#). Additional information will be added to the fact sheet as questions are received that are not addressed in the current version of the fact sheet. Individuals with questions may contact David Lee of the GSFC staff at 770-724-9011 or via email at davidl@gsfc.org.