



Research Brief

Advantages and disadvantages of weighted grading

Question: What are the advantages and disadvantages of weighted grading?

Summary of Findings: The primary purpose of weighted grading has been to encourage high school students to take more rigorous courses. This effort is then acknowledged by more weight being given to the grade for a specified class. There are numerous systems of weighted grading cited in the literature from a student determining which courses will be weighted, to honors, gifted and AP classes having different weights to only AP courses being weighted. From a study conducted in 2000 by Gail C. Downs, it was found that more than half of the nation's high schools use some form of a weighted grading system. From a perusal of some of the schools and districts that use weighted grading, research was conducted by them to determine what would best meet the needs of their students.

Major Findings and Conclusions:

Advantages:

1. More students take rigorous courses.
2. More challenging courses can be offered.
3. It increases a student's GPA.
4. Higher class rankings for those who take more demanding courses.
5. Students are more competitive with peers from other schools with weighted grading for first-choice and more elite college acceptance.
6. Better chance for students to receive more in scholarship monies.
7. More likelihood for students to have higher self-esteem

Disadvantages:

1. Lack of consistency from school to school as to what courses are weighted and how much they are weighted.
2. Not all courses, even honors and AP, are equally demanding.
3. It may send a message to those who are taking regular courses, that their work is not as highly valued as weighted classes, which may lower self-esteem and attempts to strive for high grades.
4. College admissions offices tend to look at the overall GPA and not if the grades had been weighted.
5. If a student is afraid of getting a low grade in a more rigorous course, he/she may opt to take a less demanding course in order to earn a higher grade.
6. Tracking of students could become more common.
7. Students at the lower academic end of the spectrum would not have equal opportunities to take a more engaging academic program.
8. Litigation by parents may occur if they believe the system is hindering their child(ren) from equal access to the curriculum.
9. Smaller schools have fewer opportunities to offer a wide array of weighted and non-weighted courses.



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10. Fine arts courses may not be taken because it is possible that a non-weighted grade will lower a student's GPA.

Online Resources:

- The Case for Weighting Grades and Waiving Classes for Gifted and Talented High School Students
Information collected from a small national sample on the concept of waiving classes is described, along with its advantages and disadvantages.
<http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/nrcgt/cognard.html>
- Weighted Grades Debated at Burnsville High School
The issues for students, especially when it comes to class rank and college admission were expressed in this article.
<http://www.thisweek-online.com/2004/January/23weightgrades.html>
- Weighted Grades for Tammy Brings Big Smiles
The three phase program to implement weighted grading in one school district in the southern part of the U.S. was described.
<http://www.slidellsentry.com/articles/2003/02/10/news/export11773.txt>
- Weighted Grading for Harrison District, Colorado Springs, CO
This is a brief description of the weighted grading system adopted by Harrison District. It lists how grades will be weighted and which courses will be weighted.
<http://www.harrison.k12.co.us/boe/policy/i/ika-r.html>

PDF file

- Downs, G. C. (June 2000). *Weighted grades: a conundrum for secondary schools*. University of Maine: Center for Research and Evaluation, 5766 Shibles Hall, Orono, ME 04469-5766.

This is a review of research conducted on the advantages and disadvantages of weighted grading. Programs from different schools were explained.

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