



HIGHLAND PARK

S C O T S

GPA Policy Change Summary

What changes have been made to the GPA Policy?

1. Beginning with the 2026-27 school year, all students will have more GPA exemptions available.

- 2 sophomore year (increased from 0)
- 2 junior year (increased from 1)
- 2 senior year (increased from 1)

Exemptions will now be available for visual arts and robotics, in addition to PE, athletics, performing arts, debate, and journalism. A list of eligible classes will be in the Academic Planning Guide for the 2026-27 school year.

There will no longer be prerequisites to be eligible for the exemptions (e.g. number of years of participation, minimum GPA, etc.).

As in the past, students may choose to have eligible classes counted in their GPA or excluded from their GPA but must make the choice prior to the start of the course. Students will be advised during course selection that taking a GPA exemption only helps those who have a GPA above 4.0. For students with a GPA below 4.0, taking a GPA exemption would likely lower their GPA. Regardless of whether a GPA exemption is taken or not, the grade earned in the course will be displayed on the student's transcript.

To aid students in making this decision, GPAs will now be reported at the conclusion of each semester beginning freshman year.

These changes are applicable beginning in the fall of 2026. There will be no changes to courses completed through the spring of 2026.

2. Beginning with the class of 2030, all students will be required to take at least two Category III (4.0) courses prior to senior year, and will be allowed to take up to a maximum number of Category I (AP and post-AP) courses per semester as follows:

- Freshman Year – maximum of 1 Category I course, with administrator approval
- Sophomore Year – maximum of 2 Category I courses
- Junior Year – maximum of 6 Category I courses
- Senior Year – maximum of 6 Category I courses

These parameters will not apply to students in the classes of 2026, 2027, 2028, or

2029. Why have these changes been made to the GPA policy?

HPISD's mission is to provide a "well-rounded education in academics, athletics, arts, and service" with a "balanced emphasis" across each. Students and parents, however, expressed concern that the previous GPA policy discouraged remaining involved in extracurricular activities such as athletics and fine arts due to the impact on GPA.

Parents and students also reported often making course decisions based primarily on GPA. Increasingly, selective colleges and programs (e.g. competitive majors at UT) want students who have taken courses aligned to their personal interests or intended major, rather than AP electives which merely boost GPA.

The changes aim to more closely align the GPA policy with HPISD's mission and provide students with more freedom to remain in extracurriculars/fine arts, explore electives and interests, and/or take a standard/honors elective in pursuit of personal interests or college and career goals without a significant disadvantage to GPA. These changes also will help cut back on "gaming" of the GPA system and provide a more level playing field for all students.

What research and input were gathered in crafting changes to the GPA policy?

Beginning in the fall of 2023, the policy committee of the Board of Trustees researched the GPA and academic policies of 5 peer public high schools and 6 peer private schools. The committee also received feedback regarding admissions criteria from 13

universities, including 9 of the 15 most common schools to which HPHS students apply, 4 additional rigorous schools to which HPHS students often apply, and outside college application advisors. In addition, the committee reviewed the HPHS Experience Survey results and sought additional feedback from parents representing approximately 60 HPHS students (past, present, and future) with varied academic goals who have also participated in athletics, performing arts, studio arts, robotics, academic teams, and more. Finally, the committee had extensive discussions with high school administrators over the last 18 months to understand the impact of possible changes and determine the best possible solutions.

Through this process, the committee confirmed rigor is a top consideration for all colleges, but they often recalculate GPA to remove weighting, exclude PE/Athletics, and sometimes even exclude all electives. Many colleges also value rigor in core curriculum (including foreign language) over a smattering of AP electives which merely boost GPA but do not relate to a student's personal interests or possible intended courses of study. Lastly, most colleges value continued participation in extracurricular activities and depth of involvement in students' interests.

The research also revealed that HPISD was an outlier in how it factored extracurricular activities into GPA calculations. Most peer schools allow students to exclude more credits

for PE/Athletics/Fine Arts than HPISD did, and/or they require all students to take a certain number of unweighted courses. Examples:

- Private schools such as St. Mark's, Hockaday, Jesuit, Ursuline, and ESD consider all athletics/PE courses pass/fail (not in GPA) or exclude them from course schedules.
- Eanes requires at least 5 unweighted credits, 3 prior to senior year.
- Lake Travis requires at least 4 unweighted courses, 3 prior to senior year. Students can also exclude up to 2 elective courses from GPA/rank.
- Lovejoy allows students to exclude up to 4 elective courses from GPA/rank.
- Alamo Heights bases GPA/rank only on core courses (excludes all elective courses and extracurricular activities).

Will the new Category I (AP and post-AP) parameters make HPHS students less competitive in college admissions? Do other schools have similar limitations?

First, colleges indicate they judge a student's academic rigor based on the options available to them. Each student's transcript is accompanied by a school profile which outlines what AP and post-AP courses were available, as well as any parameters in place. This report will explain the new parameters to colleges beginning with the class of 2030. (As a reminder, the new Category I parameters will not apply to students in the classes of 2026-2029.)

Secondly, because there is significant variability between high schools regarding calculation of GPA, class rank, course offerings, and caliber of students, colleges largely compare students against others from their own high school rather than against students from other schools. Since all HPHS students in a grade level will be under the same parameters, they will not be disadvantaged, and colleges will understand the differences between past HPHS applicants and those under new parameters through the school profile which accompanies each transcript.

Lastly, very few schools allow students to take more than the maximum number of college level classes allowed for HPHS students. Colleges typically limit students to no more than 18 credit hours per semester (equivalent of 6 classes). Most private high schools allow no more than 6 classes per semester and offer very few AP classes to underclassmen. Most high schools (public and private) also offer far fewer AP and post-AP classes than the 40 currently offered by HP. In addition, some similar public high schools limit AP and post-AP classes by requiring four to five unweighted classes during a student's high school career. A few examples are:

- St. Mark's – only 6 academic classes allowed per semester; only 2 APs available prior to junior year; only 25 AP/post-secondary classes offered, including only 1 in English and no WHAP
- Hockaday – only 6 academic classes allowed per semester; only 2 APs available prior to junior year; only 18 AP/post-secondary classes offered in total, with none in English
- Jesuit – only 6 academic classes allowed per semester in addition to theology class; only 2 APs available prior to junior year; offers 28 AP classes
- Cistercian – no AP classes offered
- Ursuline – only 6 academic classes allowed per semester in addition to theology class; only 3 APs available prior to junior year
- Eanes (Westlake) – GPA/Rank requires at least 5 unweighted courses, 3 prior

to senior year

- Lake Travis – GPA/Rank requires at least 4 unweighted courses, 3 prior to senior year

Will the new Category I (AP and post-AP) parameters hinder HPHS students who truly excel in certain subjects and want to take numerous advanced level classes?

First of all, very few students currently exceed the allowable number of Category I classes, so the new parameters do not represent a material change in access to rigorous courses for HPHS students.

Secondly, the proposed policy still allows students to take up to 15-16 AP/post-AP classes in high school, which is roughly half of all credits earned for high school graduation. Even most top private schools do not provide access to more advanced level classes.

These parameters provide ample opportunities for students to dive deeply into subjects in which they have special talents or interests, while also supporting overall student well being and giving students more freedom to continue with extracurriculars and/or explore other interests without a negative impact to their GPA.

What alternatives were considered?

The policy committee considered numerous alternative solutions and revised the proposal numerous times over the course of an 18-month evaluation in order to craft the best solution. Other options explored but not adopted included:

- Calculating GPA only on core classes or graduation requirements – This seemed a more radical change than was needed to achieve desired goals. It also could give students the false impression that only grades in core classes matter (despite all grades showing on transcripts), leading to reduced effort and rigor in non-core classes.
- Excluding all fine arts and PE/athletics from GPA – This also was explored at length in 2012 when exemptions were first put in place. Automatically excluding these classes would negatively impact students with GPAs below 4.0, while the option to exclude it negatively impacts no one. Parent and student preference for optional rather than automatic exclusion was clear both then and now.
- Requiring more unweighted (Category III) classes (1-2 per year), rather than

placing parameters around the allowable number of Category I classes – This idea was thoroughly explored but abandoned for several reasons.

- o Parents generally disliked the idea of forcing students to take a standard 4.0 class which they have no interest in and which would not be sufficiently challenging for some students. The two required 4.0 classes proposed in this policy can be satisfied through the students' one required fine art and one required PE credit, without students being forced to take other standard classes which are not a good fit.
- o Requiring more 4.0 classes could unintentionally incentivize students to take the standard version of a difficult core class as their required 4.0 class and an easier AP elective (rather than the more challenging core AP course and an easier 4.0 elective) to boost their GPA. Since colleges often value rigor in core classes over AP Electives which are known to be less rigorous, incentivizing such a tradeoff could be to students' disadvantage.
- o Requiring more 4.0 classes would further reduce GPA for some students. Instead, limiting the number of AP courses allows students to participate in an extracurricular activity (with a GPA exemption if desired) or take a study hall or non-credit course as their 7th course with no effect on GPA.