Memo

**RE:** Reasoning for Adjusting Dallas ISD Board Policy Regarding Class Rank

**Applicable Policy:** EIC (Local), Page 1 – 3

**Goal:** Modify board policy to allow high schools to determine whether or not to rank all of their students. High schools could continue to rank students based on the current formula, or they could opt to not rank students. Schools that chose not to rank students would provide those graduating in what would be the top 10% of their class with a certificate in order for them to still gain automatic admission to state colleges.

**Reasoning:**

Currently, Dallas ISD Board Policy mandates that all high schools must rank students beginning in their junior year and carrying through to who graduates. Forcing high schools to rank *disadvantages all students in any high school (comprehensive or otherwise),* who fall outside of the top 10% or 25% of their class.

**A student at any Dallas ISD high school who does not fall in the top 10% or top 25% of their class is automatically disadvantaged by their class rank.** Allowing high schools the option to forgo ranking their students would give these students the opportunity to apply and to be considered for colleges based on their own merits and accomplishments and not automatically discounted because of their class rank. When a student does not have a class rank on his or her transcript, college admissions officers place more emphasis on that student’s test scores, GPA, curricular rigor, and essays – all of which say more about a student than class rank.

Some specific educational and pedagogical reasons for eliminating class rank are as follows:

1. **College Admissions** – Many colleges, especially larger state institutions, use formulas as a major factor for determining which students are accepted. Often times, students who do not fall in the top 10 – 25% of their class are put at a major disadvantage in applying to these schools, even if the student is academically qualified and a great fit. Many smaller, private colleges do not look at rank, realizing that it is not a true measure of a student’s potential. For example, a Dallas ISD student last year was accepted to MIT but declined from UT-Arlington because he was in the second quartile of his class.
2. **Allows more focus on learning, less focus on “Playing the Ranking Game”** – Currently, students interested in college must spend a lot of time focusing on “getting the grades” or trying to game the system in order to get the highest rank in their class. This includes strategies such as taking certain classes online so that they can load school schedules with heavier weighted courses or transferring to different schools during their junior or senior year. On top of this, it forces students to prioritize their grades alone, rather than mastery of the content. We know that grades do a poor job of mimicking mastery, hence the move towards standards based grading and other competency based systems. Without class rank, the incentives for students would shift to a focus on mastery and learning instead of grade points and rank.
3. **Increases Equity for Students of All Backgrounds:** Students who have means to pay for online and/or correspondence courses such as PE and Health, are no longer at an advantage over equally qualified students who do not have those same means. Affluent students have been able to take PE, Health, and other non-weighted courses outside of school in order to allow them to take heavier weighted courses at school. This results in those students earning higher rank than students who have had to take PE, Health, and other non-weighted courses at the school.

**Conclusion:**

Simply speaking, there is no reason why Dallas ISD should still be mandating the ranking of all high school students. We are lagging other schools and districts when it comes to class ranking and it is impacting our students’ abilities to attend college.

Wildly successful high schools across the state and nation do not rank their students for the reasons mentioned above. These schools and districts includes Highland Park ISD, charter school networks focused on college readiness (including BASIS Schools, Uplift Education, KIPP, Achievement First, etc.), and most private schools such as Hockaday and Parish Episcopal.

As Dallas ISD moves towards Destination 2020 and the ideal of preparing all students for college and career readiness, it is imperative that board policy moves to enable the achievement of this goal rather than hindering it. Giving high schools the option of ranking their students, rather than mandating it, will go a long way towards giving our schools the tools necessary to reach this vision.

**KEY POINTS TO STRESS FOR BOARD MEMBERS:**

* Giving schools the option whether to rank students, increases students’ chances of getting into colleges when the student is not in the top quartile of their class. This benefits students **FROM ALL SCHOOLS**.
* This option will NOT have a negative impact on students who receive automatic admissions into colleges by the Texas 10% rule. Those students still receive their 10% designation.
* As DISD strives to send more students out college and career ready, giving schools the option to determine whether or not they rank all of their students is a logical next step. The most successful schools and districts have already moved away from it.
* Schools not ranking allows for more equitability for students; students without means to “play the ranking game” are no longer at a disadvantage against students who can “game” the system.
* Students can focus on learning, not grades and rankings; collaborating, not competing.