

Report to the School Committee Hingham High School Class Rank

Presented by
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After much research, discussion, and reflection, the School Counseling Department at Hingham High School will make several recommendations to the School Committee regarding class rank and related policies. The Director of School Counseling has compiled this report over the past eighteen months based on information gathered from parents, students, high school guidance/counseling department directors, and college and university admissions representatives. In order for parents, students, school committee members, staff, and administration to fully understand the scope of class rank, the report is presented in a question-and-answer format. Specific recommendations to the School Committee may be found at the end of the report.

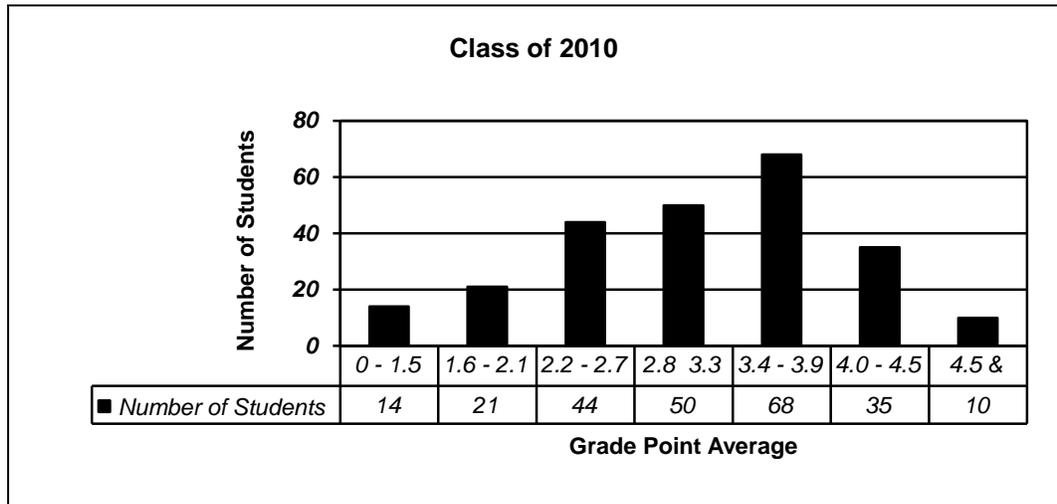
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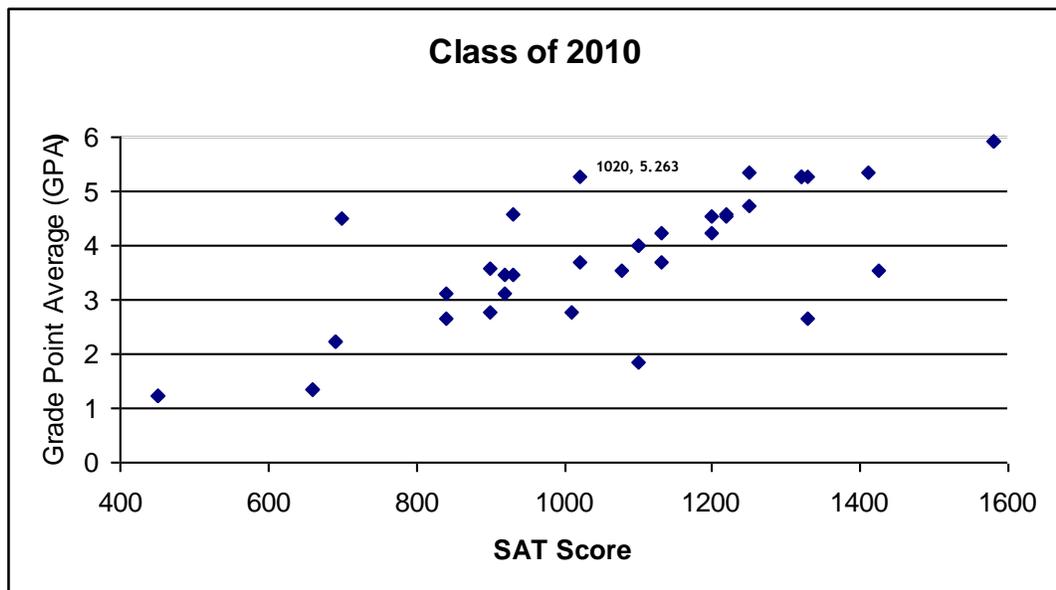
Committee Members Making Specific Contributions to the Discussion of Class Rank
Meredith Eastman, school counselor
Ellen Marshall, parent
William O'Donnell, parent
Helaine Silva, English teacher
Judy Williams, parent

Q: What is class rank? Class rank is nothing more than the distribution of student grade point averages (GPAs) from highest in a group to lowest in a group. Class rank can be reported in many different ways, but the four most common ways are explained below:

1. Class rank can be reported as a specific number, reflective of where a student stands relative to other students in that class. The student with the highest GPA is the number one student in the class. Students with identical GPAs are assigned the exact same rank. Examples of this most common way of ranking students include #104 out of 215 students or #22 out of 231 students.
2. Class rank can also be reported by decile or by tenth of the class. That is, students in the top 10% of the class are in the first decile while students in the top 30% are in the 3rd decile. In a class of 231 students, those ranked 1-23 are in the 1st decile (top 10%); those who are ranked between 24-46 are in the 2nd decile (top 20%); etc.
3. Class rank is sometimes reported in a bar graph as illustrated below. Bar graphs provide a visual rank range without assigning an exact number.



4. Class rank can be reported as part of a scattergram. In this manner, the admissions office can determine a student's class rank, GPA score, and SAT scores as compared to others in the class all in one chart. Scattergrams visually demonstrate the difference among top students.



Q: What is Hingham High School's current class rank policy? Students' class rank is based on a weighted grade point average according to the table below. That is, students taking level 2 (honors/advanced) courses have the opportunity to score more points toward their GPA than students who are taking level 3 (upper standard/college prep) courses. Class rank is calculated for the first time at the end of the fifth semester (middle of junior year). It is recalculated at the end of the sixth semester (end of junior year), seventh semester (middle of senior year), and eighth semester (end of senior year). All leveled courses in grades 9 - 12 are counted towards a student's GPA.

Hingham currently reports class rank to colleges and universities in two different ways. First, a specific class rank appears on the student's transcript. In addition, the Hingham High School profile that is included with each student's transcript includes a bar graph similar to the one above.

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Grade	Advanced Placement	Honors/Advanced	Upper Standard/College Prep	Standard
A+	7.3	6.3	5.3	4.3
A	7.0	6.0	5.0	4.0
A-	6.7	5.7	4.7	3.7
B+	6.3	5.3	4.3	3.3
B	6.0	5.0	4.0	3.0
B-	5.7	4.7	3.7	2.7
C+	5.3	4.3	3.3	2.3
C	5.0	4.0	3.0	2.0
C-	4.7	3.7	2.7	1.7
D+	4.3	3.3	2.3	1.3
D	4.0	3.0	2.0	1.0
D-	3.7	2.7	1.7	0.7
F	0	0	0	0

Q: Students at Hingham High School do very well when applying to colleges. Why make any changes? Class rank becomes a problem because of its frequent misuse. Class rank compares students from the same school to each other. When class rank is used to compare students from one school to another, however, it makes a basic assumption that all schools are equal in terms of demands and student performance. Colleges and universities use class rank to compare students from one school to students from other high schools. Although the comparison may be to similar schools, it is also often used to compare schools radically different from one another. A student in the top half of the class at one school might easily be in the top 20% of another and vice versa. Students from schools like Hingham High School can have a lower rank than students from a comparison high school, even though their academic records would show that the Hingham High School student has a much stronger program of studies and school record.

While class rank does not automatically admit a student to a particular college or university, it can automatically eliminate a student from consideration. For example, the Director of Admissions at UMass Amherst has bluntly stated that they will only consider those students whose class rank is in the top 50%--regardless of what high school a student attends. If a student's rank is lower than 50%, that student is automatically eliminated from consideration. The Director of UMass Amherst has specifically told the School Counseling Department at Hingham High School that it would benefit our students if they did not report class rank to the admissions department.

Equally important *School Leader* reported, "if a school does not officially report class rank, then the college cannot and does not include that student in the class rank statistics reported to *U.S. News and World Report*, or to any other rating services. The fact is that if a student applies from a high school which does not report class rank, that student does not have a statistical impact on the college's academic rating statistics as they pertain to class rank (regardless of where a student would have been ranked). This strongly suggests that there is greater admission flexibility available to student applicants from high schools which do not rank at colleges concerned with their academic ratings" (*School Leader*. *The Numbers Game*. New Jersey School Boards Association, November/December 2000, p. 34).

The following information has been taken directly from the college's or university's admissions profile regarding the entering freshman class (Class of 2007):

College / University		Percentage of high schools <u>NOT</u> reporting class rank	Based on schools that provided class rank:
Cornell University		44%	❖ 81% of admitted students ranked in the top 10%
Colgate University		58%	❖ 78% of admitted students ranked in the top 10% ❖ 93% of admitted students ranked in the top 20%
Columbia College	College	59%	❖ 88% of accepted students ranked in the top 10% ❖ 96% of accepted students ranked in the top 20%
	Engineering	57%	❖ 93% of accepted students ranked in the top 10% ❖ 99% of accepted students ranked in the top 20%
Kenyon College		Not provided	❖ 56% of accepted students ranked in the top 10% ❖ 98% of accepted students ranked in the top 50%
Loyola College in Maryland		53%	❖ 66% of enrolled students ranked in the top 20% ❖ 94% of enrolled students ranked in the top 40%
Middlebury College		42%	❖ 90% of matriculated students ranked in the top 20%
New York University		44%	❖ 70.1% of accepted students ranked in the top 10% ❖ 99.7% of accepted students ranked in the top 50%
Northwestern University		48%	❖ 82% of enrolled students ranked in the top 10% ❖ 94% of enrolled students ranked in the top 20%
U. of Pennsylvania		51%	❖ 78% of accepted students ranked in the top 10% ❖ 91% of accepted students ranked in the top 20%
Providence College		25%	❖ 99% of accepted students ranked in the top 50%
Reed College		40%	❖ 60% of accepted students ranked in the top 10% ❖ 84% of accepted students ranked in the top 20%
St. Lawrence University		36%	❖ 61% of accepted students ranked in the top 25% ❖ 92% of accepted students ranked in the top 50%
Tufts University		50%	❖ 30% of accepted students ranked in the top 5% ❖ 96% of accepted students ranked in the top 20%
Wellesley College		40%	❖ 66% of accepted students ranked in the top 10% ❖ 88% of accepted students ranked in the top 20%

Q: Why is the School Counseling Department at Hingham High School making these recommendations? There are several reasons for making these recommendations. First and foremost, class rank has become a major impediment in admissions for most of our students, primarily students in the 2nd through 8th deciles of the class.

Second, students have reported to staff that the academic competition at Hingham High School is a major contributor to the students' overall stress level. Although the administration and faculty have implemented many programs to alleviate stress, students continue to report that the competition amongst their classmates to achieve a higher class rank remains constant. While the pressure to do well in challenging classes is always present at Hingham High School, the overall concept of class rank inherently

Q: How do other high schools handle class rank? According to a recent survey conducted by the National Association of College Admissions Counseling (July, 2003), the use of class rank in high schools diminishes as the percentage of high school students attending colleges and universities increases (see Appendix A). In the past several years, Hingham High School typically has 88% - 93% of students continuing their education at two- or four-year colleges.

This same report also found that eliminating class rank is most common in private schools and competitive public schools on the east coast. Overall, however, in 2002, only 45% of all high schools in the country reported using class rank.

Class Rank Use by Type of High School		
	Use class rank	Do not use class rank
Public	78%	22%
Private Non-Parochial	10%	90%
Private Parochial	44%	56%
Overall	45%	55%

Q: What other high schools in Massachusetts do not rank their students? As of the 2003-2004 school year, the following schools are just some of the high schools in Massachusetts that do not rank their students (see Appendix B for more information):

- ❖ Andover High School
- ❖ Concord-Carlisle Regional High School
- ❖ Dover-Sherborn High School
- ❖ Duxbury High School
- ❖ Lexington High School
- ❖ Lincoln-Sudbury High School
- ❖ Marblehead High School
- ❖ Norwell High School
- ❖ Scituate High School
- ❖ Wellesley High School
- ❖ Weston High School
- ❖ Westwood High School
- ❖ Winchester High School

Q: Have any of these high schools that have eliminated reporting class rank to colleges and universities seen a negative result of doing so? Although it is very difficult to present any concrete, scientific data to answer this question, each and every one of the guidance and counseling directors from the high schools listed above has stated that eliminating class rank has not had a negative impact on their students, including those in the top 10% of the class.

Q: How many high schools that have eliminated reporting class rank to colleges and universities have re-instituted it? None. There are no schools that we know of that have reinstated class rank once it has been eliminated.

Q: What about students in the top 10% or 1st decile at Hingham High School? What effect will it have on their applications? This is one of many questions we asked college admissions counselors. Every high school that has eliminated the reporting of class rank has asked the same question and in every instance, the response has been that there is no negative impact on an applicant in the first decile.

Q: How can you be sure? Hingham High School asked this question to many college admissions counselors including over 100 representatives from colleges and universities who visited Hingham High School last fall. Their answers varied. Yale responded, “While we would like a class rank, if we don’t get it, we will use other data.” Meanwhile, Harvard’s response was “We don’t use class rank anyway. All you would be doing is joining most of the better private schools and other public schools like Hingham High School.”

As recommended by the colleges and universities surveyed, Hingham High School counselors will include some reference to class rank in the letter of recommendation for students in the first decile of the class.

Q: If all of this is true, then why do colleges continue to ask for class rank? Any college, when asked the question “Do you want class rank?” will always answer in the affirmative. It makes the admissions officer’s job easier because they can eliminate students based on rank as opposed to conducting a more in-depth review of a student’s quality of work as seen in the transcript and supporting materials. Eliminating class rank forces the admissions officer to take a closer look at students’ transcripts.

Q: Shouldn’t students at the top of the class be recognized for their achievements and accomplishments? Absolutely. The School Counseling Department strongly believes that students who have achieved high GPAs should be formally recognized for their accomplishments. Under the current system, the only students who are recognized solely for their academic achievement are the two students who are ranked first and second in the class. These two students are designated class salutatorian and class valedictorian. (Students who are recognized at graduation as part of the National Honor Society must meet several other requirements related to leadership, service, and character).

The School Counseling Department recommends recognizing students with a GPA of 5.0 or above with designations of summa cum laude, magna cum laude, and cum laude as outlined below. In doing so, not only are the top two students recognized for their academic achievements—but so, too, are approximately the top 40 students in the class.

- Summa cum laude: 5.70 - 6.00+ GPA (8 students in the Class of 2004)
- Magna cum laude: 5.30 - 5.69 GPA (17 students in the Class of 2004)
- Cum laude: 5.00 - 5.29 GPA (20 students in the Class of 2004)

Q: How would this policy change affect my son or daughter’s chances of receiving scholarships? Hingham High School counselors would still be able to determine a student’s class rank, if required. After all, as long as there is a grade point average for every student, then we have the ability to rank students accordingly. Because we would not want students to be eliminated from consideration of any scholarships, the counselor would report the student’s class rank directly to the awarding institution.

Q: If a class rank can still be determined, will it automatically be provided to students and/or parents? Students and/or parents will not receive a specific class rank number. Instead, primarily to assist students in the college search process, students and/or parents will be given a class rank range at the end of the 5th and 6th semester (middle of junior year and end of junior year/beginning of senior year) in intervals of five or ten percentage points and as outlined below:

- Top 5%
- Top 10% (1st decile)
- Top 15%
- Top 20% (2nd decile)
- Top 25 % (top ¼)
- Top 33% (top 1/3)
- Top 40% (4th decile)
- Top 50% (top ½)
- Top 60% (6th decile)
- Top 70% (7th decile)
- Top 80% (8th decile)
- Top 90% (9th decile)

Q: What do students at the high school think about class rank? We surveyed all students in the classes of 2003 and 2004. While individual comments varied, the results of their responses can be summarized below:

The top 30 students in the class.	Students at the top of the class mentioned that while some aspects of class rank are good (such as motivating you to do well), most of these students recommended eliminating class rank because the academic competition causes too much stress and forces an unhealthy academic atmosphere. Many students in this group expressed that they would have preferred taking classes simply to learn rather than have to worry about how the “A-“ is going to impact class rank.
Students ranked 31 - 150.	Many students in this group agreed that class rank causes a lot of additional and unnecessary stress; in general, however, the majority of these students recommended keeping class rank in some form primarily because the students at the top of the class should be recognized for their achievements.
Students ranked 151 - 215.	Students in this group had the strongest feelings toward the elimination of class rank. They expressed that a low class rank had a major impact on their self-esteem and made them feel really stupid compared to their peers and friends.

Q: Why shouldn't we give students the option of reporting their class rank to colleges and universities? Giving students the option of reporting class rank automatically puts those students who don't report class rank at a disadvantage. Regardless of the student's intent, not providing class rank to a particular college while other students in the same class do raises the suspicion of the admissions counselor. The admissions officer would most likely assume that the student who has not provided his or her class rank must not have an “acceptable” rank.

Q: Isn't it true that some colleges and universities will estimate a student's class rank if it is not provided to them? Sometimes, yes. More often than not, however, according to the vast majority of colleges and universities that were surveyed, if class rank is not provided, then class rank is not considered in the admissions process. Remember, too, that the school counselor's recommendation letter can include a reference to a student's class rank if desired and if beneficial to the student.

Q: What class years will be affected with these new policies if they are adopted by the School Committee? What about the class of 2005? The School Counseling Department recommends that these new policies—including the elimination of reporting class rank to colleges—go into effect with the class of 2005 (the current junior class).

Q: How will the class valedictorian and class salutatorian be chosen? The current selection process for the class valedictorian and class salutatorian will remain unchanged. That is, the two students with the top GPAs at the end of the 8th semester will designated as class valedictorian and class salutatorian, respectively.

Summary:

In keeping with their role as advocates for all students, Hingham High School counselors have been assessing a new trend in the way that student transcripts are reported to colleges. In the past, class rank has been included as one of many pieces of information on the student transcript. More recently, there has been a growing movement to eliminate class rank, a movement that has been adopted by many private and top-tier public high schools in Massachusetts—including all those comparable to Hingham High School.

Hingham High School's current class rank is a listing of all student grade point averages (GPA's) from the highest (number one) to the lowest (the last number in the graduating class). Thus, 1/231 represents the student with the highest GPA in a class of 231 students. As it stands now, shifts in GPA as small as .001 affect a student's class rank. Colleges use class rank, if it is provided, as one of many factors in the admissions decision process. Class rank is also used by many of the college ratings report (such as *U.S. News and World Annual Top Colleges Report*) to rank the colleges by selectivity—the percentage of the incoming class that comes from the top 10% of their high school graduating class. The higher the percentage of accepted students in the top 25% of the class, the more selective an institution is thought to be. As colleges seek to increase their selectivity standing in these college ratings reports, they face increasing pressure to pay more attention to a student's class rank and less attention to a student's entire application packet. In this competitive environment, reporting class rank is detrimental to students from Hingham High School.

In response to the issues associated with class rank and the trend toward eliminating it from student transcripts, the school counseling department conducted extensive research with staff, parents, and students from both the top and bottom halves of their respective classes. Through focus groups, surveys, and interviews, they found overwhelming support for not including class rank in transcripts. As one staff member pointed out, "Our present system encourages students to become focused on rank rather than education."

Representatives from various colleges, too, concurred that eliminating class rank will not hurt our students and may well be advantageous for many of them. Indeed, colleges are accepting more and more students from high schools that do not report class rank. While it is considered in the admissions decision if it is reported, most weight is afforded to the rigor of the coursework pursued, grades received, the total number of classes taken, credits received, and the 6th and 7th semester cumulative grade point average. In addition, the school counselor's letter of recommendation can serve to detail evidence of student achievement within the context of other academic and extracurricular activities pursued. The framework of this letter is a far better indicator of the individual student's overall accomplishments, including how he or she stands within the graduating class.

Anyone with a high school junior or senior knows that applying to colleges is a stressful business. Parents and students continually report that competing for admissions at colleges and universities is one of the most stressful times in their lives. With the elimination of class rank beginning with the class of 2005, that stress should be eased a bit and the focus can shift to educational value rather than competitive rankings.

One of the most popular arguments supporting class rank has to do with recognizing students for their academic accomplishments. Under Hingham's current system, students with top grade point averages are not recognized simply for having a high grade point average. Although National Honor Society recognizes those students with a minimum GPA of 5.0, students must also meet requirements in the additional areas of leadership, character, and service. The School Counseling Department's proposal would recognize at the Senior Awards Assembly and at graduation all students who achieved a GPA of 5.0 or higher.

Recommendations to the School Committee

Based on the information gathered in this report, the School Counseling Department recommends to the School Committee to adopt the following policies:

Changes to current policy:

- Permit only grades earned while at Hingham High School to be used towards the weighted grade point average.
- Recognize students at the Senior Awards Assembly and/or graduation who have achieved grade point averages of 5.0 on a 6.0 scale with the following designations:
 - Summa cum laude: 5.70 - 6.00+ GPA (8 students in the Class of 2004)
 - Magna cum laude: 5.30 - 5.69 GPA (17 students in the Class of 2004)
 - Cum laude: 5.00 - 5.29 GPA (20 students in the Class of 2004)
- Eliminate the reporting of any form of class rank to colleges and universities effective with the Class of 2005.
 - Hingham High School counselors will continue to reference a student's strong academic standing in letters of recommendation to colleges and universities.
- Eliminate the distribution of a specific class rank number to students and/or parents. Instead, primarily to assist students in the college search process, students and/or parents will be given a class rank range at the end of the 5th and 6th semester (middle of junior year and end of junior year/beginning of senior year) in intervals of five or ten percentage points and as outlined below:
 - Top 5%
 - Top 10% (1st decile)
 - Top 15%
 - Top 20% (2nd decile)
 - Top 25% (top ¼)
 - Top 33% (top 1/3)
 - Top 40% (4th decile)
 - Top 50% (top ½)
 - Top 60% (6th decile)
 - Top 70% (7th decile)
 - Top 80% (8th decile)
 - Top 90% (9th decile)

No changes to current policy:

- Continue to use the weighted point scale to calculate students' GPAs. Additionally, the GPA will remain on the student's transcript and will continue to be reported to colleges and universities.
- Continue to designate the two students in the senior class with the highest grade point averages as class valedictorian and class salutatorian, respectively. Students who do not attend Hingham High School for at least two years (four semesters) are not eligible to receive a class rank and are not eligible for consideration of class valedictorian or class salutatorian.
- Continue to report a specific class rank number to military academies and scholarship sponsoring organizations, if required.

	Class Rank
Amherst	Many schools don't provide it, but it is harder for admissions to judge students without it. School profile becomes very important.
Anna Maria	Will be used if provided. If not provided, not a factor.
Assumption	Becoming less and less important because fewer and fewer schools are providing it. Tend to use GPA more.
Babson	If provided, will be used. If not provided, not a factor.
Bates	Used if provided. Not a factor if not provided. The numbers are important.
Bentley	Use it if provided but doesn't count against a student if not provided.
Boston College	Number of schools providing it is getting less. Will use it if provided utilizing the school's profile.
Boston University	If provided will use it. If not provided, it is not a factor. Some schools allow students to elect whether to include class rank.
Bowdoin	Will be used if provided. Not a factor if not provided.
Brandeis	52% of last years applicants had a rank. If not ranked, admissions will talk to counselor to get an idea of place in the class.
Brown	Used if provided. If not provided, is not a factor and all of the other factors become more significant.
Clark	Many schools are not using it anymore. Not a major factor. More significant for scholarships.
Colby	If provided will be used. If not, the candidate is just considered without it.
Connecticut College	Will use if provided and if it is weighted.
Cornell	Is used if given but the transcript is more significant.

	Class Rank
Curry	Used only if provided. More schools seem to be getting away from it.
Dartmouth	A lot of schools don't rank and that is fine. Will be used if provided.
Fairfield	Used if given. Surveyed this and found that slightly over half of the schools don't rank. Behooves if no rank.
Hampshire	Used if provided following school profile. No issue if not.
Hobart & William Smith	Is used if provided. "Smaller schools do students a great disservice by ranking them in a class of under 200. Should rank only the top 10%."
Holy Cross	Prefer that it be given. If not given, will try to figure out where the student would fall in the class.
Johnson & Wales	Used only for merit scholarship.
MIT	Used if provided but no disadvantage to the student if not provided.
Merrimack	Used if given. Not as effective in small school.
Middlebury	Will consider it if provided but not place great importance on it. Transcript of grades and strength of program more important.
Providence	If provided, will be used. "I believe that any school with a class of about 100 or less should not rank as it is a disservice to the students."
Quinnipiac	If given, it will be factored in. In small classes, it can lower the admission ranking and hurt the student, but admissions tries to look at the whole picture.
Regis	Will use it if provided. No factor if not provided.
RISD	Not a major factor whether it is provided or not.
Roger Williams	If provided it will be factored in. No factor if not provided. More schools are moving away from rank.
St. Anselms	Will use if provided. No factor if not provided.

	Class Rank
Smith	The past year 56% of applicants had a rank and this number is going down every year. If it is provided, it will be used. If not provided, the student will be evaluated without it.
Stanford U	Becoming less important as fewer are provided. Use if provided.
Stonehill College	Will use it if provided but just operate without it if not provided.
Syracuse U	Will use if provided. Will evaluate without it if not provided.
Trinity (Hartford)	If provided it is used. Some rank only top 10%.
Tufts	Tufts prefers using class rank as a factor, although more and more schools are not providing it.
U Conn	Use it if provided utilizing school's profile. Evaluate without if not provided.
U Hartford	Use it if given. No issue if not given.
U Mass Amherst	Rank is used to weed people out. More and more schools are not providing class rank. Can hurt a student. If none is provided, the student is evaluated without it.
U Miami	Finding more schools not using it. If provided it will be used. If not provided, will scrutinize school profile more carefully.
U New Hampshire	Used more for merit scholarship than for admission. More and more schools are not providing it. It probably benefits the student not to have it.
U Notre Dame	Is significant. If not provided by the school will ask the school to approximate what part of the class the student falls within.
Wellesley	Lots of schools are not providing it. Will use it if provided but if not provided will look more closely at the transcript.
Wheaton	If provided and if it has been weighted, it will be used. Otherwise, the student is evaluated without it.
Worcester Polytech	If provided will use it. If not provided, more weight to the transcript.