

Frequently Asked Questions: Transcript Exchange and the HOPE Scholarship GPA Calculation

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Background & General Information

Why is GSFC doing this?

In 2004, the Georgia General Assembly passed HB 1325 (codified in § 20-2-157 O.C.G.A.), requiring GSFC to calculate, for purposes of determining HOPE Scholarship eligibility, the grade point average of every graduating high school senior in Georgia beginning in 2007. This requires GSFC to construct and provide the mechanism for every Georgia high school to furnish GSFC with the requisite student and school information.

This process also presents the opportunity for GSFC to provide every high school in Georgia with the means, through GAcollege411.org, to transmit a standardized Georgia high school student transcript form electronically to colleges and universities.

Where can I view the state law mandating these changes?

The relevant section of the Code of Georgia is available online at:
http://www.legis.state.ga.us/cgi-bin/gl_codes_detail.pl?code=20-2-157

Is every Georgia high school required to participate in this process?

While no school is required to be a participant, the only way that a student entering college for the first time after April 30, 2007 may earn eligibility for the HOPE Scholarship is for his or her high school to submit all of the required information to GSFC through the Transcript Exchange and HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation process.

Does this change only apply to seniors who graduate in 2007 and afterwards?

§ 20-2-157 O.C.G.A. states that for purposes of receiving the HOPE Scholarship, the new HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation applies to any student whose first enrollment in college occurs on or after

May 1, 2007 “regardless of when a student graduated from high school and regardless of such student’s eligibility status prior to May 1, 2007.”

If a student completes their high school graduation requirements in December 2006 but does not participate in graduation ceremonies until June 2007, will that student be subject to the new HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation?

The date that determines which HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation standard applies to a student is when that student first enrolls in college after graduating from high school. If a student that graduates in December of 2006 is eligible to and enrolls in college in the spring semester of 2007, they will not be subject to the new standard. However, if that student chooses to wait until the summer or fall of 2007, they will be subject to the new HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation standard, and that student’s data will have to be submitted to GSFC for processing through the HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation system.

Does joint high school and college enrollment (such as through the Accel program) count as a student’s first enrollment in college for purposes of determining what HOPE Scholarship GPA standard applies to a student?

No. As stated above, the college enrollment date that determines which standard applies to a student is the date on which a student first enrolls in college after graduating from high school.

Why does every school have to sign a legal agreement with the Xap Corporation to participate in this process?

The Xap Corporation is the third-party vendor that maintains the infrastructure of the GAcollege411 website for GSFC, and will also be providing the electronic transport mechanisms necessary for the Transcript Exchange and HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation processes to function. While the legal agreement does not exclusively obligate any school to usage of Xap products in any way, legal restrictions bar the Xap Corporation from working with any school absent a signed legal agreement.

If there is more than one high school in a district, we require only one agreement for the district as opposed to individual high school agreements.

Is GSFC changing high school graduation requirements?

No. GSFC is, as per statutory requirements, altering which attempted academic credits are counted in the HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation. This will not affect the academic credits that are required to obtain a high school diploma in Georgia.

Will GSFC also be performing class-ranking calculations for each high school?

No. Space is provided on the Georgia Standard High School Transcript for schools to report the ranking and class size for each senior, but it will simply display whatever data a school provides to populate the field. Schools may choose to leave these fields blank.

If a school district manages the Transcript Exchange data uploading on a district-wide level, will each high school have its own profile screen on GAcollege411, or will there only be a single district-level profile screen?

Each school will have its own profile screen as the Transcript Exchange and HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation processes require data to be gathered on a by-school basis. Therefore, GSFC requires that

each high school submitting transcript data also submit the appropriate information required for the HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation process through the school profile screens on GAcollege411. The breakdown of duties between school districts and their respective high schools, however, is left completely to the discretion of local officials.

Where can I get more information?

The most current information on the Transcript Exchange and HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation processes can be found in the Transcript Exchange Document Library on GAcollege411.org. Go to the homepage and find the "School Counselors" title on the yellow navigation bar on the left-hand side of the page. Select this button and choose "High School Transcript" from the next page. Click on the link at the top or the bottom of the following page to access the Document Library.

The Library may also be directly accessed by navigating to the web address <https://www.gsfc.org/transcript/>.

The Library contains a wealth of information on Transcript Exchange and the new HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation process, including graphics, presentation slideshows, and the latest version of the Transcript Exchange Workbook. Three webcasts on this process are also available for viewing any time day or night through the Library.

Additionally, face-to-face meetings will be scheduled at regional locations. Further questions and requests for information may be e-mailed to Transcripts@gsfc.org.

Transcript Data/SIS

How will high schools provide the information GSFC requires for this process?

There are two primary sources of data. Most of the data required for the HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation and the Transcript Exchange process will be compiled from each school's Student Information System (SIS) through a piece of software called an extract. GSFC will assist schools in downloading and installing the extract software; once the software is installed it will allow submission of the required information.

For any school whose SIS is not compatible with the extract software, the school will be required to use the export capability of their SIS to generate a file containing the required transcript data.

The second source of data will be the School Profile screens on GAcollege411.org. Each high school's staff will enter this information into a series of web pages located in the School Counselors section of GAcollege411.org. Together, the SIS data file and the School Profile screens will provide the information required to perform the HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation.

How will high schools that do not use SASIxp, PowerSchool, or SchoolMax as their SIS export data to the GAcollege411 Transcript Exchange database?

GSFC will be providing a "generic" online template that can be used to generate the required output format for importing into the GAcollege411 Transcript Exchange database. Alternatively, GSFC can provide the format of the output so that a school may utilize its own SIS's export functionality to produce the output in the required format.

What are the hardware and software requirements for a school to participate in the Transcript Exchange and HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation processes?

Due to the lack of SIS standardization in Georgia's schools, GSFC has constructed an implementation strategy that will accommodate multiple software and hardware configurations. GSFC's software installation support technicians will work with whatever hardware and software are present at a school in order to get that school on-line with the Transcript Exchange system.

Since the State of Georgia now issues testing IDs for all students, can a school use those ID numbers to identify students in the HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation process instead of Social Security Numbers?

GSFC will be able to perform the HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation and produce transcripts using any student ID number that a school wishes to use and has resident in its SIS. However, by law GSFC is only permitted to disburse HOPE Scholarship funds to students identified by Social Security Number. If a school does not identify students by SSNs for the final HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation in May/June, those students will not be able to receive a HOPE Scholarship until GSFC has been provided with the required SSN information.

When will high schools be allowed to submit transcript data for the 2007 HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation?

The schedule for local installation of the software that will allow individual schools to submit transcript data is still being developed. However, every high school in Georgia will be able to submit transcript data by February 2007.

If a high school does not utilize an SIS software package to maintain student records, will that school still be able to submit student data to the GAcollege411 Transcript Exchange database?

Yes. GSFC will work with non-SIS schools to provide a generic form into which they may manually enter the required student data.

Grading Scales

Are Georgia high schools required to change their grading scales?

No. The HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation process will require each school to submit (through the GAcollege411 Counselor Center) the grading scale or scales that apply to the high school course records for all of that school's graduating seniors. Each grading scale is then equated to a 4.0 grade-point scale for the HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation process. This allows the GPA calculation to be applied uniformly to every student at every high school in Georgia, no matter what grading scale is used.

What high school grading scale(s) will be used for students who attend more than one school?

The grading scales used will be those provided by the high school submitting the student's information; the appropriate grading scales from that school will be used for all grades reported for that student, regardless of where the grades were actually earned. It is the responsibility of the reporting school to properly equate transfer student grades to appropriate values on the locally used grading scale.

Why can't the "Other School" data field be used to associate courses with the grading scale(s) at a school other than the reporting school?

While the "Other School" field has been made available as a part of the course record layout for Transcript Exchange, any data placed in this field is simply passed on for printing on the Georgia Standard High School Transcript to identify transferred course credits. Due to the complexity and the potential for inaccuracies posed by cross-matching course grades to grading scales at schools other than the reporting school, the Other School data field plays no role in the HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation.

What should a school do with grades transferred in from another school that are below 70 on a numeric scale (the lowest passing grade allowed in Georgia) but are not failing grades?

Schools have these main options for handling such grades:

A school may accept the grades as they were awarded at the student's previous school. However, any numeric grades reported in this way will be included in the HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation based on the receiving school's grading scale. Alternately, the receiving school may convert the numeric grades to the equivalent numeric values on its own grading scale, or may report transferred grades as letter grades.

Finally, a school may choose to report the grades as-is on the transcript and *exclude* those grades from the HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation by submitting those course records with a credit indicator. Transfer grades may also be excluded from the HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation by converting them to Pass/Fail grades.

Regardless of the method employed in handling transfer grades, accurate translation and reporting of transfer grades is the responsibility of the school reporting those grades to the GAcollege411 Transcript Database.

Will high schools that report only letter grades be required to change their grading systems to a numeric system?

No – the HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation can be performed on grades reported in either numeric or letter form, as all grades will be equated to a 4.0 scale prior to performing the calculation.

GPA Calculation

What courses will count in the new HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation?

All academic credits attempted by a student in the core high school academic areas (English, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, and for College Preparatory students only, Foreign Language) will be used to determine the student's HOPE Scholarship GPA. In addition, because the Georgia Department of Education (GADOE) considers them adequate to meet graduation requirements for high school science, the courses Animal Sciences (02.x210) and Plant Sciences (02.x410) will be counted in the HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation as Science courses. All other courses will be excluded from the calculation.

Will the HOPE Scholarship GPA calculated by GSFC replace the GPA(s) Georgia high schools currently report on transcripts?

The HOPE Scholarship GPA will only be used by GSFC for purposes of determining HOPE Scholarship eligibility. High schools will be able to report up to two GPA values of their choice on The Georgia Standard High School Transcript. The transcript form will simply report whatever data a school chooses to place in the spaces made available for calculated GPA values. Schools may also choose to leave one or both of these spaces blank.

How will courses taken in middle school (such as Algebra 1 taken in the 8th grade) be treated in determining the HOPE Scholarship GPA?

According to § 20-2-157 O.C.G.A., the HOPE Scholarship GPA is to be calculated based on grades in "the complete high school academic record of the student". Courses taken in middle school are not part of the high school academic record, and therefore will not be incorporated into a student's HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation. Every school is responsible for identifying such credits so that they may be properly excluded from the HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation.

If GSFC doesn't count 8th Grade Algebra in the HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation, will some students then not have enough math credits to qualify for the HOPE Scholarship?

The new HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation methodology no longer requires a set number of credits in each academic area (such as 4 English credits, 4 math credits, etc). Rather, the new HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation will be performed on ALL academic credits a student earns in the academic areas of English, math, science, social science, and (for College Preparatory students only) foreign languages, regardless of the number of credits the student has earned in each area.

How will Pass-Fail courses be treated in determining the HOPE Scholarship GPA?

§ 20-2-157 O.C.G.A. requires the HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation to be calculated utilizing all core academic grades reported on a student's high school course record. "Pass", "Fail", "Satisfactory" and other similar designators are not grades but are given in place of a grade, and cannot be translated to a 4.0 scale. Therefore, any credit earned in a course without an actual numeric or letter grade associated with that credit will be excluded from the HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation.

Are grades earned through home schooling included in the HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation?

GSFC will use every grade reported for high school courses that fall within the core academic areas and that can be interpreted through the school's grading scale(s). If a school awards credit for home-school courses but does not retain the grade awarded (i.e. converts it to Pass-Fail or another non-grade indicator), those courses will not be counted in the GPA calculation, as they cannot be equated to a 4.0 scale.

Will an overall average of 80 for a college preparatory student (85 for career/technical) still qualify a student for the HOPE Scholarship?

Because grading scales differ from one school to the next (and therefore an 80 may not mean the same from one school to the next), § 20-2-157 O.C.G.A. mandates that all grades be converted to a 4.0 scale, based on the local school's grading scale, prior to the HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation. This will ensure that all students in Georgia are being measured according to the same standards for purposes of earning the HOPE Scholarship.

How will GSFC determine which grades should count towards the HOPE Scholarship GPA?

The exact course for which any grade and credit is awarded (and thereby whether or not it is within an academic area included in the HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation) will be identified based on the uniform course numbering system developed by GADOE. High schools currently using a course numbering system that differs from the state numbering system will need to equate each course number to the closest equivalent on the GADOE list of approved courses.

How will schools know that GSFC accurately calculated the HOPE Scholarship GPA for every student?

After the initial and final eligibility calculations are performed in February and June, respectively, GSFC will be providing both school-wide and student-by-student reports to each high school. A detailed report will be provided for each student displaying the course record that was used for the calculation along with any un-weighting, re-weighting, and exclusion of grades that do not qualify for the calculation. A feedback mechanism will be provided so that each school may contact GSFC to resolve any problems or discrepancies in the HOPE Scholarship GPA calculations.

Will the HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation system be available to produce preliminary HOPE GPAs for underclassmen for use as an advising tool?

GSFC will be adding functionality over time so that the GPA calculation system can be used as an advising tool for students below the senior level. In the run-up to the first implementation of the HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation system, however, the main focus is getting the system and each individual school up and running so that all Georgia Seniors' GPAs can be calculated in February of 2007.

Course Numbering

How will GSFC use the uniform course numbering system to identify courses included in the HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation?

The first two digits of any course number in the uniform numbering system identify the main subject area of that course. As such, English course numbers all begin with 23; Mathematics with 27; Science with 26 or 40; Social Science with 45; and Foreign Language with 60, 61, 62, 63, or 64.

If a school uses the course number for a "core academic area" course as an elective (such as Journalism I (23.0320) as a yearbook course), will grades earned in that course be counted towards the HOPE Scholarship GPA?

Yes. The Georgia Department of Education has a standard description corresponding to every course listed in state education rule 160-4-2-.03 ("List of State-Funded K-8 Subjects and 9-12 Courses") meets with a specific and rigorous academic standard. Schools and school systems are expected to follow these standards when designating courses under the GADOE uniform course numbering system.

How will GSFC identify courses properly if a school does not use the GADOE uniform course numbering system?

Any school using a course numbering system that differs from the GADOE course numbering system will need to supply GSFC with an electronic file equating the course numbers used in the school's student

course record with numbers in the uniform course numbering system. A web screen interface to facilitate this translation will be made available through STARS.

If GSFC only needs the first two digits of the course number to identify whether a course grade should be included in the HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation, why does my private school have to equate every course in those areas to a course in the GADOE uniform course numbering system?

Once every high school in Georgia is submitting course record data to the transcript exchange database, this process will result in the creation of millions of database records. Therefore, the course number translation is vitally important in that it will allow GSFC to better manage the vast amounts of data this process will produce, particularly as it relates to verifying the accuracy of all received data.

How can a school equate the course number for a course with no equivalent in the GADOE uniform course numbering system?

The course number translation web screen available through STARS will provide a “dummy” course number that means “none of the above” for each of the academic areas included in the HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation.

If a school translates its course numbers to the GADOE uniform course numbering system, will the GADOE course numbers now be displayed on the transcript form in place of the school’s unique numbering system?

The course numbers displayed on the transcript form produced through the GAcollege411 transcript exchange process will be the same course numbers a school currently uses on transcripts and within its SIS. GSFC will only be using the equated course numbers within the HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation process.

Where can I obtain a copy of the GADOE uniform course numbering system?

The uniform course numbering system is contained within the State Board of Education’s rules as rule 160-4-2-.03. The rule also contains an explanation of how the course numbering system is structured. It is available online at:

http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/_documents/doe/legalservices/160-4-2-.03.pdf

Course Weights

Why does GSFC need to know what student grades have been weighted (had extra points added)?

§ 20-2-157 O.C.G.A. requires that a grade used by GSFC in the HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation “be the actual grade earned by the student, with no weighting or addition of points by the local school system or private school.”* In order to fulfill this statutory requirement, high schools will be required to provide information identifying all grades with weighting or additional points as well as the amount of that weight; GSFC will un-weight all grades before performing the HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation.

*As per § 20-2-157 O.C.G.A., Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses will be uniformly re-weighted by GSFC prior to the HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation. Courses ending before June 15, 2006 will receive a whole letter grade (1.0 on a 4.0 scale). Courses ending on or after June 15, 2006 will receive a one-half letter grade (0.5 on a 4.0 scale). High schools will still be required to identify

these courses and any additional weight the school adds to these grades so that GSFC can un-weight them before adding the 1.0 or 0.5 weight, as Georgia high schools may place different weighting amounts on these courses.

Will Honors courses be re-weighted prior to the HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation?

No. For purposes of HOPE Scholarship eligibility, § 20-2-157 O.C.G.A. only permits weighting prior to the GPA calculation for Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses.

Why are Honors courses not being re-weighted?

AP and IB courses follow set curricula established by outside entities (the College Board and the International Baccalaureate Organization, respectively), making such courses equivalent from one high school to the next. "Honors" is defined locally in Georgia by each local school system or high school, and therefore has no standard definition or scale of comparison from one school to the next.

If a student earns a 100 (or A+) in an AP or IB course -- will that student's grade be equated to a 4.5 or 5.0 in the HOPE Scholarship GPA calculation?

No. § 20-2-157 O.C.G.A. requires that all grades be translated to a 4.0 scale; therefore, no grade may exceed 4.0, as a grade of 4.5 or 5.0 would by definition no longer be within a 4.0 scale.

How will GSFC know the difference between a transferred-in "Honors" grade that has not been weighted as opposed to an "Honors" grade awarded at the reporting school that has been weighted?

In this situation the reporting school may specify (via the School Profile screens through which such data will be entered) two different "Honors" weighting indicators – one that indicates a non-weighted Honors course from another school, and another that indicates a weighted Honors course from the reporting school. As an alternative, if the word "honors" is included in the title of the transferred courses, the reporting school may choose to identify a weighting indicator for only the local Honors courses.

Is GSFC requiring that every high school transcript show un-weighted grades?

The Georgia Standard High School Transcript will display grades in whatever form each school's SIS stores them in, and therefore the grades should be not display any differently from the grades each school currently reports on student transcripts. Grades will be un-weighted following their submission to the GAcollege411 Transcript Exchange database only for purposes of calculating each student's HOPE Scholarship GPA. These un-weighted grades will be displayed only in the reports provided to high school counselors by GSFC.