

CLASS RANK: DOES IT HAVE A FUTURE AT AVON?

● By Simone Bender **Co-EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

According to the National Association for College Admission Counseling, over half of American high schools no longer abide by a class rank system, and yet Avon's academic merit recognition is still determined by a number that ranks students and their accomplishments among their peers – why is that? And, as AHS is the only high school in its conference that hasn't shifted away from "class rank," what does the future hold for this system that, according to schools around the country, is out of date?

To answer these questions, the Echo was invited to a meeting discussing the topic of shifting toward a Latin Honors System (as many other schools in the conference follow) between Avon administration and the parents of the current top 25 ranked students for the class of 2025.

"Fishers, HSE, Brownsburg, Westfield, all those schools have made a shift to a different system, different from what we're doing, which I would call a very traditional way of doing things," said Principal

Matthew Shockley, addressing this group of parents. "We're looking at schools like us that we compare ourselves to."

The possible Latin Honors System that Avon may be shifting toward wouldn't affect seniors this year; instead it wouldn't be implemented until the graduation of the class of 2029. Avon has taken action now because even though a shift has been in the works for years, it takes time to put a new plan into action.

"You guys may not know, but we've been talking about this for five years," said Shockley. "It really started five years ago when we had a group of students from the National Honors Society come and mention that we should think about doing something a little bit different. And so that started a conversation about it."

Shockley said that while changing Avon's senior recognition system to match other schools in the area has been in talks for many years, one of the most vital reasons it has been brought

back up during this school year is the implementation of the new diploma system in Indiana, which places emphasis on fluency in more areas than just traditional academic excellence. The exploration of this diploma change has also brought up the subject of what colleges really look at in the admissions process, and how class rank fits into that.

"There was a study done in about 2019 by one of the major school counseling associations, and class rank is probably eighth or ninth on the list of factors we're considering for college admissions," said Shockley. "Colleges and universities are looking at the courses you take, the curriculum, and the rigor of the curriculum."

In the open forum part of the agenda, multiple parents expressed disappointment in their children working so hard for a distinction that meant very little to colleges.

"[My child] is looking at five East Coast schools," one parent shared, "and I always thought for [them]

to be at the top of [their] class was the most important. It was totally different than I thought, and I guess I was a little deflated."

Multiple parents also expressed displeasure with the deterrence the class rank system brought toward their children from unweighted classes like that of Avon's performing arts program.

"All of us have experienced some thought processes with the kids around performing arts," another parent shared. "Those are not weighted, and maybe it would be a different conversation if those were weighted, or something like that. I think probably a lot of kids in [the top 25] didn't pursue performing arts that maybe wanted to, or at the extent they wanted to, because it affects class rank."

At schools like Avon, where upper-level courses, such as Advanced Placement, are rewarded with bonus weightings, weighted GPAs are often a large contributor to student rankings.

Associate Professor and Director of PhD Program in Educational

Experts Weigh In on the Class Rank Debate

"The pursuit of weighted grades adds to students' work and, likely, stress levels. But it also means they may be forced out of taking courses that could be academically or financially valuable for them, such as a dual credit course taken at a

community college. It could save students more money by providing college credits and AP might not, but it might be a bad choice for a student competing for a top class ranking if the high school does not weight it as much an AP class. Or perhaps a student just wants to take studio art or chorus. Taking either could be personally enriching but ding the student's class ranking. Such choices limit a student's education."

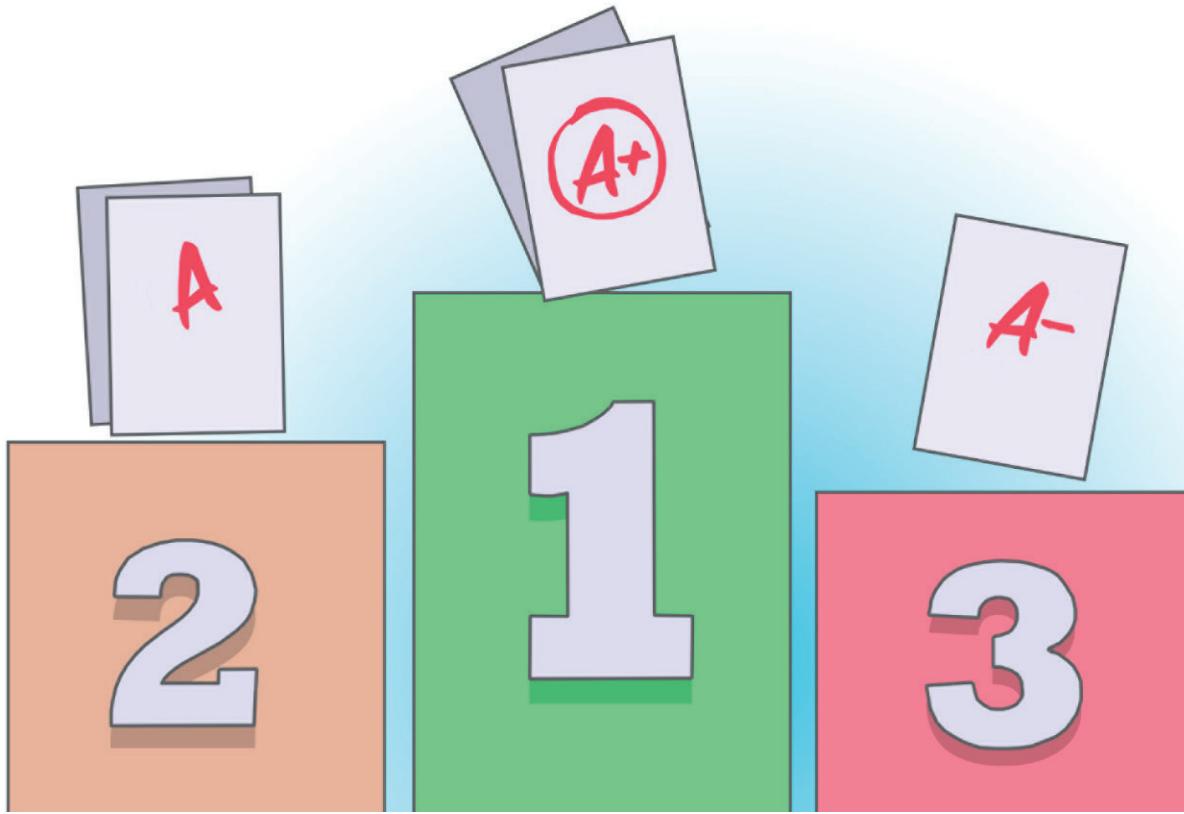
-James Murphy, **The Elective**

"There are several reasons more and more schools have stopped using class rank. Some schools believe that students who just miss important percentiles, like top 10% or 25% of their class, may be unfairly disadvantaged for scholarships and college admissions. For example, a student in the top 11% of their class may have a GPA very similar to a student in the top 9%, but may not receive certain scholarships or college offers because they aren't in the top 10% of their class."

-Christine Sarikas, **Prep Scholar**

"Although still reviewed by many colleges, class rank has declined in significance as many private and religious schools have eliminated student ranking. Most small private and competitive high schools have done away with it because they feel it penalizes many excellent students who are squeezed out of the top 10% of the class and then overlooked by elite colleges."

-College Board



While class rank has traditionally been vital in the college admissions, more than half of American high schools no longer report class rankings, according to the National Association for College Admission Counseling.

Illustration by Henry Whittle

Studies at Ball State University, Dr. Gilbert Park said that while this seems ideal on paper, it often takes away from the accomplishments of students who find success in subjects outside of the traditional academic path.

"You work hard to make it. That's the message we send out to our students," said Park. "But then, when we talk about it, it's not that you work hard to be successful. It's that you work hard in certain classes to be successful. Maybe it's more about providing a rationale on why some should do well, while other people should blame themselves and think 'I should have worked hard in life.'"

Park said that while these advanced classes are available to everyone and are typically idealized as the path to success, students of certain backgrounds are often urged to take them, whereas other groups are often pushed toward different, less publicly rewarding paths.

"How can we foster success for everybody when we only want certain people to succeed?" said Park. "Who takes those classes? Certain kids from certain families. Every system

is designed to reward the kids from where they come from, as opposed to helping them to develop the skills that they have. The school is... antithetical to their goal."

Park said that these ideals flow to his own classroom, as a graduate professor at Ball State, where he believes the students in his department should be celebrated by their accomplishments in achieving PhDs, rather than ranked and degraded among their peers.

"I don't think PhD programs, or any graduate programs, should be programs where we reward students who have a higher ranking in undergraduate, or even in high school," said Park. "Instead, what we're looking for in the doctoral program, is be[ing] able to demonstrate that they finished... because it's not easy work. When a student is committed to the doctoral program, it has little to do with ranking."

Park said that while many often assume it is the purpose of public schooling to aid students in their path to success, it tends to only favor certain students, and often goes

without check because of the fear to speak out.

"Maybe school really is not to help students to succeed," said Park. "It gives people who do not do well rationale for them to not critique and challenge the system. Meritocracy, right?"

In a private interview, Shockley said that the traditional system Avon follows has incentivized students to push themselves to the highest level of rigor by pitting them in academic competition with their peers.

"There's maybe some positives to that, but there's some negatives to that as well," said Shockley. "Does this need to be more about competing with themselves or competing with everybody else? Are they making some decisions that may not be best for their mental health?"

Shockley said that the goal of moving toward a Latin Honors System and following in the tracks of many other neighboring schools would be to provide students a title of academic excellence that recognizes a larger proportion of the student body and does not diminish chances of...

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Is the Class Rank System Fair?

"I know many that are in the top 10 and cheat their way through."

Remy Davis, 12

"School is not necessarily the best way to measure an individual's intelligence, and ranking hundreds of people, kids even, by an arbitrary level of intelligence is somewhat unfair to some."

Josh Elliott, 12

"Yes because it's based off of how smart you are in your grade. If you are sad about your rank then get smarter and try harder."

Elly McClure, 11

"No, honestly because someone can be ranked literally LAST. How is that supposed to be motivational?"

Gwen Parsons, 10

"Yeah, because it represents the people that truly put in all of the work."

Namra Patel, 11

"No, it rewards people who take the most AP classes rather than pure intelligence or hard work on its own. Many students are forced to quit their hobbies, music or arts, in order to try and compete against their peers in who can take the most AP courses."

Julie Kim, 12

"I don't think it's fair because it creates unnecessary pressure and competition between students. It also creates a success or superiority complex amongst students where if you aren't ranked well, you aren't successful in school and won't be successful in life."

Hannah Harvey, 11

"Yes. It does exactly what it is supposed to do. It rewards kids who are good at getting good grades. If you think it's about the worth of the person or that it doesn't take into account someone's personality or something then you're wrong."

Elliott Hershey, 12

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...attending elite programs, as the class rank system has become known for doing. He hopes that this shift would improve the morale of Avon's academics.

"Instead of kids competing against each other, it becomes more about competing against yourself to reach a certain standard," said Shockley. "And does our current system really fit that while still recognizing academic excellence?"

With these recent developments, the administration continues down the path of moving away from the class rank system and implementing a Latin Honors way of recognition

for the upcoming class of 2029. Following the parent meeting that occurred on Nov. 12 and the school board update that occurred on Nov. 21, the team focusing on the switch will continue to develop their plan and present it to the school board officially in late January or early February.

"Right now, what we're looking at with the class rank system is, in recognizing the top 25 seniors, are we missing a larger group of students?" said Shockley. "Have we incentivized only taking every single AP class? And we're reevaluating—is that really what we need to be about?"

What Do Other Schools in the Area Do Instead of a Class Rank System?



Brownsburg

Summa Cum Laude: 4.20 GPA
Magna Cum Laude: 4.00 GPA
Cum Laude: 3.80 GPA

Q&A with Former Top 25 Student

GRANT SHIRLEY RANKED 23RD IN THE CLASS OF 2024

What is your perspective on the class rank system? What was your experience with it?

Personally, class rank is a part of the reason that I tried to keep my GPA as high as I can, alongside college applications and scholarships, and being in the top 25 has been a goal of mine since freshman year. At the end of my senior year, the top 25 banquet and recognition had come and gone, I was just outside my goal, ranked 30th. But when I received my final transcript, I saw that I was ranked 23 out of 809. So I had made my goal, but I was essentially the only one who knew, and I didn't get any recognition at all for being within the top 2% of my class.

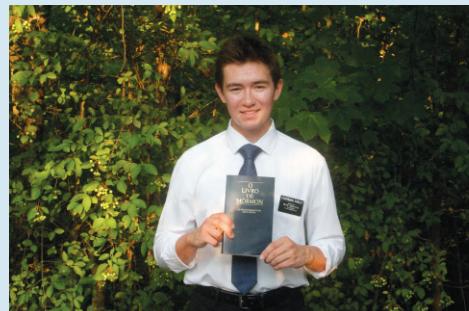
What effect does senioritis have on the class rank system?

Avon determines its top 25 group at the culmination of the first semester of senior year. After this decision is made, there is no incentive to try as hard to keep

grades in the A range. I would even hear people talk about how the second semester "doesn't matter" as long as you pass required classes and not look bad for colleges. Personally, I think that even if working hard isn't required, you should still hold yourself to high standards and attempt to succeed. Based on the seven-person jump I made, there's no doubt that other top 25 individuals stopped caring about getting the A/4.0 grade, and were recognized for that.

How is the relationship between the students in the top 25? Are you overly competitive with each other?

The group of people competing for the top 25 is generally pretty amicable. Although I do have to say, the amount of cheating that I saw in high school was pretty disheartening. So many people share answers and send test



Senior Grant Shirley graduated with a final class rank of 23 out of 809; however, he said that despite his high ranking, he believes the system to be unfair.

Photo submitted by Grant Shirley

questions. It really isn't fair. I saw people (well within the top 25) the class prior to a test literally going over with someone every single question and answer on the test. I also know that people used ChatGPT on many assignments.

What are the positives of Avon's class rank and GPA system?

I do appreciate that Avon had class rank and that the GPA system was well-structured enough that it incentivized me and others to succeed in high school. It's also good that the difficulty in classes is factored into GPA weightings. I am glad that the top 25 are recognized, but I just have problems with the way that those students are selected. Of course, it can't be perfect.

How has your ranking followed you into your post-graduate life?

The biggest thing that I got from being in the top 25 was the positive college consideration. I know that colleges look at class rank, it isn't the end-all-be-all of course, but it is a factor, especially at my university. It is nice to also have the validation of my hard work through high school printed out on paper put in context with everyone in my class.

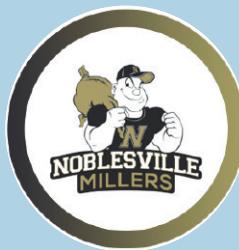
How would you change the ranking system?

If the school wants to recognize students that worked hard during high school, they should maybe have a system that does that. Top 25 students should be recognized by the rank that they end their senior year with. It's like if halfway through a marathon, whoever's in first at that point in time automatically receives a gold medal, and the rest of the race is just for kicks.



Zionsville

Valedictorian & Salutatorian
 Summa Cum Laude: Top 5% GPAs
 Magna Cum Laude: Next 5% GPAs
 Cum Laude: Next 5% GPAs



Noblesville

Summa Cum Laude: 4.00 GPA
 Magna Cum Laude: 3.75 GPA
 Cum Laude: 3.50 GPA



Plainfield

Valedictorian & Salutatorian
 Summa Cum Laude: 4.50 GPA
 Magna Cum Laude: 4.25 GPA
 Cum Laude: 4.0 GPA



Carmel

Commencement Speaker: Highest Academic Score
 Distinguished Grads: Top 3%
 Commended Grads: Next 7%

Senior Connor Taylor Talks Class Rank

Many know senior Connor Taylor. They know him for his heavy load of AP classes or for being number one in this year's current senior class, but what they don't know is: how did he get here?

Taylor was one of two students in the class of 2025 who was given the opportunity to begin high school classes in sixth grade, giving him a head start in weighted honors and AP classes once he reached high school. Coupled with near-perfect grades in his classes, he propelled to the top of his class's ranking. But how was he able to do this? Taylor said it all began in his fifth-grade math class.

"I got really bored with the curriculum they were teaching. There was a lot of... memorizing different methods... and that got really tedious, and it wasn't very fun," said Taylor. "So [my mom] showed me that I could just advocate for myself... and that the goal wasn't as lofty as I'd expected."

Taylor said that with the support of his parents, who were

teachers, and the company of another student, who also had a parent working in the school system, he was able to secure a meeting with Dr. LeMay, the principal of AIS West at the time, where he was given the chance to take the Orleans Hanna Test a year early in order to test into high school Algebra I as a sixth grader.

"I had a meeting with him, and he just wanted to make sure this was what I really wanted. Like, you're going to bus to the high school and the middle school and all that," said Taylor. "And I was like yeah, this is what I want. I'm done learning all these methods. Please teach me something different."

After passing the test, Taylor was on his way, travelling in between the intermediate school and the middle school and eventually, the middle school and the high school. By taking these classes earlier, he was given the opportunity to begin AP classes as a freshman, boosting his GPA with additional weightings, and adding more to his academic plate.

"There's a lot of stress put on academics, but I also feel like a lot of us in the top 10, top 25, we're all trying to get into good colleges, so more of our stress comes from our extracurriculars and that time when we could be studying," said Taylor. "It's taken away by doing things like being student body president or being in marching band or something like that."

Taylor said that despite any extra stress he's received from overloading his schedule with AP courses and even moving to a virtual Ball State course after completing the ACE math track at the high school a year early, he is grateful for the competition and academic rigor that the class rank system has produced.

"As the numbers get lesser, the camaraderie you build with your class increases," said Taylor. "The people I've been with through multiple years, I've had multiple classes with them because they're likely to put us together in a bunch of classes. I've gotten a lot of new friends, and I've learned a lot of new things."

Taylor said that he's benefitted

from the class rank system in ways he never expected, not only because of his academic success, but also because of the people he met along the way and what he was able to learn from them as he progressed through Avon's rigorous academic classes.

"I've gotten to know some people who I've had healthy competition with. I wouldn't call it fun, but it's helped me grow and meet new people," said Taylor. "I've met people who aren't necessarily in my classes too but are in that top three or four. It's just like, 'hey! I know these people now!'"

Taylor said that though the class rank system may cause stress as classmates compete with each other, it serves an important role in our school system and allows students to push each other to be their best selves.

"At the end of the day, it's a number," said Taylor. "If your number is a small number, it doesn't matter. If your number is a big number, it doesn't matter. It just gives everyone something to strive for."