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November Gear Up Column...

Understanding grade point averages... ¹⁸⁸

Once a student reaches high school, grades become even more important than in past years. A student's Grade Point Average (GPA) is something he or she will carry beyond high school, whether it's good or bad.

"It's very beneficial for them when looking at what college they want to attend. A number of our schools have gotten very competitive," says Ed Hubbard, Guidance Counselor at Madison Southern High School. In addition, he says, "Your GPA is important when applying for scholarships."

Eef Fontanez, guidance counselor at Berea Community School, points out that while GPA is important, it is only one element used for admission.

"However, I am sure that the better GPA you have the more success you may have in college," he says.

Employers and military recruiters also request high school transcripts that include the GPA. Therefore, it is important to understand what the GPA is and how it is calculated.

Each letter grade a student earns is assigned a number, ranging from four points for an A to zero points for an F. At the end of the semester, the letter grade the student received for each class is added together, then divided by the number of classes taken. This results in a GPA anywhere from 0 to 4.0. A GPA of 3.0 would be a B aver-

age.

For example, a student took five courses, earning 2 As, 2 Bs, and a C. The student earns 8 points for the As, 6 points for the Bs, and 2 for the C. This totals 16. Next, divide by 5, the number of courses taken. The GPA would be 3.2.

Each semester's GPA is calculated along with the GPAs from previous semesters to arrive at the cumulative GPA. When a student graduates, the cumulative GPA is the one that will be requested. Although a very good semester can help compensate for a poor one, generally the final cumulative GPA is a good indicator of a student's overall ability and commitment to work in a college or employer's eyes.

GPA will also determine the scholarships a student can apply for. Another source of money, Kentucky Educational Excellence Scholarships (KEES), is awarded based on each year's GPA. Hubbard says many students are under the misconception that the only GPA that counts for KEES money is what they graduate with.

"Freshman year is just as important as senior year," he says.

If a student earns money for a good GPA during freshman year, the student can use that award for college upon high school graduation. If the GPA qualifies again sophomore year, more money will be added to the reward amount. The process continues for the

junior and senior years. This scholarship money ranges from \$500 to \$2500, for yearly GPAs of at least 2.5 and is a great asset for students who continue with their education.

Having a good GPA while in high school is also advantageous for other activities. GPA is used during high school to rank students for graduation. In addition, athletes must earn and maintain a certain GPA to participate.

People oftentimes look at the GPA as a predictor of future success, concluding that a student who works hard in high school will most likely also work diligently at future endeavors.

"However, I have seen students with low GPA succeed in college and graduate with honors while some with 4.0 get caught in the 'social' scene of the college and fail," Fontanez says.

Although students and parents can calculate the GPA on their own, Hubbard says, the guidance office can also supply it. In addition, in many schools parents can retrieve student grades and attendance records directly through Software Technology Incorporated (STI). With the student's social security number and a four-digit number provided by the guidance office, parents can log onto the data collection system from any internet accessible computer. To find out if parent use of STI is available at your school, ask your student's guidance counselor.