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Gear Up

Understanding student grade point averages

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A student's Grade Point Average (GPA) is something he or she will carry beyond high school, whether it's good or bad. "GPA is a huge factor in obtaining scholarships and in gaining admission to a college or university," says Janice Miller, guidance counselor at Rockcastle County High School. "When filling out applications for admission and/or scholarship, there is usually a question about student ranking. Student rank is also determined by grade point average."

Employers and military recruiters request the same information. 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.

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

At Rockcastle County, another factor also comes into play. Advanced Placement (AP) classes are weighted classes,

meaning in those classes an A is worth 5 points, a B is 4 points and a C is 3 points. Students in AP classes can have a GPA above 4.0. "The reason why AP courses are weighted is because they usually require more work. In fact, many AP courses require a summer assignment that a student is to complete prior to beginning the course," Miller says. AP classes can also give students option for college credit.

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. This GPA will also determine the scholarships a student can apply for.

Another source of college money, Kentucky Educational Excellence Scholarships (KEES), is awarded based on each year's GPA. If a student earns money for a good GPA (at least 2.5) during their 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 \$536 to \$2500 paid annually for college costs is a great asset for students who continue with their educa-

tion.

Having a good GPA while in high school is also advantageous. Miller says, "It is used to determine honors such as valedictorian and salutatorian; it is also sometimes used to select students for certain programs or clubs, such as the National Honor Society or Beta Club."

In addition, athletes must earn and maintain a certain GPA to participate.

"A good GPA is a reflection of how motivated a student is and how important grades are to him or her," Miller says. "Teachers, admissions counselors and scholarship committee members do make certain judgments about a student based upon GPA; because that is often the first piece of information they get about a student."

Although students and parents can calculate the GPA on their own, the guidance office can also supply it. In addition, at some schools parents can retrieve student grades and attendance records directly through the school's Software Technology Incorporated (STI) program. 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 computer. To find out if parent use of STI is available at your school, ask your student's guidance counselor.