

# Practice makes perfect (grades)

## Athletic classes now count toward GPA of freshmen

PATON LABELLE  
FEATURE EDITOR

Beginning this school year, the grades Pflugerville I.S.D. freshmen receive in their athletic classes will impact their GPA. While no formal announcement regarding the district-wide policy change has been made to PHS freshmen, the change is retroactive to the beginning of the school year, meaning it will affect freshmen who have been enrolled in athletic classes this semester or last semester.

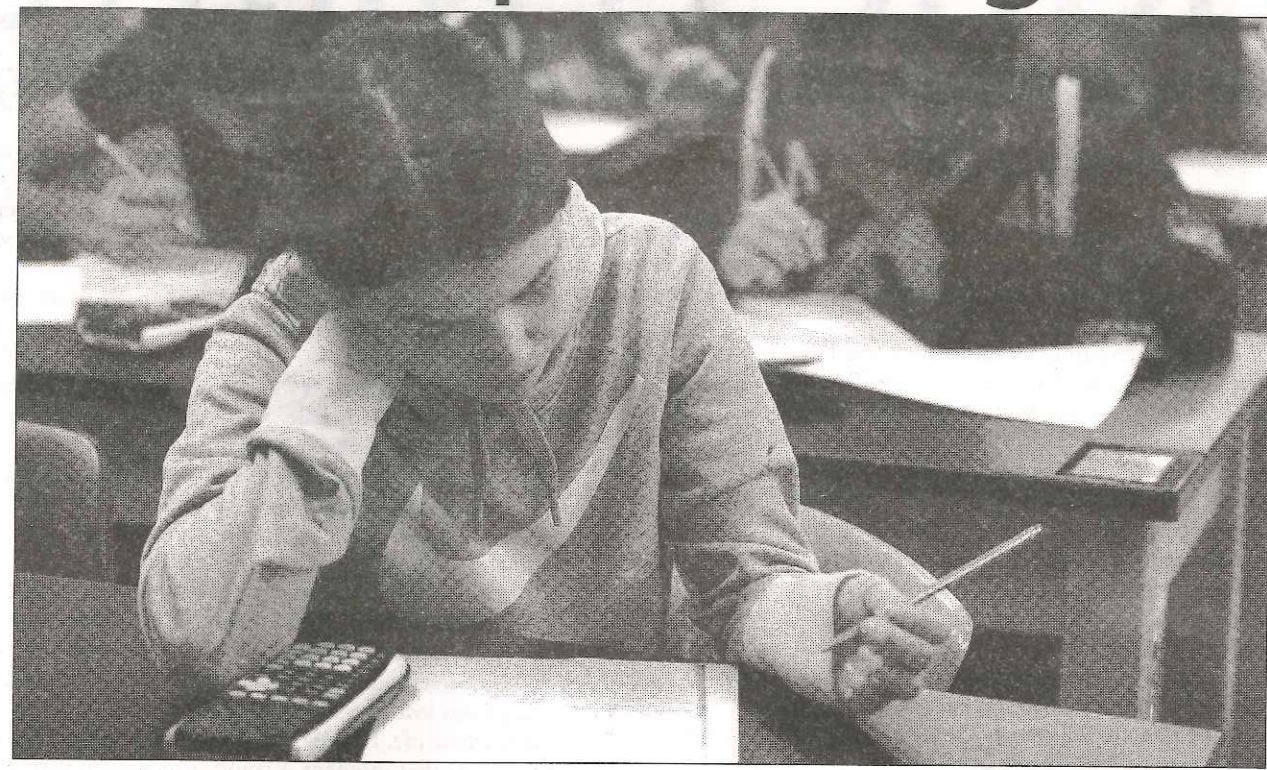
Pflugerville I.S.D. District Athletic Director Johanna Denson said the change was agreed upon after several meetings last fall between district principals, coaches and administrators.

"The purpose for the change is equity," Denson said. "A student who chooses to be in athletics, who chooses to represent the school district, [now] has the same opportunity to receive the grade as someone who's in technical theater. Not to allow [athletes to] receive credit toward their GPA is not equitable."

Freshmen counselor Sarah Cable said not everyone who attended the fall meetings agreed that the move was fair.

"It was a pretty heated debate," Cable said. "There were a lot of people who felt like athletes work really hard and commit a lot of time and energy during the year, and that that grade should be counted in the GPA. And then there were quite a few people who felt like coaches just hand out 100s to everybody, that [it] was unfair to put [grades from athletic classes] in the GPA if it wasn't based on attendance and a strict guideline as to how they earned that 100. There were a lot of mixed feelings about it."

Pflugerville I.S.D. Executive Director of Special Programs Joanne Frantzen said that while this change only affects freshmen this year, it will be applied to sophomores in 2015-16, juniors in 2016-17, and seniors in 2017-18. As part of the policy, Frantzen said, grades earned in athletic classes will only



Sophomore basketball player Nancy Hidalgo takes a test during AP Chemistry. Beginning this school year, the grades Pflugerville I.S.D. freshmen receive in their athletic classes will impact their GPA. This policy change will also be applied to sophomores in 2015-16, juniors in 2016-17 and seniors in 2017-18. "The purpose for the change is equity," Pflugerville I.S.D. District Athletic Director Johanna Denson said. Photo by Madison Masters

count toward GPA while students are earning their two semesters of athletic credit required for graduation. During these two semesters, the athletic classes will count toward a student's GPA as an on-level elective.

"It has a GPA attached to it now," Assistant Principal for Curriculum & Instruction Angela Barnes said. "It's going to be just as important as the Algebra 1 class down the hall, it's going to be just as important as the chemistry on-level class."

Barnes believes that, overall, this change will be a positive for student athletes.

"The only big concern was that many of our athletes are AP scholars, and they've picked their classes very, very carefully," Barnes said. "They pick them because they're weighted. Athletics will never be weighted."

Freshman basketball player Kyle Suh believes this change will benefit freshmen.

"I get good grades [in athletics], so it affects my GPA in a positive way," Suh said. "It's really hard to get a bad grade [in athletics] because you're supposed to participate and [coaches will] make you participate. It's probably going to affect their GPA positively."

Tennis Coach James Sombathy said the policy change will do more than give athletes a grade boost.

"I think it will encourage more participa-

tion," Sombathy said. "I think it's a great idea to recognize the work that student athletes are putting in during the academic day and benefit from it."

Under the new policy, Denson said athletes will be graded with a rubric system that is currently being designed by head coaches at each high school campus. Every sport will get its own unique rubric that will be based in part on athletic improvement. Sombathy currently uses a similar rubric system.

"We're not grading them on their performance against another team," Sombathy said. "It's learning skills. It's performing in the class to show mastery of something that you have been taught. And that is the same whether it's athletic or academic."

At the fall meetings, Cable said some consideration was given to granting students GPA credit for athletic classes taken in high school. However, many expressed concern that the current trend of high grades in athletic classes may give an inequitable advantage to those in athletic classes.

"I do think giving straight 100s isn't fair," Cable said. "I think if people felt there was a guideline for how grades were calculated, they'd feel more comfortable with that. But because it seems like everybody kind of just gets 100, most people were uncomfortable with that."

Freshman tennis player Alexia Higgins takes issue with the district's implementation of the new policy.

"If any policy should change, it should affect all grade levels," Higgins said. "That's what should be fair. Anyone taking athletics in high school should be under the effect of the new policy."

Sombathy believes the impact of the policy change will be minimal.

"If there is going to be either a detriment or a benefit, I think it will be minuscule at best," Sombathy said. "I think the students that are performing well academically will perform well in [athletic classes]. I think students who academically don't have the work ethic might not have the work ethic in [athletic classes] either."

Despite the various opinions regarding the new policy, only time will tell how it will actually affect athletes and athletic teams across the district.

"It's hard when you make changes in the middle of the year when it's affecting students who are already in school," Cable said. "... With any change, I think there's going to be some questions. But I'm kind of excited to see how it goes."

—Additional reporting by Catherine Atkinson