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***FAIRGRADE Explains Why Letter Grades Matter
Understanding the Impact of Grading Scale vs. Weights***

Fairfax County, VA –Tuesday, January 6, 2009— FAIRGRADE expressed concern today that Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) has not clearly outlined for School Board members that the number one factor for college admissions is NOT grade point average (GPA) but high school letter grades in core classes – a fact cited in FCPS’ own report. (*FCPS Report: National Association for College Admissions Counseling – NACAC, & The College Board*)

FAIRGRADE reports they are seeing a lot of email traffic from School Board members to constituents that indicates some confusion regarding evidence cited in FCPS’ report that relates to the negative impact the current grading scale has on high school letter grades and the college admissions process.

“Because colleges use high school letter grades for making college admissions’ decisions, FCPS’ grading scale is THE problem for FCPS students, and the grading scale IS limiting their opportunities in terms of where they can and cannot get accepted,” said Megan McLaughlin, FAIRGRADE President and former admissions officer for Georgetown University.

FAIRGRADE says Dr. Dale’s recommendation to change only the weights for advanced courses but NOT the grading scale will continue to put FCPS students at a competitive disadvantage.

“Dale recommends changing the weights so FCPS students can be more competitive in winning merit scholarships and getting into college honors programs. But if FCPS students cannot get admitted to the college of their choice because of lower letter grades in their core courses, then Dale’s added weights only solve half the problem,” said Marcy Newberger, FAIRGRADE Vice President.

FAIRGRADE has always acknowledged that Virginia public universities take into account FCPS grading policies. “The problem,” says FAIRGRADE Co-founder Sara Pacqué-Margolis, “is the grading scale’s negative impact on students applying to many of the private colleges and out-of-state schools that only consider letter grades in core courses or do not recalculate GPAs.”

“Contrary to what parents and students have been told, we now know from the FCPS report that 55% of colleges surveyed do not recalculate grades and 89% compare individual applicants against their entire applicant pool. Because letter grades are the number one factor for college admissions, our current grading scale is clearly limiting the college choices available to our students,” said FAIRGRADE Vice President Louise Epstein.

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