

Student recognitions, achievements, and adaptations to previous practices:

The academic achievement at Plum Senior High School has never been more distinguished than it is currently. Students from this year's senior class are attending Columbia University, the University of Pennsylvania, Georgetown University, and the United States Air Force, just to name a few, and the number of students pursuing fields in the sciences, engineering, mathematics and technology related fields was abundantly evident in last Monday's Academic Honors Ceremony. Complimentary to this achievement has been the number of students taking Advanced Placement classes and exams. This total has tripled over the last six years, raising the rigor of coursework, preparing students for post-secondary study, and earning valuable college-level credit while still in high school. Recognition of this achievement is also extremely comprehensive. Students are generally recognized as follows...

- 3.25 – Honor Roll every nine weeks, Honors Cords at commencement
- 3.5 – Eligibility for the National Honor Society
- 3.75 – High Honor Roll every nine weeks, High Honors Cords at commencement, invitation to participate in the Academic Honors Ceremony
- 4.0 – High Honor Roll every nine weeks, High Honors Cords at commencement, invitation to participate in the Academic Honors Ceremony, 4.0 medals and line recognition at commencement
- Senior Awards Night – recognition of students receiving specific awards and scholarships presented by the awarding post-secondary institution or organization

The practices of recognizing valedictorians, salutatorians, and calculating official class rank were eliminated for the benefits of both representing our students in a more favorable manner to post-secondary institutions and scholarship organizations, and to eliminate the very contentious and unhealthy previous GPA competitions between students. Students can still get their unofficial ranks from the guidance department if needed, but it is not officially calculated or represented on transcripts. One example of a class rank misrepresentation would have been, that of the 98 students in this year's senior class who have a 3.75 GPA or better, 20 would not have been in the top 25% of their class. To be ranked #98 in a class of 311 students with a grade point average of 3.75 presents a diminishing representation of individual achievement. Examples of previous valedictorian concerns were students taking classes of no interest or benefit to their futures, simply because they were weighted classes. Also, we previously found that students would choose to not take additional elective classes at times because they were not weighted (study halls were of more benefit to GPAs than taking a non-weighted class). Many local schools have moved away from rank and valedictorian and more than 50% of schools nationally had moved away from these practices prior to our change at PHS. Removal of class rank and valedictorians seems to happen most prevalently in higher achieving schools, where achievements are of most benefit to students as "stand alone" on transcripts rather than in comparison to other high achieving students in the same school. Two articles are attached to give more insight into this. Our primary goals have been to shed students' achievements in general in a more favorable light and remove an unnecessary and contentious previous practices in the process.