

Graduation Recognition Study

Madeira School Board Planning Commission

2018-2019

Amanda Shults (Chair)

Tim Weber (Resource)

Abby Seelmeyer

Cara Kuester

Karen Dougherty

Katie Maney

Purpose

What are the current trends in how students are recognized upon graduation? How can we align our student recognition programs to reflect best practices in supporting the mental health of our teens? Are there other ways to honor top students without emphasis on rank? Should we continue to recognize the valedictorian and salutatorian academic status?

Methodology and Research

1. We distributed a survey to Madeira High School faculty and staff and asked them to respond to the following questions:
 - a. What are the advantages of naming a valedictorian/salutatorian?
 - b. What are the disadvantages of naming a valedictorian/salutatorian?
2. We looked at Madeira's current graduation recognition programs.
3. We spoke with Madeira High School counselors and asked the following questions:
 - a. What do you feel are the positive aspects as to how we currently honor our top seniors at graduation?
 - b. Do you feel there are any negatives associated with the practices we currently have in place?
 - c. If we choose to eliminate the designations of valedictorian and salutatorian from our graduation ceremony, would that have negative repercussions as far as colleges and universities were concerned? Are there scholarships our top students would not be eligible for without this designation?
 - d. Given how we currently honor our top performing seniors, how do you feel it impacts the mental health of our students?
4. We reached out to neighboring school districts including Finneytown, Forest Hills, Indian Hill, Mariemont, Sycamore, and Wyoming. We discussed their current graduation recognition processes and any changes they are considering for the future. Specifically, we asked the following questions:
 - a. Do you currently recognize a valedictorian/salutatorian?
 - b. If no, when did you stop and what steps did you take to stop.
 - c. If yes, are you considering making this change?
 - d. How do you feel the valedictorian/salutatorian recognition process affects the mental health of your students?

- e. How do you recognize your valedictorian/salutatorian? What is your ceremony like?
5. We spoke with Tracy Schuman, Associate Director of Enrollment Services of Undergraduate Admissions for The Ohio State University, to find out how OSU evaluates student applications.
6. We spoke with Nancy Miller, a mental health expert with 1N5, who consults with Madeira High School. We asked Ms. Miller to share her opinion on valedictorian/salutatorian recognition programs and how they affect the mental health of high school students.

Background: What we currently do at Madeira

Valedictorian and Salutatorian

Right now we recognize a valedictorian(s) and salutatorian(s) - there are typically more than 2, but not more than 4. The reason there is more than one of each is that the top students are separated by small fractions of a point.

In response to an earlier planning commission study, we recently removed class rank from transcripts and do not report it. If colleges require or request it, counselors can add the rank to the transcript for that purpose. We do not use class rank in any recognition or ceremony except for valedictorian and salutatorian.

Aside from public recognition, the valedictorian(s) and salutatorian(s) make a speech at graduation.

How are the highest GPAs calculated?

Students with the highest GPAs qualify for valedictorian and salutatorian. Students earn points for their grades on a 4 point scale: A = 4, B = 3, C = 2, D = 1. However, many classes are weighted classes.

If a class is weighted, that means that after the final grade for a course is calculated, a weight is applied when determining overall GPA. An AP class is weighted 1 point; an honors class is weighted .5 point. This means that if a student earned a B in an honors class, he or she would have a 3.5 GPA for that class instead of a 3.0. If the student

earned a B in an AP class, he or she would have a 4.0 GPA for that class instead of a 3.0. Because of weighted grades, it is possible for students to have higher than a 4.0 GPA.

There is a state law that requires high schools accept CCP classes, or College Credit Plus classes, towards high school graduation credit and as part of a student's high school GPA. CCP classes are classes taken at colleges and universities; they may be classes that we currently offer, but they may also be classes that we do not offer. According to the law, if a school uses weighted grades, it is required to weight CCP classes the same as the highest weighted class. For Madeira High School, that means CCP classes must be weighted 1 point, the same as AP classes. This is true regardless of the class taken.

Madeira also has a policy that allows students to take an elective class and not have that class factor into their GPAs. This is called "declaring" a class; it is similar to "auditing" a class. Students do have grades for a declared class, and the grade is reported on the transcript, but it is not used to calculate GPA. Classes can only be declared if they are not required for graduation, and this can only be done for one credit per year.

Other recognitions

Madeira also has a recognition of Top Senior, which is any senior who has a cumulative GPA of 4.0 or higher. Top Seniors have an academic day of signing and are recognized when their names are called at graduation.

At graduation, the class president gives a speech. Students in National Honor Society wear cords. There is also a service cord for students who have completed 150 hours of community service. The honors with the cords are indicated in the graduation program, but they are not announced.

There are other times when outstanding seniors are recognized. Madeira has a senior awards night in May, when students are given a variety of awards. Awards such as Outstanding Senior Boy and Outstanding Senior Girl recognize academic achievement as well as leadership and character. Many scholarships, such as the Ryan Korengel scholarship and the Roger Slagle scholarship, are also announced at this event.

The senior class also has a baccalaureate ceremony the week of graduation. At this event, roughly 10 students and 2 faculty members give speeches. Often students sing

or play instruments as well. The student speakers are volunteers who have a reflection they wish to share with their classmates. This event does not acknowledge awards or specific achievements at all; rather, the class as a whole is celebrated.

Culture Playbook

Most of the graduation recognition practices we use are traditions started many years ago. Our committee wanted to mention that Madeira City Schools has recently developed a culture playbook that describes what we as a district value and how we hope to live up to those values. We believe that any discussion of new or altered recognition practices should keep that culture playbook in mind. The playbook names several things that might be relevant to this topic:

- Act with purpose (let our actions be intentional and match our values).
- Everyone is welcomed, included, and valued.
- View mistakes as feedback.
- Take risks.

Findings

Tying our research back to the study's main objectives, here are the trends and key findings:

What are the current trends in how students are recognized upon graduation?

- Schools have either moved away from val/sal recognition or have a plan to do so on their radar.
- Schools are recognizing the need and making positive mental health a priority.
- Schools are also recognizing the need for well-rounded student - not just a high GPA.
- Many schools are not using class rank.

How can we align our student recognition programs to reflect best practices in supporting the mental health of our teens?

- Making sure the students are competing against a standard - not each other
- Ensure our practices match our values (risk taking, strong student characteristics, "LIGHT", etc.)

- Connect students and parents with resources who can help provide “truth” to the changing trend in college admission

Are there other ways to honor top students without emphasis on rank?

- Encourage students to compete against a benchmark rather than against other students (for example, the college recognition system)
- Allow students to audition for speech to represent the senior class
- Continue to celebrate student accomplishments with Top Senior, Academic Day of Signing, Senior Awards Night, and the Made in Madeira Scholarship
- Highlight senior student accomplishments in the Madeira Quality Profile

Should we continue to recognize valedictorian and salutatorian academic status?

- No. Based on our faculty survey and interviews with other schools, nothing positive is gained by having a valedictorian and salutatorian (other than maintaining a long-standing tradition).
- There were several drawbacks mentioned such as the impact on mental health, students selecting courses based on GPA and not interests, etc.
- This is a video of a valedictorian speech given in 2016 that illustrates some of the feedback that research reflected, but in the words of a graduate - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a5uqNhfNHL8>

Recommendations

- Develop a steering committee to plan timeline and process to remove val/sal (including teachers, students and parents) and potentially replace with a benchmark system
- Evaluate current recognition programs to make sure they align with Madeira values and culture
- Educate students and parents about what colleges prioritize in the admissions process
- Continue to make positive mental health a priority at Madeira schools for students, faculty, and parents

Appendices

Appendix A - MHS faculty survey

The survey was emailed as a link to the MHS faculty listserv. Participation was voluntary. There were 26 responses. Some respondents left one question blank. Blank responses have been left in the table of survey results.

The following directions were given at the top of the survey:

This is a survey of MHS faculty to gather information for the Planning Commission study on graduation recognition. If you have any questions about the study or this survey, please talk to faculty representatives Abby Seelmeyer or Karen Dougherty.

The goal of the survey is to find out what faculty members have found to be the advantages and disadvantages of our current methods of recognizing top graduates. Please use your experience teaching at Madeira High School to answer the questions. You may share specific examples if it is helpful, but please refrain from using student names or graduation years.

Your responses are anonymous, but results of the survey, including specific responses, will be shared with the committee and potentially with the Planning Commission and/or the Board of Education.

Survey results:

What are the advantages of naming a valedictorian and salutatorian?
There are none.
no advantages
Motivation for the top students to do their best.
I'm not even sure anymore? Are there scholarships given out to students who are named valedictorian/salutatorian? Other than that, I don't know what an advantage would be - I can't even remember who they were from my graduating class!
There aren't any. The designations do not recognize anything we as a school should place any value upon.
Tradition?
None
Recognition for exceptional dedication to a student's academic studies

recognition
Those selected are selected because they have worked hard for four years. I think these would be great honors.
Being able to give recognition to those students
Knowing that these titles are obtainable may serve as a motivator for students to work hard and take challenging classes. Being recognized at graduation as the val or sal provides recognition as a reward for dedication to students' school work.
Many students work very hard for their entire academic careers. This is their 'area of expertise' for which they have studied, practiced, and taken the tougher, more advanced curriculum. Recognizing the students for this hard work is important, just as a trophy or ribbons are in sports.
Some universities still do look at the ranking of students for admission, and some even still award scholarship money to students who are in the top (or are the top) of their class.
There are none.
sense of accomplishment or a goal, it's a nationally recognized rank/accomplishment for a college to view, reward for a student's hard work, possible motivation to work hard and/or take rigorous courses
None. In today's world of CCP, Summer Courses, Flex Credits, etc the landscape of these designations have changed. They made more sense when schools had local control over courses students take, the type of courses available, and the playing "field" was level.
Recognition for achievement
Those kids receive money from certain schools. It fulfills a tradition.
I no longer feel there is an advantage...
I am struggling to come up with any.
Recognition of individual students with the highest GPAs; Could help to motivate students to perform well at school for this honor; Students in this position receive a lot of recognition/publicity in the community and at school; nationally recognized title
We recognize one or two kids.
none that I can identify

What are the disadvantages of naming a valedictorian and salutatorian?

Creates "competition" among students.

Encourages students to "work the system" (take CCP in order to take AP classes at the HS to inflate their GPA) rather than taking classes they are interested in

Encourages students to focus on a grade rather than learning content.

I've witnessed students taking CCP English (which gives them a 5.0 A, rather than take our AP English courses at the HS because the HS courses are more difficult). This opens up their schedule to take more AP classes in other areas (to their detriment).

Again, they are focused on the grade outcome and not the value of learning content.

It is a false representation of the person who exhibits the "highest academic achievements in their class". It is more of who played the GPA game better.

there are so many kids that work so hard and are not recognized

Forgetting about learning and only caring about the grades, can impact relationships, takes away from celebrating the whole class

The insane competition between students to get the highest GPA possible (CCP classes, etc.). Making them such busy students academically rather than challenging themselves in some classes and enjoying their teenage/high school years. I know of so many students who are so busy because the amount of Honors, AP, CCP classes they take that they are only doing homework/studying rather than also having downtime to relax, enjoy family/friend time, etc.

Encouraging students to make decisions that aren't in their best interest is the principle disadvantage. Continuing to elevate a very few students as especially important due to something so insignificant as a few thousandths of a grade point over the next student just seems like we are completely unaware of and unable to distinguish between what is worth awarding and what is not.

Causes unnecessary anxiety for students. Causes students to take too many AP classes.

Increased academic stress for students and families, disappointment for students and families that miss this honor by tiny margins, manipulation of courses and sequence of courses for the sold purpose of class rank positioning, lack of acknowledgement for the work invested by many students who might not have achieved the same level of final grades

Manipulation of the system, pressure to cheat, unethical behavior, taking additional outside courses to gain an advantage over peers.

others may feel their accomplishments are less worthy

My high school did not have a valedictorian or salutatorian. I do not know why. A grade point average is a grade point average, and that is the basis of having each. I can't see that there would be any disadvantage other than the jealousy of other student's and/or their parents. Trying to make everybody happy should never be a reason for these sorts of things.

Naming a val/sal creates a culture of competitiveness that is neither healthy nor beneficial to our kids. In my 12 years teaching here, I have seen an increase in student acts of desperation to reach unrealistic standards or to keep up with overachieving classmates. These acts of desperation include plagiarizing papers, paying others to do homework, copying homework from other students or the internet, sharing answers on group chats, missing school to study or finish work, and attempting to use technology during tests. I believe the high levels of stress, anxiety, and depression that I am seeing more and more of my students suffer from are partly influenced by the grade-obsessed culture that we promote. It seems that it gets worse and worse every year as students compete to be in the top of their class. Students have ruined relationships with friends and staff members, all in the name of "playing the game" to be awarded the val/sal title. Meanwhile, many of our other students notice the unfairness and irony when students are awarded for behavior that is unethical. It's really sad to see some of our most intellectually gifted students lose their love of learning because they are instead so focused on their grades and their academic ranking.

This distinction causes an unhealthy competition among some students. I have experienced students in an Honors class argue every lost point on their assignments because they worry it will drop them in the rankings. They were focused so much on defending their answers or wheedling their way into additional points that they completely lost sight of what they were supposed to be learning. I then watched some of these students, in higher grades, backstab their friends by secretly taking CCP classes in the hopes of climbing higher in class rank. They put their potential position as val/sal above their relationships with their friends. Aside from this example, many students blatantly "game" the system by figuring out which AP classes, weighted electives, and CCP courses they need to take to mathematically be at the top of the class. Instead of taking classes they're interested in or that may be a better fit for them, they make their selections based on rank. This leads to mental health issues, as their lives are consumed by AP coursework, and they become overwhelmed, stressed out, and some resort to cheating in a desperate attempt to stay on top.

While the intention of these titles may be to motivate students to work hard, the disadvantages (combined with the fact that the titles mean little to nothing to universities) outweigh the benefits.

Fewer student "gaming" the system for the sole purpose of being 1st or 2nd. Attempting to refocus on taking classes for learning and not points.

Often times, students already know which students are at the top, and there can only be 2. Students can feel pressure & anxiety trying to reach that goal (and possibly 'failing') Naming just 2 individuals eliminates the spotlight on all of the students who also put in the academic work and excel at their own levels. Also, pressure is put upon these students to take more and more Honors and AP courses just for the grade boost, regardless of their interests or their abilities to succeed.

It does cause added stress and competition for some students. Students might be more likely to choose a class based on interest rather than a potential GPA boost. Some students play the system and it creates some bitterness among classmates.

There are many. We associate valedictorians with being the highest achiever in the graduating class; however, it has become increasingly more of a system to be played and won. The introduction of CCP classes as 5.0 A's have allowed kids to not only avoid certain classes at MHS, but to keep adding additional courses during the school year or summer to increase the GPA. It has encouraged students to make poor decisions regarding both their schedule load (more and more weighted classes at earlier stages) and to avoid some very strong Madeira courses (i.e. AP English or unweighted electives). It turns the academic climate for the top of the class into a competitive environment that brings out an attempt to get the "A" at any cost. Students will also calculate exactly how many quarters they need to get an "A" and then worry less about a certain class due to the rounding of the quarter grades. Many of our recent valedictorians have been students that began plotting out the path as eighth graders and stay on the journey to see if they can attain this rank. This often leads to making course decisions increasing the number of classes taken or certain classes taken that don't allow them the opportunity to explore learning in general. For example, a student that loves foreign language may quit taking a language during their junior year to pick up an additional AP course because the junior year foreign language classes are only weighted 4.5. Furthermore, I have had students give up art or music classes because they can only audit one course per year to not count in their GPA. This process is NOT a true reflection of what we value at Madeira High School. I dislike honoring someone at our biggest celebration of our graduates for playing a game that does put the things that we value first. By continuing to honor the highest GPA (even with all these ways of increasing it), we are saying that this process or game is important and valuable to our

school culture. I have also seen the mental health of students affected by this process. Because you don't need to have A's all year to receive an A in the course, students will often take too many classes and stretch themselves too thin. Exhausted and anxious students putting in all this effort just to be valedictorian is the result -- if they miss the mark, they aren't recognized. It has become an all or nothing game. I am tired of seeing the negative effects of this process.

stress on the student to always perform perfectly to maintain or attain this status, competition between classmates, might discourage a student from taking a course that won't contribute to his/her class rank even though he/she might be interested in it, no special national recognition or academic accomplishment to put on college applications

These designations do nothing but feed a competitive academic experience that is not healthy.

Students playing the numbers game in order to get ahead

It sometimes creates a fight between parents/kids/faculty when instances of cheating or character lapses occur (ex: one kid is accused of cheating and another parent threatens to offer proof the next kid in line has also cheated but never been punished). It makes kids focus on their class rank and compare with each other (I've even heard kids put others down for their class rank). It makes kids take classes for grade weight and GPA advantages rather than the learning. It sends the message that academic rank is the most important for success. It sends the message that they are the superior graduates (who get to speak while the others sit there). I could go on and on, but you can probably tell that already!

There have been students named as valedictorian and salutatorian who have received the title by "playing the game" instead of truly deserving it. I believe there might be more integrity shown by students if they know that there is no longer a chosen valedictorian and salutatorian.

The students know what we value by what we honor and recognize. In this case, we honor and recognize those who 1) are clever enough to look up all of the rules and loopholes (such as declaring courses, getting extra weight for CCP courses, etc); 2) have the time and resources to take extra classes outside of the school year (CCP) - including a parent who can provide transportation, etc; 3) are willing to forego more than one elective class a year; 4) are intellectually gifted and work hard.

I don't think that's what we mean to be honoring, but that is what it takes to earn val or sal. We are also suggesting that achievement (the grade) is more important than process, growth, integrity, and work ethic, which again is not what I think we mean to be saying.

Students enrolling in classes / creating schedules for combinations that will gain them a higher GPA; The focus is only on grades and not on student learning; Students could have a higher level of anxiety about grades and individual tests;

We end up recognizing one or two kids.

What results from that is a grind in unhealthy ways among kids and parents to want to be the top kid, take all the “right” courses, and plot and scheme to get to the top. The pursuit of #1 means putting yourself against friends, doubling up on CCP courses, and stressing out kids who have to be perfect to be #1

There can be very little difference between the 1st and 2nd student or the 2nd and 3rd. This can make students too competitive and can affect which courses they take. They might take an AP instead of another course, not because they are truly interested in the AP but because they want the grade boost. They also tend to fight teachers over single points because the "A" means so much to them. I think this competition contributes greatly to student angst.

Appendix B-Forest Hills Local School District

Meghan Lawson, a former curriculum director at Forest Hills, discussed her involvement with Forest Hills school district as they removed weighted courses from transcripts and no longer recognize val/sal. The power point presentation link is given along with other key points from a phone interview.

- Dec 2017 they started interviewing students and received essays showing the effects of class rank, val/sal recognition and weighted GPA
 - “This fixation with numbers carried into my secondary education as I mulled over how my GPA, class rank, and ACT score distinguished me from my peers. At some times, it made me feel a false sense of superiority, while at others, it destroyed my sense of worth as a student. I am disillusioned with the idea that a person can be valued this way...I am under the impression that after fourteen years of schooling, the Forest Hills School District regards me as little more than a statistic. I feel as if am nothing more than one of the two-hundred-eighty-two graduating seniors”
- Contacted top five universities that were attended by and those most sought after in regards to their admissions processes and how they view class rank, val/sal,

and weighted GPA

- Overall, there was no consistent pattern
- From the National Association of Secondary School Principals & National Association of College Admissions Counseling
 - Of surveyed college/admission counseling groups comprised of 230 universities, 79% of colleges said their biggest item of importance is the grades in CP coursework followed close by grades in all courses over all, and the school's profile.
 - 50-60% placed ACT/SAT of high importance.
 - Class rank was of medium importance, so they MIGHT use class rank a bit. But overall, less than 10% of schools gave class rank considerable importance in 2016. The importance of class rank to IHE's continues to decline.
 - Recommendation letters & other materials were high in importance.
- Shared this with administration, PTO, and parents and they agreed that in 2020 they would remove class rank and val/sal recognition. They would also go to a five point weighted system in 2018/2019.
- Parents could still request class rank

-Committee's Recommendations

- Remove class rank from transcripts starting with the Class of 2020
- No longer recognize val/sal starting with the Class of 2020 and instead recognize students in a Cum Laude system.
 - Top 5% of students: Summa Cum Laude
 - Top 6-10%: Magna Cum Laude
 - Top 11-20%: Cum Laude
- In Forest Park (1200 students from Turpin and 1200 from Anderson) they had 17

people come forward with negative feedback.

- Below is the link to the power point presentation Meghan gave to the Forest Hills School District.
- <https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/11H8Z20MrsVKMLH3-X6HFo8Q4m9IIZWRdoQ3Pj82kVko/edit#slide=id.p3>

Appendix C-Mariemont, Indian Hill, Sycamore and Wyoming High School counselor interviews

Phone interview with Amanda Leszczuk-Mariemont High School counselor:

- Mariemont is struggling with these same issues: they want to reward but don't want to push kids over the edge.
- Three years ago they gave students a choice to put class rank on transcript.
- They meet with sophomores in a counseling lesson. They explain why they take rank off, and if students decide they want it, they have to go to counselor. They are trying to downplay importance of class rank.
- They still use val/sal.
- Val/sal process is designed to reward the student who took the most challenging courses. However, this has changed in the last few years. Currently, it rewards you for taking classes, but you get a bump for all classes, not just AP. THIS IS ONLY FOR VAL/SAL (see process explained below).
- THEY ARE NOT penalized for taking classes they like (i.e. band).
- Recognition night for grades 9-12. They recognized the top kids in each subject/class. There are also art awards, DECA (clubs) awards and "effort" awards. Overall it is fairly broad. About 20 local scholarships are announced.
- They do not recognize scholarships. In the program it states, "Class of 2018 earned nearly x amount in scholarships."
- Val, sal, and the president of the class all speak at graduation.

Below is the process Mariemont High School follows:

Cum Laude Society

The objective of the Cum Laude Society is to promote learning and sound scholarship. Outstanding scholarship is the sole basis for selection to Cum Laude Society. Students are elected for membership after semester one of grade 12 has been completed; equal weight is given to each semester. Student members must have been enrolled at Mariemont High School during the entire senior year and must have successfully completed a minimum of 14 full credits of Cum Laude course work. To be tapped a

student must have at least a 3.5 GPA based on a weighted 4-point scale. Weighted grades are retained when determining eligibility. Students must also have comparable SAT/ACT scores. The number of students admitted is restricted by the Cum Laude Society charter.

The scope of all cum laude courses includes all college preparatory courses offered for high school cred These would include arts, business, and other college preparatory electives. Physical education, FOCUS... and foundations level courses will not count as cum laude courses,

Flex credit courses such as online and post-secondary courses could be considered as cum laude cours at the discretion of the principal and the cum laude committee. Flex credit classes which are proposed as honors or AP level courses could be given consideration for additional weighting of the grade point average by the principal and cum laude committee if the flex credit course being considered for addition weight was also offered to students at MHS.

Students will not be able to take any more than 14 sections of cum laude courses per academic school year which would count in the calculation for cum laude recognition. If the student wishes to take additional courses, they would be included in the student's transcript, but would not be included in the calculation for GPA and/or class rank.

It is incumbent that students not attending junior high in the Mariemont School District not have an academic advantage over students attending MJHS. This must be considered when determining course. that are accepted for high school credit from other junior high schools as well as whether those courses are given additional weight.

The determination of valedictorian and salutatorian at MHS will only be modified to the extent that the scope of the courses included in the calculation will be increased for the Class of 2017. The additional weight for each cum laude course to reward taking a college preparatory class over a study hall will remain in effect.

Valedictorian and Salutatorian Selection

Beginning with the Class of 2017 and carrying through the Class of 2020, the Valedictorian and Salutatorian (Val/Sal) will be chosen using the current Board policy. There will be no limit placed upon the number of credits a student can apply towards Val/Sal. Students will be permitted to use weighted courses that have been approved by school administration. Any additional weight or credit units applied towards CCP courses will be stripped for purpose of Val/Sal if the course is not available at MHS. The CCP courses will not have additional weights or credit units stripped for the purpose of class rank.

Beginning with the Class of 2021, only high school courses taken during grades 9 through 12 will apply towards the selection of Val/Sal. The number of credits that can be applied towards the calculation of Val/ Sal will be 28, as that is currently the number of courses that can be taken over a four-year period of time taking the maximum number of seven classes a day. We will maintain the practice of adding additional 0.1 Weight for each cum laude course. The high school principal will decide which CCP and flex credit courses will receive additional weight due to their rigor.

The method for determining class rank for the sole purpose of selecting valedictorian/salutatorian for Mariemont High School will be in accordance with the procedures outlined below:

1. Grades earned in courses enumerated for admittance into the Cum Laude Society will be used to

determine valedictorian/salutatorian. For each Cum Laude course taken, one tenth of one point will be added to the "Cum Laude" GPA. This total adjusted GPA will determine the valedictorian/ salutatorian. If a Cum Laude course is valued at a .5 credit, a .05 add on will be used.

2. Weighted grades will be included with full weights applied.

3. Only students who have enrolled at Mariemont High School for their entire senior year will be considered.

Phone interview with Donita Jackson-Indian Hill High School counselor:

- Indian Hill recognizes their top 10 seniors based GPA.
- The top 10 sit in front row at graduation.
- Indian Hill currently recognizes val/sal.
- They don't announce order of the "Top 10" — only that val is #1 and sal is #2.
- They are having discussions about changing the format due to mental health and anxiety; they feel that the competitive nature is unhealthy.
- Lots of students are taking classes based on weight, "easy A", and CCP.
- Other schools are using Latin system—Cum Laude, Magna, Summa, etc. This would recognize more students based off of GPA (more college-esq).
- The valedictorian speaks at graduation.
- Senior Recognition Night: Each department selects two awards: top student and personal growth. The evening is just for seniors. Scholarships are awarded, outside scholarships are recognized, and salutatorian speaks.
- Total scholarship amount is tabulated for the class.
- IH is meeting in the spring with staff, parents, teachers, administrators to discuss

their new strategy.

Phone interview with Cynthia Meis-Wyoming High School counselor:

- Dropped class rank 6/7 years ago
- Wanted students to stop comparing themselves to one another
- Counselor felt like it was too easy for college admissions to utilize class rank and not look deeper at student transcripts.
- Removing class rank forces college to look at students as individuals.
- No longer recognize rank in any way other than val/sal
- Don't tell val/sal until one week before graduation
- They have *not* talked about getting rid of val/sal.
- WHS is deeply rooted in tradition; even getting rid of class rank was a challenge!
- Really emphasize consistency, don't drop classes you are passionate about! (DO NOT SACRIFICE FOR GPA)
- Teachers are asked to recognize this in college letters of recommendation.
- Struggling with CCP and have not addressed how to handle it yet
- Combined academic awards night (not separated for seniors)
- Wyoming Schools Foundation day — scholarships awarded in front of the student body
- There is no scholarship recognition at graduation.
- Speeches by val/sal at graduation are the only distinction.

Phone interview with Meg Brenner-Sycamore High School counselor:

- Sycamore dropped val/sal more than 10 years ago.
- Sycamore speeches are by audition only—not just for top students.
- Class president often speaks, but not always.
- They recognize students for honor cords, but they don't stand.
- The only students called out and asked to stand during the ceremony are students going into military -- everything else is in the program.
- Senior awards night—recognize National Merit, departmental awards, etc. (Summa Cum Laude -- might drop that)
- They don't collect or recognize scholarship recipients. They had a parent explain that it was inequitable/uneven for some students, so they dropped it.
- Officially say they don't rank and don't list rank on college applications. They WILL provide rank for scholarship applications if requested. A handful of students will ask/worry about it, but most don't.
- Outcome: it is not a big race any more!

- They have a few kids hyper-focused on GPA, but she believes this will always be the case. There are not as many worried about weight and constant manipulation.
- It is easier on students, teachers, and families.
- They can focus on celebrating what they are doing.
- Channel 9 “Best in the Class” — they do send the top 3 students in class.

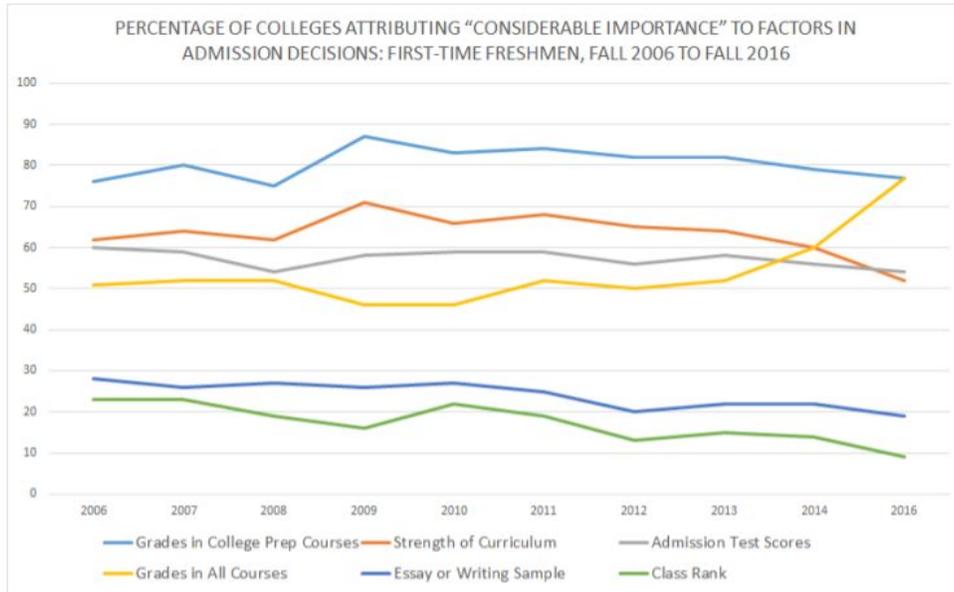
Appendix D-The Ohio State University and National Association for College Admissions Counseling

Email response from Tracy Shuman, Associate Director of Enrollment Services of Undergraduate Admissions at The Ohio State University.

“You are not the first counselor or district to ask about rank or consider moving away from it. I would say that only about 50% of schools still use rank. There are also some schools that do not have a val or sal at all.

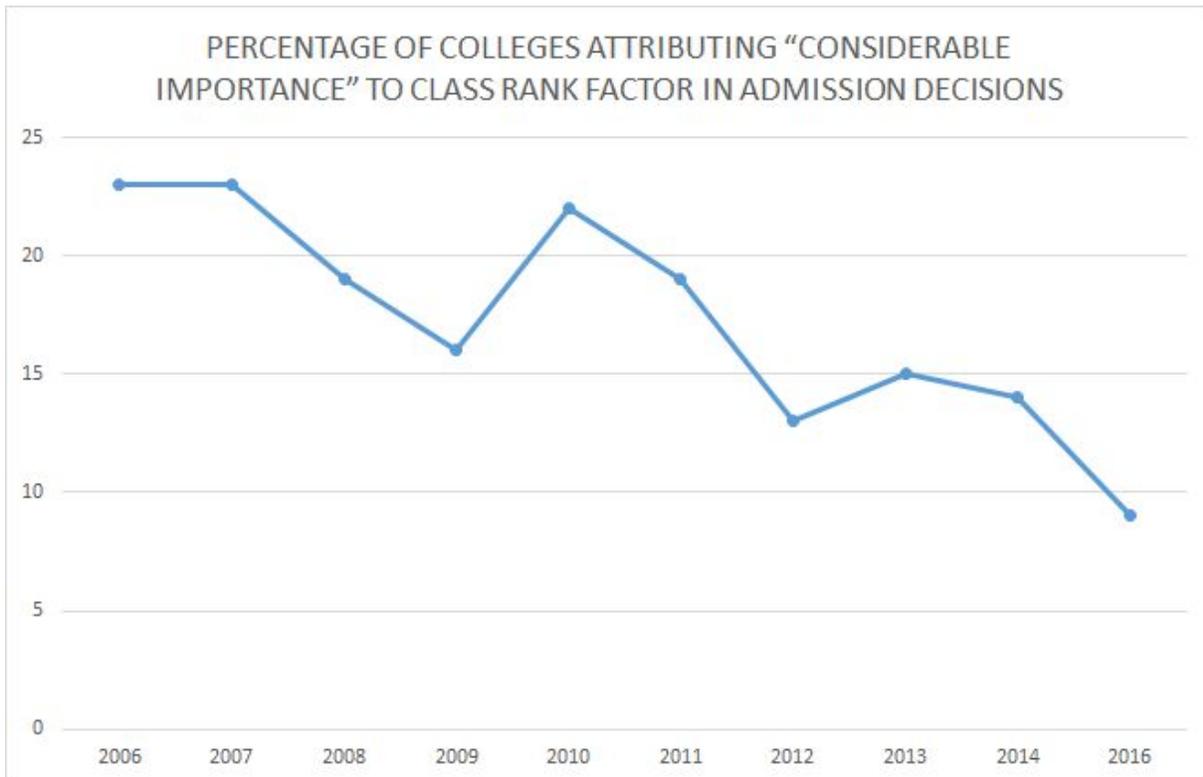
Ohio State does use class rank if it is offered by a school. I wouldn't say that we specifically use val or sal in our review to automatically admit a student if they have that distinction but, typically, their competitiveness as a student is reflected in that ranking (does that make sense?). Also, we do a holistic review in our admission process. Other than rank, we also balance that with test scores, activities, the essay, rigor, leadership, diversity/first-gen/low-soc, etc. Rank is a part of our process, but only one part. As you know not all ranks/GPAs are created equal.”

National Association for College Admissions Counseling



Research from the National Association for College Admissions Counseling

©Copyright 2016, Forest Hills School District, All Rights Reserved.



Additional Research

From the National Association of Secondary School Principals & National Association of College Admissions Counseling

Of surveyed college/admission counseling groups comprised of 230 universities, 79% of colleges said their biggest item of importance is the grades in CP coursework followed closes by grades in all courses over all, and the school's profile.

50-60% placed ACT/SAT of high importance.

Class rank was of medium importance, so they MIGHT use class rank a bit. **But overall, less than 10% of schools gave class rank considerable importance in 2016.** The importance of class rank to IHE's continues to decline.

Recommendation letters & other materials were high in importance.



Trend for grades has remained consistent over time. Grades and strength of curriculum are the most important. If we do away with class rank, an idea for an alternative is to share distributions on the school profile. For example, X % of students earned this band of a GPA.

©Copyright 2016, Forest Hills School District, All Rights Reserved.



Appendix E-Nancy Miller- Director of IN5-a non-profit organization helping bring awareness to mental health in teens and adults.

Nancy Miller's phone interview:

- Her work with Madeira Schools has been through counselors and Kevin Wright surrounding education, programming and resources on mental health for students (all ages) - her organization is [1N5](#) (Mental health is a national issue that impacts people of all ages, demographics and income and 1 in 5 individuals live with a diagnosable mental illness). Main focus has been on self-care and anxiety. She referred me to videos and data on their website to learn more.
- She commented that Madeira schools is doing a good job being mindful and asking good questions and making mental wellbeing a priority.
- Our kids deal with so much pressure and parents play a big role in driving that pressure which manifests into anxiety and depression.
- She sees a need to educate parents so they know how to parent.
- Kids are melting down in colleges when they realize they "aren't the best" or "top of class" - they don't know how to cope
- #'s of anxiety and depression in our youth continues to escalate

- Even Kindergarteners have no free time (everything scheduled or measured against something) - it a “keeping up with the Joneses” mentality
- At young age, kids are exposed to importance of GPA, AP classes, Class Rank, etc. They are not following likes/dislikes, but what gives most favor to recognition or honor
- Striving for perfection - is accepted and student do not know how to cope when they fall short
- In order to “take of the pressure” she suggested: education for parents, helping the kids find joy in life, allowing and supporting downtime, allowing and supporting free play, and hobbies.
- Teachers report now having 5 kids on average per class with issues of self regulation and anger v 1 in the past
- I asked her from her experience and professional opinion - what should MHS do about val/sal - she said strongly - “do away with it”
- I mentioned some of the information we have already learned from other schools (like how Sycamore did away with it 10 years ago) and she commented that they also dealt with issues like suicide that may have forced the decision.
- She noted a P&G study where young workers are dealing with so much anxiety - they can’t enter the workplace to work - they are often not able to problem solve, think on their feet or have high emotional intelligence
- She admitted as a parent (of grown children) that her daughter reminds her that she played into the “pressure” factor so she understands how it can happen - because it did (even with her background) - so again stressed the importance of being intentional of educating parents and students