# Graduation System: Class Rank vs. Laude Designation

## MISSOURI HIGH SCHOOLS (NW, Greater KC, and beyond)

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<tr>
<th>High School</th>
<th>Class Rank</th>
<th>Laude &amp; Rank</th>
<th>Interested in Laude</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Braymer HS</td>
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<td>Wentzville HS</td>
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**PLATTE COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL-Platte City, MO**


At Platte County R-3 School District, we prepare our graduates for college, career and citizenship. Platte County High School uses the laude system to recognize graduates for their success in rigorous programs. These designations use weighted grades: **Cum Laude (3.8-3.99)**, **Magna Cum Laude (4.0-4.19)** and **Summa Cum Laude (4.2 and above)**. The Board of Education approved the new academic recognition and eliminated the class ranking system beginning with the 2011-12 school year for the following reasons:

**High Achievement**: Students are more focused on the educational value of their class selection. They choose to take a broader range of course work to balance and improve their educational experience - rather than selecting a course for the potential weighted grade to increase their “top 10” class ranking.

**Top Performing Schools**: Schools around the state and nation can be vastly different. Students from different high schools may have selected vastly different courses and may have earned different grades - but have the same class rank to report to colleges as Platte County students in their top performing schools. Platte County High School consistently scores above state averages in state assessments and the ACT.
**Handout 1_Graduation System Packet**

**Increase Post-Secondary Opportunities:** Research shows that colleges may consider applicants more individually when class rank is not a factor. Factors such as academics, test scores, course rigor and extracurricular activities may become the focus. Most importantly, it means that our graduates applying for college will be competing with all applicants, not just the students within their own high school.

**SMITHVILLE HIGH SCHOOL-Smithville, MO**

3.94-4.0: Summa Cum Laude  
3.75-3.89: Magna Cum Laude  
3.5-3.74: Cum Laude

**ROCKWOOD HIGH SCHOOL-St. Louis, MO**

http://www.rsdmo.org/guidanceandcounseling/Pages/ClassRank.aspx

In Rockwood, we prepare our graduates for college, career and citizenship. All four high schools use the laude system to recognize graduates for their success in rigorous programs. These designations use weighted grades: *cum laude* (3.5), *magna cum laude* (3.75) and *summa cum laude* (4.0). The Board of Education approved the new academic recognition and eliminated the class ranking system beginning with the Class of 2013 for the following reasons:

**High Achievement:** Students are more focused on the educational value of their class selection. They choose to take a broader range of course work to balance and improve their educational experience - rather than selecting a course for the potential weighted grade to increase their "top 10" class ranking.

**Top Performing Schools:** Schools around the state and nation can be vastly different. Students from different high schools may have selected vastly different courses and may have earned different grades - but have the same class rank to report to colleges as Rockwood students in their top performing schools. It is important to note that Rockwood schools collectively make up one of the highest achieving districts in the state and nation.

**Increase Post-Secondary Opportunities:** Research shows that colleges may consider applicants more individually when class rank is not a factor. Factors such as academics, test scores, course rigor and extracurricular activities may become the focus. Most importantly, it means that our graduates applying for college will be competing with all applicants, not just the students within their own high school.

**WENTZVILLE SCHOOL DISTRICT-Wentzville, MO**

http://wentzville.k12.mo.us/pluginfile.php/18114/block_html/content/1415%20STUDENT_PARENT_HANDBK.pdf

**GRADUATION HONORS SYSTEM** In an effort to recognize those students that go above and beyond in their high school career in all areas, we will use the following Honors system:

**Academic Honors:**
- Meet Wentzville School District graduation requirements plus one additional math credit; three electives must be core electives  
- Earn a minimum of 3.0 GPA  
- Achieve minimum ACT composite score of 21  
- Participate in at least one high school activities  
- Demonstrate good citizenship
Handout 1_Graduation System Packet

*As a result of the addition of Academic Honors, the ACT composite score requirements for cum laude, magna cum laude and summa cum laude will change for students beginning with the graduation *Class of 2015.

**Cum Laude:**
- Complete the coursework necessary to achieve Academic Honors*
- Complete at least one credit from the list of qualifying courses
- Earn a minimum of 3.5 GPA
- Achieve minimum ACT composite score of 22*
- Participate in at least two high school activities
- Demonstrate good citizenship

**Magna Cum Laude:**
- Complete the coursework necessary to achieve Academic Honors*
- Complete at least two credits from the list of qualifying courses
- Earn a minimum of 3.75 GPA
- Achieve a minimum ACT composite score of 23*
- Participate in at least three high school activities
- Demonstrate good citizenship

**Summa Cum Laude:**
- Complete the coursework necessary to achieve Academic Honors*
- Complete at least three credits from the list of qualifying courses
- Earn a minimum of 4.0 GPA
- Achieve a minimum ACT composite score of 24*
- Participate in at least four high school activities
- Demonstrate good citizenship

**ORCHARD FARM HIGH SCHOOL-St. Charles, MO**

[http://www.ofsd.k12.mo.us/schools/orchard_farm_high_school/graduate_honors_recognition](http://www.ofsd.k12.mo.us/schools/orchard_farm_high_school/graduate_honors_recognition)

Graduating students from Orchard Farm High School who meet all four criteria as outlined below will receive Cum Laude, Magna Cum Laude or Summa Cum Laude graduation recognition. Students will be recognized in the graduation program and will wear a colored cord at graduation representing their honors graduation status.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Cum Laude:</th>
<th>Magna Cum Laude:</th>
<th>Summa Cum Laude:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Credits</td>
<td>28 or more</td>
<td>28 or more</td>
<td>28 or more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade Point Average</td>
<td>Cumulative 3.25 GPA or above on a 4.0 scale</td>
<td>Cumulative 3.50 GPA or above on a 4.0 scale</td>
<td>Cumulative 3.75 GPA or above on a 4.0 scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT Score</td>
<td>Composite score of 23 or above</td>
<td>Composite score of 25 or above</td>
<td>Composite score of 27 or above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EOC Tests</td>
<td>Proficient/Advanced on all mandatory EOC tests</td>
<td>Proficient/Advanced on all mandatory EOC tests</td>
<td>Proficient/Advanced on all mandatory EOC tests</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cum Laude Recognition

Beginning with the Class of 2015 graduate honors will be based on the following criteria:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summa Cum Laude</th>
<th>Magna Cum Laude</th>
<th>Cum Laude</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.9 GPA with 10 semesters of AP/College Level/4th year of Foreign Language (10 semesters=5 full year classes)</td>
<td>3.9 GPA with 4 semesters of AP/College Level/4th year of Foreign Language (4 semesters=2 full year classes)</td>
<td>3.7 GPA with no AP/College Level/4th year of Foreign Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7 GPA with 8 semesters of AP/College Level/4th year of Foreign Language (8 semesters=4 full year classes)</td>
<td>3.5 GPA with 6 semesters of AP/College Level/4th year of Foreign Language (6 semesters=3 full year classes)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Students who earn a 4.0 GPA will also be recognized

JOPLIN HIGH SCHOOL-Joplin, MO

Graduation Honors

Cum Laude Academic Honor System

The cum laude system will recognize academic excellence at graduation with the following GPA standards for levels of achievement and recognition after 8 successful semesters of high school attendance:

4.2 GPA and above = Summa Cum Laude
4.0 – 4.19 GPA = Magna Cum Laude
3.85 – 3.99 GPA = Cum Laude

All students that have taken a minimum of 27 (graded) credits, completed the courses listed in the college prep curriculum, and have been enrolled as a *full-time equivalent student for 8 semesters are eligible for consideration for graduation honors.

*Full-Time Equivalent Student = Any student who is enrolled and participating in a full schedule of classes offered during a regular school day.

In the event a student has taken all the courses offered in the core college prep curriculum of a particular discipline during high school, and he/she wishes to take advanced courses beyond the present high school offerings, the student can petition the principal to substitute a college course/s on an equivalent basis to high school courses in terms of hours of instruction, and the student can remain eligible for high school academic honors (cum laude honors).

As student’s names are read at commencement, the cum laude honors designation will be announced and awarded. In addition, a sticker will be placed on the student’s diploma indicating the cum laude honor.

GPA & Class Rank

At the end of semester, the class rank and the weighted class rank will be computed for students in the 11th and 12th grades. Students should be aware of the following information related to class rank.

The GPA is figured at the beginning of the junior year and refigured each semester hereafter. Rank is not computed for 9th and 10th grades. Seniors and juniors must contact the guidance office for their GPA and class rank. All classes are included in computing a students’ GPA and class rank. If a student repeats a class both grades are included.
Class rank will be reported on final individual students' transcripts. To be eligible for final class rank a student must attend at least one full school year (two consecutive semesters - at the end of his/her high school career) at Joplin HS.

Definitions for recording courses on a transcript for purposes of class rank:

Graded credits = course taken by a students in grades 9-12 whereby a letter grade of A, B, C, D, of F is awarded. Only classes taken in grades 9-12 will count towards both graduation honors and class rank.

Note: All Pass/Fail courses, courses taken outside the regular school day, correspondence courses, non-graded independent study courses, etc... will not count as graded credits.

Full-Time Equivalent Student = Any student who is enrolled and participating in a full schedule of classes offered during a regular school day.

Grade Point Average (GPA) = The Grade Point Average is an accumulative numerical average of all grades earned during high school.

OAK PARK HIGH SCHOOL-Oak Park, CA

"CUM LAUDE WITH HONORS"
GRADUATION RECOGNITION PROGRAM

Historical Perspective:
The Valedictorian/Salutatorian program used prior to the class of 2010 was created circa 1995 for the purpose of recognizing our top students at graduation. At that time there had been some students who moved into our district from other schools where students had access to more Honors courses than were offered at Oak Park High School. When those additional courses were factored into their weighted GPA’s it gave them an advantage in the Valedictorian & Salutatorian selection process. The committee proposed that only those students who have taken the most rigorous curriculum in all subject areas – but only in courses that were available to all Oak Park students would be eligible for Valedictorian or Salutatorian consideration.

Since 1995 the number of AP/Honors courses offered at Oak Park nearly doubled (currently 11 Honors & 22 AP). As school enrollments have increased it also became increasing difficult to insure that all OPHS students actually had access to all of the AP/Honors courses we offered. Additionally, we further limit access to our Honors/AP courses through the use of Prerequisites as well as the limitations on the number of sections we can offer due to budgetary constraints.

To address the aforementioned concerns the following changes were recommended to be effective with the class of 2010. A new “Cum Laude With Honors” recognition program now replaces the concept of designating a valedictorian and salutatorian at graduation. The rationale for this change was to adopt a form of recognition that most colleges and universities use to acknowledge their most successful students at graduation. Additionally, we wanted to provide recognition to more of our outstanding seniors than the valedictorian/salutatorian concept allowed.

For the purpose of calculating the qualifying grade point averages, all classes posted on the OPHS transcript would be included, up to and including the third quarter of the students’ senior year. Since all grades have been unweighted since 2006 (effective with the class of 2010), the GPA ranges below will also be unweighted.
The adoption of a "cum laude with honors" recognition program at graduation was approved by the OPUSD School Board on 10/21/08 effective with the class of 2010.

The categories for distinction under the "Cum Laude with Honors" graduation recognition program are as follows:

- **Summa Cum Laude** - meaning “with the highest praise” is the highest recognition awarded at graduation. To graduate summa cum laude, a student must achieve a 3.90 or higher grade point average on a 4.00 scale.

- **Magna Cum Laude** – meaning “with great praise” is the second highest recognition awarded at graduation. To qualify for magna cum laude, a student must achieve a 3.70 – 3.89 grade point average on a 4.00 scale.

- **Cum Laude** – meaning “with praise” is the third recognition awarded at graduation. To qualify for cum laude, a student must achieve a 3.50 – 3.69 grade point average on a 4.00 scale.

**“With Honors” Designation:**
The OPHS ASB & Faculty proposed the following additions to the *Cum Laude* recognition levels to honor those students who have excelled in Honors & AP curriculum. The following *Honors* distinctions would be added based on the number of (Honors & AP) semesters a student will have completed through the end of their Senior Year:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Honors recognition</th>
<th># Semesters of Honors/AP courses required for Honors recognition</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>with “Highest Honors”</td>
<td>16+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with “High Honors”</td>
<td>11-15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with “Honors”</td>
<td>6-10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with “Distinction”</td>
<td>.5 – 5.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:**
Students must have a minimum 3.5 unweighted GPA to qualify for any of these Honors levels. Honors course semesters will count as .5, and AP semesters will count as 1.

**Summary:**
The net result of the combined “Cum Laude with Honors” recognition will look like this on the student's diploma seal:

- **Summa Cum Laude** with *(Highest Honors, High Honors, Honors or with Distinction)*
- **Magna Cum Laude** with *(Highest Honors, High Honors, Honors or with Distinction)*
- **Cum Laude** with *(Highest Honors, High Honors, Honors or with Distinction)*

Students who have not taken any AP or Honors courses, but did meet one of the *Cum Laude* GPA benchmarks would still receive the following distinctions on their diploma seal, and be allowed to wear the gold cord around their necks during the graduation ceremony, which all *Cum Laude* honorees receive:

- **Summa Cum Laude**
**Handout 1_Graduation System Packet**

- *Magna Cum Laude*
- *Cum Laude*

**Amendments:**

1) The following amendment was approved by the OPUSD School Board on 5/21/13. The Honors at Graduation changes were approved by the Board effective with the class of 2010. This became our new “Honors at Graduation” program and replaced the concept of salutatorian and valedictorian. The rationale for this change was to adopt a form of recognition that is used by most colleges and universities to acknowledge their most successful students. Additionally, we wanted to provide recognition to more of our outstanding seniors than the current valedictorian/salutatorian programs allowed.

However, each school year a few students do not qualify for any recognition based on their cumulative GPA as of the 3rd quarter of their senior year (i.e. below a 3.5 unweighted GPA) Additionally, some students do qualify for the program, but perhaps at a lower level based on their cumulative GPA as of the 3rd quarter of their senior year. The proposal is that both categories of these students, upon submission of a written request accompanied by a final transcript, would be able to return after fourth quarter grades are finalized to receive a revised gold seal on their diploma that would reflect their revised Cum Laude status. Gold cords could also be given to those students who have achieved such status after their final grades are in. This is expected to affect 10-15 students each year and give them the recognition.

This amendment was retroactive to the class of 2010 when the Governing Board first approved the recognition program.
In my stubbornness, I rarely completely change the way I think about things.

When Crown Point High School began talks of erasing the valedictorian and salutatorian status of high school graduates and replacing it with a Latin cum laude system of recognition, I was against it. I thought it was ridiculous to put tradition aside.

But Crown Point Class of 2014 valedictorian Dori Sotirovska has me rethinking the way I see it.

While giving her valedictorian speech last week, Sotirovska was somber in sharing her regrets with the way she “played the game” when in school. She, like many other top-performing students, would take classes with weighted GPA boosts to ensure the highest possible cumulative GPA.

Honors courses are worth more GPA points. An A grade in an AP class is worth more than an A grade in an art class. With the competitiveness of the students and the closeness in grades of a school of nearly 3,000 students, taking an art class and getting an A in the class would have brought Sotirovska’s GPA down.

The same would have been true of a music class or of a wood shop. Sotirovska, like the rest of the top students in class rank, would have been penalized for exploring her interests.

A kid gets penalized for learning about something they are interested in. Students will take study halls they don’t need simply to avoid taking a “regular” class that may jeopardize their GPAs.

Isn’t that the opposite of what education should be? Isn't it penalizing students for exploring their interests?

The cum laude system of recognition that Crown Point has begun to grandfather in recognizes three tiers of students separately. The bottom cum laude requires at least a 3.75, the magna cum laude requires a minimum 4.0 and the top tier summa cum laude recognizes students with a GPA of 4.25 or higher.

The laude system allows for students who want to take GPA-killing electives to still be recognized for their work at graduation. It doesn’t stop students from manipulating GPAs, but it certainly helps.

I still think the recognition of a valedictorian is the right thing to do. It very obviously seems to have helped Sotirovska become a mature adult ready to take on the world. She has me convinced the amount of work the student puts into school deserves to be recognized regardless of whether they played the system to manipulate grades.

But the cum laude system has a place, too. Not everyone will get a trophy. But students who put the work in will more often than not earn recognition as they walk across the stage.

When the valedictorian herself calls out the academic structure, that’s a red flag. Let’s continue to recognize young people who reach the pinnacle of the academic summit, but let’s not forget about the rest, either.
Huntington Beach high schools opt to use Latin honors for top students

The district hopes to ease competitive pressure on seniors by replacing valedictorian and salutatorian recognitions with more inclusive magna cum laude and summa cum laude honors.
December 23, 2009|By Tony Barboza

None of them will become valedictorian, but some of the brightest 17- and 18-year-olds in Huntington Beach will be graduating summa cum laude before they ever set foot on a college campus.
For years, high schools have been retreating from singling out students as valedictorians and salutatorians to ease the competition and pressure that the quest for the top class rankings can place on teenagers.

Some high schools have found a solution in recognizing dozens of valedictorians. Others shun the designation entirely.

High schools in Huntington Beach are adopting a different approach, replacing the traditional recognitions with the broader, more inclusive Latin honors used by colleges and universities: magna cum laude for students with grade-point averages of 4.0 and above and summa cum laude for students earning 4.4 and higher.
"Before, there was only one recognized," said Janie Hoy, principal of Huntington Beach High School. "Now we're opening it up to many."

The idea of using Latin honors, school officials said, was designed to ensure that students see themselves as scholars, not rats in a race to the statistical top.

Rivalry for the traditional top honors can be so intense that high-achieving students overload their schedules with honors courses, overwork themselves in pursuit of straight A's and even slyly take extra weighted classes at schools across town -- all to push their grade-point averages further and further above 4.0.

"You're talking about students who are within fractions of a point of each other competing for that top spot," said Carol Osbrink, assistant superintendent of educational services for the Huntington Beach Union High School District. "In our way of thinking, that's borderline unhealthy."

Benjamin Simons, a Huntington Beach High School junior who serves as a student representative to the school board, said that though many top students were against the change, he supports it because he has seen the quest for valedictorian become a near obsession among his talented peers.

"Incredibly bright students become zombie-like," he said. "They're so worn out by school that they don't have much of a personality left."

With a 4.0 GPA, Simons, 16, already knows he won't be eligible for valedictorian.

"I wouldn't even be close, even though I think my GPA is pretty good," he said. "Now, when I walk I'll be recognized for magna cum laude."
But not everyone is supportive. Traditionalists say competition is a useful tool to motivate students, and political correctness is not a good reason to eliminate the top two recognitions.

School board member Matthew Harper was the only "no" vote when the school district approved the change last month, saying he had encountered "overwhelming opposition" to the loss of individual recognitions.

And some teens resent losing the chance to distinguish themselves as the top student.

"Valedictorian was a title they wanted the opportunity to get," Simons said, reporting the view of some of his high-achieving peers. "They didn't want it to go away."

Nonetheless, the changes in Huntington Beach are yet another signal that the old concept of a single valedictorian is fast becoming less common.

None of Irvine's four high schools, for example, use the term, instead bestowing the top tier of students with Latin honors or groupings such as "highest honors" and "high honors with distinction."

Other school districts, however, cling to the tradition.

Los Angeles high schools have no plans to stop recognizing valedictorians and salutatorians, officials said, but 2004 district guidelines say commencement ceremonies should focus on honoring the graduating class as a whole and keep individual recognitions "to an absolute minimum."

When high schools in Temecula floated the idea of eliminating valedictorian awards in 2007, students gathered hundreds of signatures opposing the change, and administrators backed off.

English teacher Jodi Young, who advises the 100 students who make up Huntington Beach High's chapter of the National Honor Society, said she expects some outcry. But she said she can see how the change could help end grade-grubbing and "point pimping," a term for the practice of students accumulating advanced classes just to pump up their grade-point average.

"When there's a race for the top, you'll have science and math students taking Advanced Placement music theory when they have no interest in music," she said. "There's always a backlash to change, but if the reasons behind it are more positive -- to honor more students -- then the majority may receive it well and not with anger."

Huntington Beach's six high schools will phase in the Latin honors over four years, with this year's freshmen the first to graduate without valedictorians. The top two groupings will wear white robes at graduation to make them stand out from other students, who are usually clad in black.

An even rarer animal than the top student designation is the valedictory speech, a privilege traditionally reserved for the No. 1 student. Most schools these days opt for tryouts or auditions. Those, officials point out, are open to all graduates.

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