# Graduation Cum Laude Honors in Place of Class Rank in DMPS

Starting with the class of 2026, Des Moines Public Schools will replace class rank recognitions at graduation with an honors system of recognition of academic performance. Historically, Des Moines Public Schools numerically ranked students at the end of their senior year by comparing cumulative Grade Point Averages (GPAs). This information was documented on student transcripts and could be used in letters of recommendation for post-secondary opportunities. The honors system may be used in the same ways as class rank. Three honors classifications will account for both the unweighted and weighted GPA (Grade Point Average). The distinctions include:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Level** | **Meaning** | **Unweighted GPA** | **Weighted GPA** |
| Cum Laude | With Honors | 3.60 - 3.75 | 3.7 -3.99 |
| Magna Cum Laude | With Great Honors | 3.76 - 3.95 | 4.0- 4.59 |
| Summa Cum Laude | With Highest Honors | 3.96 - 4.0 | 4.6 + |

If a student’s unweighted GPA places them in a different level than their weighted GPA, the higher of the two levels will be applied. The cum laude distinctions are reserved only for students who have earned a minimum GPA of 3.6+ (unweighted) and 3.7+ (weighted).

**IMPACT ON SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL WELLBEING**  
There is a difference between striving for excellence and ‘toxic’ perfectionism. Students who demonstrate self-orientated perfectionism have a keen sense of self-efficacy in learning and performance. They compare their achievements with intrinsic goals and are good critical thinkers. They are not derailed by mistakes and are highly organized, strategic, and effective students (Mills & Blankenstein, 2000). Students who demonstrate maladaptive perfectionism are motivated to avoid failure. They compare their achievements to the achievements of others, driven by social recognition and extrinsic approval. Perfectionistic tendencies among adolescents have dramatically risen over the last 30 years, due to social media’s inherent comparisons between individuals (Curran & Hill, 2019). Students with maladaptive perfectionism become anxious over mistakes which can lead to test anxiety and a reluctance to seek help from instructors or others (Dixon, Lapsley, & Hanchon, 2004). Living in fear of failure is frequently associated with broader mental health concerns such as anxiety and depression (Speirs Neumeister, 2004).

Class Rank forces a comparison to others and promotes maladaptive perfectionism (Brogan, 2014). It is antithetical to Standards Referenced Grading, which sets high expectations for achievement for all students. A Cum Laude system of recognizing student achievement promotes healthier self-orientated behaviors where students strive towards a high standard.

While there is a place for competition between individuals—there can be only one starting quarterback, for example—students should have a choice about competing in such contests. Academics are mandatory for all students. To pit students against each other for recognition in their academic work is unethical and unhealthy (Brogan, 2014). An effective remedy is to let go of the comparison mindset (Psychology Today).

Brogan, J. (2014, May 24). The trouble with high school valedictorian awards: A high school valedictorian’s mom on why it’s time to end class rankings. Boston Globe. Retrieved from <https://www.bostonglobe.com/magazine/2014/05/24/the-trouble-with-high-school-valedictorian-awards/kumm5lsjUNJcXbByVH6yYI/story.html>

Curran, T., & Hill, A. P. (2019). Perfectionism is increasing over time: A meta-analysis of birth cohort differences from 1989 to 2016. Psychological Bulletin, 145(4), 410–429. [https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000138](https://www.bostonglobe.com/magazine/2014/05/24/the-trouble-with-high-school-valedictorian-awards/kumm5lsjUNJcXbByVH6yYI/story.html)

Dixon, F.A., Lapsley, D.K., and Hanchon, T.A. (2004). An Empirical Typology of Perfectionism in Gifted Adolescents. Gifted Child Quarterly, 48(2), 95-106. [https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/001698620404800203](https://www.bostonglobe.com/magazine/2014/05/24/the-trouble-with-high-school-valedictorian-awards/kumm5lsjUNJcXbByVH6yYI/story.html)

Mills, J.S., & Blankenstein, K.R. (2000). Perfectionism, intrinsic vs extrinsic motivation, and motivated strategies for learning: a multidimensional analysis of university students. Personality and Individual Differences, 29(6), 1191-1204. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0191-8869(00)00003-9](https://www.bostonglobe.com/magazine/2014/05/24/the-trouble-with-high-school-valedictorian-awards/kumm5lsjUNJcXbByVH6yYI/story.html)

Psychology Today Basics: Perfectionism. Accessed on January 2, 2021. Retrieved from [https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/perfectionism](https://www.bostonglobe.com/magazine/2014/05/24/the-trouble-with-high-school-valedictorian-awards/kumm5lsjUNJcXbByVH6yYI/story.html)

Speirs Neumeister, K.L. (2204). Understanding the Relationship Between Perfectionism and Achievement Motivation in Gifted College Students. Gifted Child Quarterly, 48(3), 219-230. [https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/001698620404800306](https://www.bostonglobe.com/magazine/2014/05/24/the-trouble-with-high-school-valedictorian-awards/kumm5lsjUNJcXbByVH6yYI/story.html)

**IMPACT ON VALEDICTORIAN & SALUTATORIAN**

Class rank is re-calculated at the end of senior year for purposes of naming a salutatorian and valedictorian. These designations and honors can still be calculated without the formal use of class rank using weighted GPAs.

**POST-SECONDARY SELECTIVITY**

Class rank is one piece in a body of evidence that may describe a student’s readiness for the next stage in their lives, as are standardized test scores, grades, rigor of course load, resilience, executive functioning skills, and many other criteria. According to annual surveys of colleges conducted by the NACAC (National Association of College Admissions Counseling), the importance of rank on college admissions has declined significantly since 1993. The most recent survey released indicates that class rank is of “considerable importance” to only 9% of colleges in 2018, down from 14% in 2014. Most post-secondary institutions consider the broader portfolio of evidence in a student’s profile.

Because of the wide variation of rigor and programming amongst high schools across the state and nation, some post-secondary institutions recalculate a student’s GPA according to their own admission standards to try to calibrate the meaning of the number. However, “colleges vary how they use class rank in admission, based on a combination of institutional characteristics” as cited in NACAC’s research of class rank. For example, large colleges and universities may not have the human power to recalculate GPA and will take a student’s reported GPA and rank at face value. Unfortunately, this practice compares students from high schools that can be radically different from one another. A student from DMPS can have a lower class rank than a student at a different high school even though the DMPS student has a stronger program of studies and school record. While class rank is one factor in the admissions process, it can be used to eliminate students from consideration if a student is below a threshold set by the college or university.

**IMPACT ON SCHOLARSHIP ELIGIBILITY**

As the trend across the country continues to move away from calculation of class rank, so to have colleges when it comes to consider class rank for scholarship eligibility. Most post-secondary programs have set their criteria to be based upon GPA, SAT/ACT, and other criteria relevant to the institution or the benefactor.

**FURTHER READING & RESEARCH**

[The Case for Abolishing Class Rank, Washington Post, 2016](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2016/12/13/the-case-for-abolishing-class-rank/)

**IOWA BOARD OF REGENTS STATMENT (August 2022):**

In recent years, several Iowa high school districts have moved away from providing class rank. Several years ago, because of the increasing number of districts that were eliminating class rank, the Regent Admission Index – a formula that determines automatic admission to Iowa's Public Universities – removed class rank as a required element of that formula. Class rank is also not required during holistic review for admissions, although all elements of a student's academic record are considered. The Board has no opinion on whether DMPS or any district should make that change – it should be made at the local level and what works best for them.

**DATA FROM THE 2019 NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGE ADMISSIONS COUNSELING (NCAC)**

<https://www.nacacnet.org/globalassets/documents/publications/research/2019_soca/soca2019_ch3.pdf>



