



Proposed Changes to Graduating Honors

Study Session



Matt Munger
Associate Superintendent for Secondary Education



History of Honors



The roles of Valedictorian and Salutatorian have long been cherished traditions in high school graduations, honoring the students with the highest academic achievements in their graduating class. These distinctions often come with the privilege of delivering commencement speeches and serve as symbols of scholarly excellence/achievement.



However, while these titles celebrate outstanding individual performance, they also present challenges by recognizing only a very limited number of students, specifically, two (2).



As districts emphasizes the values of equity, collaboration, and acknowledging the diverse ways students succeed, many schools/districts are reconsidering whether such narrow distinctions adequately reflect the full range of student success, achievement, and contributions.





Challenges with Valedictorian/Salutatorian Honors



- Only two students are recognized, even when many students have exceptional academic grades and achievements.



- Decisions often come down to minuscule GPA differences (e.g., to the ten-thousandths).



- Encourages narrow course selection focused primarily on GPA maximization.



- Promotes a hyper-competitive atmosphere and potential for “gaming the system” which may be detrimental to collaboration and wellness.





Reflecting Amphitheater's Mission, Vision, and Beliefs



Amphitheater's Mission, Vision, and Beliefs are not consistent with identifying and honoring only two students among a graduating class.



- **Mission:** Empower every student to reach full potential through challenge.



- **Vision:** Create academically excellent, personally enriching environments.



- **Values:** Equity, growth, integrity, and meaningful recognition.



- **Promise of a Graduate:** Supports holistic student development.



Reflecting the Promise of a Graduate





An Alternative to Current Honor System



Adopting a *Cum Laude* System of Honors

- Recognizes many high-achieving students across GPA ranges.
- Encourages students to explore broader course options including the arts, CTE, and electives.
- Fosters a healthier academic environment and supports social-emotional learning.
- Widely used and understood in higher education, enhancing consistency, and furthering the district's reputation for academic excellence and celebration of the same.





Structure of the *Cum Laude* System



Utilizing the *Cum Laude* System of Honors, the following is the *proposed/draft* GPA recommendations



- Summa Cum Laude: Weighted GPA of 4.26 and above.
- Magna Cum Laude: Weighted GPA of 4.01–4.25.
- Cum Laude: Weighted GPA of 3.50–4.00.



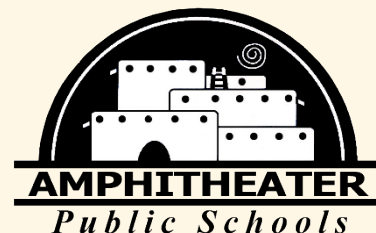
No longer reliant solely on weighted classes for academic recognition.



- Comparison to college/universities^{*}:
 - University of Arizona:
 - *Summa Cum Laude (With Highest Praise)*: 3.90 – 4.00
 - *Magna Cum Laude (With Great Praise)*: 3.70 – 3.899
 - *Cum Laude (With Praise)*: 3.50 – 3.699

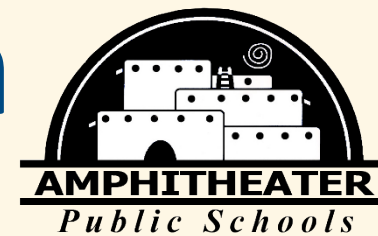


^{*} *Colleges, generally, do not have weighted grades.*





Benefits of a *Cum Laude* System



- Increases the number of students recognized.

AHS:

- 2024
- 2025

<i>Summa Cum Laude</i>	<i>Magna Cum Laude</i>	<i>Cum Laude</i>
8 students	9 students	22 students
3 students	9 students	33 students

CDO:

- 2024
- 2025

<i>Summa Cum Laude</i>	<i>Magna Cum Laude</i>	<i>Cum Laude</i>
35 students	31 students	101 students
46 students	43 students	98 students

IRHS:

- 2024
- 2025

<i>Summa Cum Laude</i>	<i>Magna Cum Laude</i>	<i>Cum Laude</i>
46 students	38 students	98 students
41 students	54 students	91 students



Benefits of a *Cum Laude* System



- Reduces academic stress and toxic competition.
- Encourages deeper, more meaningful engagement in learning.
- Reflects a values-based approach to education aligned with Amphitheater's mission and Promise of a Graduate.



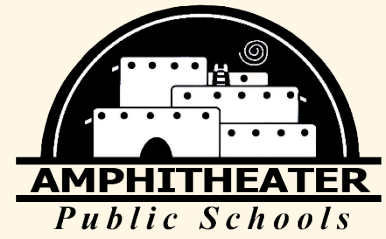


Current Trends in AZ Districts

- **Catalina Foothills SD**
 - Does not recognize Valedictorian, Salutatorian, or class rank.
- **Chandler USD:**
 - Adopted the *Cum Laude* system beginning with the Class of 2020.
- **Flowing Wells USD:**
 - Adopted a Blue, Gold, and Platinum honors system.
- **Phoenix Union HSD:**
 - Adopted the *Cum Laude* system beginning with the Class of 2022.
- **Scottsdale USD:**
 - Adopted the *Cum Laude* system beginning with the Class of 2024.
- **Sunnyside USD:**
 - Eliminated the Valedictorian/Salutatorian honors, starting with the Class of 2026. SUSD is adopting a general Honors system.



Time Honored Student Roles



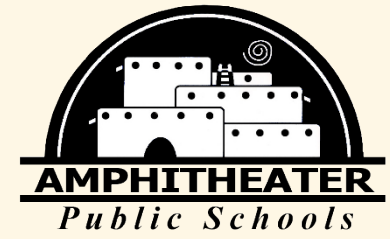
Class Speakers:

- Instead of automatic speeches by Valedictorian/Salutatorian, students will audition to deliver commencement addresses.
- This existing tryout process is already used by our schools for senior speakers.
- The audition process fosters equity and representation to a broader group of students, resulting in more inclusivity.
- The audition process, which involves a faculty committee, results in consistency among schools.





Timeline & Next Steps



- If approved and adopted, the new honors system would begin with the Class of 2028, the incoming Sophomore class.
- Communication would begin in Fall 2025 informing students of the change and providing the rationale for the transition.
- Begin design format of foil diploma seals that would be affixed to qualifying students diploma as well as other appropriate regalia.



Questions?