



# SHARON HIGH SCHOOL

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MS. JANET DENZER, SPECIAL EDUCATION ADMINISTRATOR

June 22, 2015

Greetings! In the wake of what was a wonderful graduation ceremony for the Class of 2015, this letter comes to make you aware of a change going into effect at the conclusion of the 2016 - 2017 school year. Though this change is a couple of years away, it's important to be aware of it now, as well as the rationale behind it.

As you hopefully know and believe, Sharon High School takes great pride in acknowledging student success. Our students work very hard and they pursue their interests with passion, so it's only appropriate to recognize their accomplishments in a variety of ways and in multiple forums. One current and traditional method of recognition occurs at the graduation ceremony, where the two students who have earned the highest grade point averages (GPA) over the course of four years are identified as the valedictorian and salutatorian.

During this past school year, the possibility of a change to the aforementioned model was explored. The impetus for consideration of a change stemmed from the development of the *2014 - 2015 School Improvement Plan* by the School Council in the spring of the 2013 - 2014 school year. This document can be found on our school's website by navigating to the relevant page in the drop-down menu titled, "About SHS". Once on the School Council's dedicated page, find the appropriate plan and see Goal #5.

As research on this particular topic was completed and other schools were surveyed, it became apparent that many schools have moved away from recognizing a valedictorian and salutatorian. Listed below are a few of the reasons that were shared by other institutions, that were taken from literature, or that were identified as existing within our own school's culture.

- often, the GPA difference between the top 5-10 students is negligible
- sometimes, students are less collaborative and excessively competitive in the quest to get the highest GPA
- sometimes, students select courses based solely on potential GPA impact rather than on personal interests
- sometimes, the valedictorian doesn't want to be singled out or expected to deliver a speech at the graduation ceremony
- the titles play no role in the college admissions process because they are determined just before graduation
- Sharon High School eliminated class rank many decades ago but has continued to determine the top two GPAs

While there are also legitimate reasons for keeping these distinctions, such as tradition and the spirit of competition, a move away from this form of recognition mirrors a bit of the rationale for other changes that have taken place in recent years. For instance, the elimination of the quarterly publication of the honor roll in the *Sharon Advocate*, the incorporation of Eagle Block into our schedule, the shift to a later start time, and the adoption of some parameters around midyear and final exams were all put into place with the intent of reducing stress and placing added emphasis on learning for learning's sake, collaboration, and student well-being. They also echo sentiments shared in the film, *Race to Nowhere* (2010), screened at Sharon High School in February of 2011 to many positive reviews.

To that end, a different method of recognition used at graduation ceremonies around the country that may be familiar to many is the Latin Honors system employed by colleges and universities, as well as by some high schools. In this model, a group of students are acknowledged at the graduation ceremony for sustained academic excellence over four years by having earned one of three distinctions: **summa cum laude** ("with highest honor"), **magna cum laude** ("with great honor"), or **cum laude** ("with honor").

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## VISION, MISSION, AND CORE VALUES

SHARON HIGH SCHOOL STRIVES TO BE A RESPECTFUL, CARING, DYNAMIC, AND INSPIRATIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY.

WE OFFER OUR STUDENTS THE ACADEMIC, CIVIC, AND SOCIAL TOOLS TO BE INFORMED, THOUGHTFUL, AND EFFECTIVE CONTRIBUTORS TO A GLOBALLY CONNECTED WORLD.

**P**ERSEVERANCE ~ **R**ESPONSIBILITY ~ **I**NTEGRITY ~ **D**EDICATION ~ **E**XCELLENCE

SHARON PUBLIC SCHOOLS DOES NOT DISCRIMINATE ON THE BASIS OF  
AGE, COLOR, DISABILITY, GENDER IDENTITY, HOMELESSNESS, NATIONAL ORIGIN, RACE, RELIGION, SEX, OR SEXUAL ORIENTATION



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Presented as a possibility to many stakeholders in the community over the past few months, including the School Council, the PTSO, and the School Committee, the response has been overwhelmingly positive. Students in our *Public Speaking* course also pitched the idea to students and received favorable feedback. The option most welcomed involves eliminating the valedictorian and salutatorian distinctions and replacing them with a Latin Honors system that would recognize 15% - 20% of the graduating class for reaching specific and publicized GPA thresholds.

Given what appears to be general consensus around the fact that this kind of change would be a good move for Sharon High School, it will be introduced to students this coming fall and go into effect at the graduation ceremony for the Class of 2017. While a shift to this form of recognition at the graduation ceremony won't resolve every concern about grades, competition, or stress, the change is a nice reflection of our collective values about learning. Further, the change affords our school community the opportunity to recognize many more deserving students.

Thanks for reading this letter. If you'd like more information about the research and work that was done this past year, please contact me.

Sincerely and respectfully,

*Jose Libano*

Jose Libano, Ed.D.  
Principal

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