

# A Valedictory to the Valedictorian



Cassidy Padgett, Class of 2015 co-Valedictorian  
photo by Logan Thompson

• Kyle Sanders

@KyleSanders10

Graduation day is a special moment for many seniors at Jeff High.

While many will take their last steps through Jeff High, two students are honored with an award for their academic achievements. One of those lucky students will earn the title of valedictorian, an award given to the student with the No. 1 rank in their class. That student is awarded by having the opportunity to give the valedictory farewell speech at graduation.

However, soon the Valedictorian, as well as the Salutatorian award for second place, might not be around.

According to the Greater Clark School District, unhealthy competition among students in their battle to receive this award has led administrators to consider getting rid of the Valedictorian and Salutatorian award altogether.

“The way the system is now requires you to be really excellent at strategy, have a lot of foresight, and lots of luck -- on top of being really smart and determined. I’ve had to sit down with students and their parents every year to talk about strategy and why another student has a higher GPA,” Jeff principal Julie Straight said. “I’m not against students exploring, but I know that students have given up classes that pertain to their career to take AP classes to get a better rank.”

As the years have gone on, more universities have decreased the importance of class rank in the college admission process, according to the National Association for College Admission and Counseling. Because of this, the Valedictorian and Salutatorian is not seen as a “must have” to get a scholarship into college.

Instead, schools tend to focus more on ACT and SAT scores as well as grades in college prep courses.

“I wanted to be Valedictorian for my own personal pride because although the title itself didn’t get me any extra scholarships or into any extra colleges, it motivated me to get the grades and ACT scores that produced those things. Titles and rewards create competition, which creates motivation,” said Cassidy Padgett, the class of 2016 co-Valedictorian

In the past, the Valedictorian award honors one student for their academic achievements throughout their four years. The new proposed system, however, would honor the top 10-percent (approximately 40 students) of the senior class.

From there, that group would vote on two kids to speak at graduation. Formerly, both the Valedictorian and Salutatorian, along with the class president, would receive this honor.

“We like this idea because we want students to be open to taking classes related to their future, and not so focused on taking a full load of AP classes just to raise rank,” JHS counselor Whitney Roberts said. “We have multiple (senior) students affected by choosing classes based on rank who may have chosen differently if we honored students differently.”

GCCS is finding that students are taking classes for the sole purpose of raising their class rank, instead of taking classes that can teach them something valuable for their future, as well as what they want to do in the future.

Despite the buzz around the impending decision, this change in the system would not occur until the Class of 2020, this year’s freshman class. This is causing some students in the freshman class, including Greta Reel, to be upset. Reel feels like the change would put JHS students behind other students around the state when competing for scholarships.

“I feel that getting rid of the Valedictorian system is going to put Jeff High students at a disadvantage compared to other schools with Valedictorians. When it comes to getting academic scholarships, I feel like Valedictorians from other schools are going to have the advantage in competing for scholarships,” Reel said. “Even if the college understands Jeff’s system of honoring the top five-percent or 10-percent, the word ‘Valedictorian’ automatically sticks in a person’s head.”

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**“The title of being Valedictorian created motivation for me.” - Cassidy Padgett**

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## Staff Editorial

What is the most important title for students in high school that proves that they’ve worked harder than anyone else? The one award that those dedicated students stayed up through countless hours of the night to earn? The one honor where a student can truly say that they are on the top?

That’s what becoming a high school Valedictorian earns you.

However, the Greater Clark County School Board is now debating on whether to get rid of the Valedictorian and Salutatorian awards, beginning with this year’s freshman class. Instead of focusing on the top two senior students, the recognition would go toward honoring the top 10-percent and five-percent of the graduating class.

Greater Clark claims that “unhealthy competition” is the reason for the switch. To us at the Hyphen, it seems that GCCS wants to give the top students something equivalent to a participation ribbon, rather than saying that someone stood out the most.

How is it fair that the lone student with higher grades earns the same recognition as someone who didn’t match those scores? That is equivalent to someone doing most of the work on a group project, while the rest of the group gets the same grade as the person who did the majority of the project, despite not doing the same amount of work.

The Valedictorian and Salutatorian are supposed to give a speech during graduation. They are able to put the prestigious award on their applications and resumes for the rest of their lives.

So what happens if they take all of that away?

Becoming Valedictorian is the only way some students feel they can stand out from the other 2,000 students at JHS. Other students rely on this award to leave their mark in high school. If the Greater Clark County School Board took this away, it could change how students value their education.

We want those students who earned the right to be at the very top to be recognized as so. A little competition doesn’t hurt anyone.

If more than one person could possibly become Valedictorian, then great! Doing away with the Valedictorian could take away someone’s chance to make a name for themselves in a school that’s so easy to go unrecognized in.

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