

# FACE OFF: VALEDICTORIAN AND SALUTATORIAN

## PURSUE PASSIONS, NOT GPA

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**A**ccording to our promotional brochure, American Heritage is No. 1 in Speech and Debate, No. 1 in Math Competition and No. 1 in National Merit scholars. It's safe to say Heritage students are at the top.

However, due to the constant struggle to reach the top, students' mental health may suffer from the competition. This is why our switch to acknowledging the top



(Graphic/Noor Sukkar)

10 students in 2021 is beneficial. Principal Mrs. Elise Blum explained the motivation for switching to top 10 students is also giving more opportunities for students to see themselves on stage at graduation.

"I just want to be more inclusive and reflect all types of students," Mrs. Blum said. "I would like to see people just taking the classes they want to take and not sort of trying to game the system."

Constant personal academic pressure to be at the top in a highly talented and rigorous school can cause extreme stress. Plus, achieving valedictorian or salutatorian status provides a false sense of permanent achievement.

Many find themselves sacrificing their passions in pursuit of a higher GPA. A study by the Boston Globe in January 2019 reviewing valedictorians from 2005-2007 showed that one in four of their Boston valedictorians failed to graduate college within six years and four of them even went homeless. The reality is a lower GPA

ranking along with the pursuit of passion can create more success in the long run. "We have not ranked students for many years. The change happened before I arrived. Again, the difference between the top 5% and top 10% here is so marginal.

We have so many amazing students that our top 25% is like the top 5% at other places. It works in favor of the students for us not to rank. Ranking does not provide an accurate indication of achievement here. Also, we wanted to curb the intense competition as well," Mrs. Blum said.

The top 10 students will audition for the academic speaking spot which makes sure that only those who want to speak at graduation will.

The times are changing; it's easy to fall into the growing competition of the modern day but we should adapt to honor more of our high achievers. We're going in the right direction. As always, Heritage is number one, this time in change.

## CONTINUING COMPETITIVE TITLE TRADITIONS

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**S**econd-semester senior year brings plenty of its own challenges for students. Seniors anxiously wait while college acceptances roll in, ensure they have those last few credits they need to graduate and get ready to say goodbye to an entire chapter of their life. But in terms of achievement, one more event is quite nerve-wracking: the announcement of valedictorian and salutatorian.

Schools award the title of valedictorian to the student with the highest GPA (grade-point average) of the graduating class and salutatorian to the student with the second-highest. Recently, however, the question has come up: should these two titles of valedictorian and salutatorian remain a tradition of high schools in the United States?

American Heritage has always awarded the title of valedictorian and salutatorian but, recently, the school has chosen to begin awarding the "Top 10" students instead. This new policy will begin with the

Class of 2021, making the Class of 2020 the last to have a valedictorian or salutatorian. "Some students work hard to be the valedictorian or salutatorian," North Carolina's Gaston County school board representative Chris Howell said. "If we don't do that and everybody's just driving for a 5.0, 4.0 or 3.0, where's the drive?" Sure, competition does not need to be the main thing on students' minds but, the option of getting these titles doesn't mean that students immediately have to care about it; they can easily decide they do not want the stress of aiming that high.

A suggested alternative to the two titles is to have a "Top 10" of students rather than just congratulating the academic achievement of two people. However, this idea of awarding 10 students on their achievement not only devalues the achievement of those top two students but also contributes to a society that gives our youth praise and awards for anything.

The removal of valedictorian and salutatorian as titles for two high-achieving students at graduation proves detrimental and hopefully, schools will continue the tradition of awarding a valedictorian and a salutatorian.



(Graphic/Noor Sukkar)