

Central York Honors Academic Excellence And Community Input

Recently, the local news media and a handful of vocal parents have suggested that Central York School District does not recognize academic excellence simply because the district does not name a valedictorian or salutatorian at graduation. Further, the articles have suggested that Central York School District does not listen to or value the opinions and concerns of its community.

The truth is that Central York School District cares very deeply about and is strongly committed to the academic excellence of ALL students. That is why the district, for more than 10 years, has worked in concert with our community of parents and residents to create a recognition philosophy that promotes and honors the academic excellence of our students in a method similar to that used by universities and colleges throughout the nation.

How Does The District Recognize Academic Excellence?

The decision to not name a valedictorian or salutatorian was the result of a change in recognition philosophy following a long-term strategic planning process. This process, which began in the late 1990s, created a timeline whereby the valedictorian and salutatorian designations would be phased out by 2007, when the high school would adopt a "cum laude" model of honoring academic achievement.

Our recognition model, similar to a university or college, honors the top 5% of each class and the top 5% of students in each of the high school's Career Academies.

The system of honoring these top students by no means indicates that every student earns recognition. In fact, in a district of more than 5,000 students and more than 1,600 high school students, this means less than 9% of students, on average, are recognized for their commitment to academic excellence and achievement.

Additionally, class rank is made available to students. By providing class rank to our students, universities and colleges are clearly able to identify the number 1 and/or number 2 students in our class.

How Were Parents/Community Members Involved In This Decision/Process?

It has been and will continue to be the practice of Central York School District to value and solicit parent and resident feedback on the education of our children.

Parents and residents were invited and participated in discussions on this issue from the time discussions began in the late 1990s through the present. The district school board and administrators - both past and present - felt that parents and community members were afforded adequate discourse on this philosophy, along with many other important issues facing education and the Central York School District. This philosophy was also addressed in the recent strategic planning process, where parents and community members were once again invited to share their thoughts and concerns with district administrators and Board members on many issues.

What's Next?

Today's school districts must strike a balance between serving as both educational and community leaders. Our charge is to create an educational environment that supports the success of our students and is responsive to the needs of our community.

In an attempt to promote academic excellence, the district provided a recognition structure similar to the cum laude model used by our nation's highly regarded colleges and universities. However, as with any change, not every person was pleased with this recognition philosophy. The vocal opposition to this decision has reached a point where it is becoming the dominant issue of a school district that has many other academic and economic challenges to address in the coming months and years.

Last week, we shared with the local news media that this issue will be on the agenda for discussion at our Monday, July 13 School Board meeting. Members of the public will have the opportunity to share their comments with the School Board and Administration. However, please know that we will reinstate the naming of valedictorian/salutatorian in future graduating classes.

It is time for Central York School District to move beyond this issue and continue fulfilling our mission of providing educational opportunities through which ALL students may strive to achieve their full potential. Central York School District cares deeply about academics and our mission and call to educate ALL of our more than 5,000 students. We are proud of our tradition of academic excellence and will continue working hard to ensure that tradition continues long into the future.