

Date: October 26, 2017  
RE: Class Rank at St. Michael's High School



Dear St. Michael's High School Parents & Guardians,

After much prayer, consideration, analysis, and deliberation the school has made the decision that beginning with the class of 2019, St. Michael's High School will no longer calculate class rank. After researching the pros and cons of ranking, it was determined that ranking does not benefit small schools as it provides a skewed perception of academic success.

I'm sure you have questions. Allow me to explain:

**History and Background:** Over the last 10 months the President's Council has vigorously discussed the idea of eliminating class rank from St. Michael's High School. Discussions have been civil, even as administrators have consistently challenged each other about what this means for our school to ensure a good, long-term decision for our students. For the reasons below, we will be discontinuing class rank.

1. **Academic Traffic Jam.** In high-achieving classes, there can be an academic "traffic jam" at the top. For example, the class of 2016 had 96 seniors. Like most of our classes, this particular class was a very high-achieving, competitive class. Students ranked 1–30 had a 4.0 and above. The student ranked 48th had a 3.62 GPA and was considered to be in the "top half" of her class. The student below her, ranked 49th, had a 3.61, and was NOT in the top half of her class. The 74th-ranked student had a 3.0. The 75th had a 2.92. Because of this "academic traffic jam," class rank was actually hurting our students as they applied to colleges.
2. **Pressure and Competition at the Top.** While we believe firmly in academic competition, everything should be kept in moderation. In the case of class rank, the school has witnessed firsthand the competition at the top becoming unhealthy between the top 2–3 students vying for the top spot. Several years ago our top two students experienced several health problems. Both were consistently sick as they stayed up all day and all night taking online AP courses to "one up" each other in class rank. Both went to top-tier colleges. Both are thriving, but their success came at a cost.
  - a. In addition to health problems, the competition has led to academic dishonesty in some students. We've witnessed parents put undue pressure on their seniors to get a certain rank, which adds to what many would consider unnecessary stress in their senior year.
  - b. If one of our goals as a school is to create a functioning, supportive Lasallian Family, the conflict (internecine warfare) over who is going to be number one has detracted from that goal. Class rank should not be the

central theme to the St. Michael's experience—there is more to our educational philosophy and experience than class rank. Over the past four years the competition for class rank has fractured many of our senior classes, not brought them together.

3. **College Admissions Changes.** Only about 1 in 5 colleges gives class rank “considerable importance” in their admissions criteria. Several articles and one video are included at the end of this letter that support our change in policy. Counselors do not have to indicate rank when filling out the Common Application form, which is the preferred method of applying to college. All the Counselor has to do is check the box that says the school does not rank.

**The change in policy will read in the student handbook as follows:**

**Beginning with the class of 2019, St. Michael's High School will not calculate class rank. St. Michael's believes the concept of class rank does not accurately reflect the selective nature of our college preparatory curriculum. Class rank is not an accurate measure of individual achievement and could be misleading in determining a student's ability to successfully compete in college level work.**

Internet articles about class rank are listed here:

From The College Board:  
[“To Rank or Not To Rank”](#)

From The Washington Post:  
[“High Schools Are Doing Away With Class Rank. What Does That Mean for College Admissions?”](#)

From the National Association of Collegiate Admissions Counseling:  
[“Factors in the Admission Decision”](#)

From The Pantagraph:  
[“Local Education Unit Considers Eliminating Class Rank”](#)

A YouTube Video with several College Admissions Directors:  
[“How Important Is a High School Student's Class Rank in College Admissions?”](#)

Questions I anticipate you'll have:

- 1) How will valedictorian and salutatorian be determined?

***Valedictorian and salutatorian will be determined at the end of trimester 3 of senior year based off high school cumulative GPA.***

2) As a parent or student, can I request the rank?

**No, St. Michael's does not rank our students. Service Academies will be the only exception. Special circumstances will be considered and approved only by the administration.**

3) Will this hurt my child's chances of getting into their college of choice?

**No. Not ranking them will serve as a benefit to them. Cumulative GPAs, strength of course work, and test scores have more of an impact than rank.**

4) My son thinks he is 3rd or 4th in the running for valedictorian. He wants to know how close he is. Can he find out to see if he has a chance?

**There would be no way for your son to know whether he has a chance of becoming valedictorian or not without us telling him other students' information. We cannot and will not divulge that information. Your son should continue to do his best.**

5) My daughter has been working hard to be the valedictorian since the 9th grade. She feels without ranking she will no longer be able to obtain this honor. What do I tell her?

**We are not taking away the valedictorian and salutatorian honors. Your daughter should continue to take the most challenging coursework and continue to do her best as we will determine those honors at the end of the third trimester of her senior year.**

6) St. Michael's says they are all about college prep, but this seems to dilute your academics. I don't understand how this helps my student.

**Actually, rankings are what tend to dilute a student's academic strength and success. A student may have a strong GPA (greater than a 3.0, for example), but a mid to lower ranking based on the class achievement. This situation could end up hindering that student's ability to get into a particular college.**