

“Plato said that a society cultivates whatever is honored there. Let us make no mistake about what we honor. If these symbols are understood, we can and do enable each other.”

— Max DePree, *Leadership is an Art*

THE HONORS AND DISTINCTION PROPOSAL

The Honors and Distinction Proposal has been developed by Saint Paul’s seven high school principals and school district staff to achieve two goals: (1) encouraging more students to take a highly challenging and focused program and (2) encouraging and empowering teachers to raise the rigor of all high school courses.

The Honors and Distinction Proposal has two components: new graduation honors categories and a designation of distinction. If a high school graduate meets the standards for one or both of these forms of recognition, it would be noted on his or her official transcript. For example, the top of a student’s transcript might read:

*Graduated with High Honors (GPA 3.83)
Earned Distinction in Mathematics*

If approved by the Saint Paul Board of Education, the Honors and Distinction proposal would be implemented starting with the Class of 2008, which enters high school in the fall of 2004. Prior to the school board’s consideration of the proposal, district staff and high school principals are gathering extensive input and conducting further research.

New Graduation Honors Categories in Detail

- Purpose: Recognize graduates for high achievement in all subjects over their entire high school career, 9-12
- Graduates could earn one of two types of recognition:
 - High Honors**: Cumulative GPA of 3.75 or above and completion of two years world language study or demonstration of oral and written proficiency
 - Honors**: Cumulative GPA of 3.3-3.75 and completion of two years world language study or demonstration of oral and written proficiency
- Changes from current practice: All courses would be weighted equally in calculating GPAs (no honor points would be awarded) and graduates would not be individually ranked except valedictorian and salutatorian (first and second highest GPAs).
- Rationale:
 - Student success would be measured against a challenging standard of performance, not the performance of other students
 - Students would be encouraged to choose courses based on academic needs and interests rather than seeking weighted honor points
 - The weighted honor points system suggests that some rather than all courses should be highly challenging for students
 - Colleges contacted to date indicate that discontinuing weighted honor points and class rank would not hurt graduates’ chances of admission

To provide feedback on this proposal over the Web, go to <http://forms.spps.org/honors> or contact any high school principal; Kent Pekel at 767-8140, Kent.Pekel@spps.org; or Micheal Thompson at 793-5474, Micheal.Thompson@spps.org

Designation of Distinction in Detail

- Purpose: Recognize graduates for high achievement in an academic content area (such as English) or interdisciplinary specialty (such as information technology)
- District-wide criteria for earning distinction in an area:
 - A. To earn distinction, students would be required to complete a challenging sequence of courses within an academic area or interdisciplinary specialty. Each school would select the specific courses needed to earn distinction in each area at that school.
 - B. Students would need to earn at least a 3.75 GPA in distinction area courses and would need to complete at least *one* of the following:
 - Senior Project or Portfolio demonstrating deep understanding of the distinction area
 - 100 or more hours community service in a field related to distinction area
 - 100 or more hours in an internship in a field related to distinction area
- Distinction and Six Year Plans: A student would formally declare his or her intent to work toward distinction in an area and would integrate the requirements of the distinction program into his or her Six Year Plan. The Saint Paul Public Schools Six Year Plan charts a student's course through four years of high school and at least two years of higher education or high-skill employment after graduation. The Board of Education has directed that starting with the Class of 2008 all high school students will be required to complete a Six Year Plan.
- Incentives for Earning Distinction: The school district and individual schools would work with area colleges and businesses to create incentives for students to work toward distinction, such as giving them a preference for jobs and college admission and providing them with scholarships at two and four year colleges.
- Rationale:
 - The designation of distinction would recognize students who have focused on and excelled in an important area of study
 - Students could earn distinction for mastering courses of study within their small learning communities and other programs
 - The designation of distinction would encourage high school staff to create and maintain programs that “connect the dots” from class to class and lead to deep knowledge and skills in an area of study

Opportunities for Discussion of the Honors and Distinction Proposal

- February-April: High schools and junior highs hold input sessions
- March: Web-based staff survey and discussion board
- April: District-wide study group convenes
- May: Board of Education considers final proposal

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