



The down low on your
most likely
valedictorian

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photo by erica hui

You've probably heard her name by now. She's a frequent on the SMSD home page, every article she's featured in announcing a new honor, a new award.

Her name is Megan Smith. And besides being a Presidential Scholar semi-finalist, National Merit finalist, Grand Award winner at the Greater Kansas City Science Fair and the winner of so many other awards, she's first in her class. And she skipped a grade too.

"I did skip eighth grade. It was kind of a random occurrence," Megan Smith, senior, said. "In seventh grade I had compacted a lot of my classes and a teacher brought it up."

"I was really hesitant to skip a grade at first because I was afraid about wasting my childhood, growing up too quickly, etcetera, but in retrospect it was the right decision for me," Smith said.

Smith is notorious for her intellect. She has impressed teachers and peers alike.

"The class I teach is Calculus 3 for first semester and Differential Equations for second semester - all of the kids [in the class] are gifted academically, and even in that class, she stands out," Brad Tennant, math teacher, said.

Smith's intellect challenges even that of her teachers, and her achievements don't go unnoticed.

"When I grade my tests and quizzes, I grade Megan's first - to check if my key is correct," Tennant said.

People are impressed by Smith and her skills. She holds a reputation of being brilliant, a unique astuteness.

"She's obviously bright, and that's what everyone says. She seems not to flaunt that. Everyone knows Megan and their expectations are set," Tennant said. "She certainly hasn't been disappointing."

There's a certain modesty that Smith has when her work is being recognized.

"She doesn't think that she's any better or any smarter than anyone else," JoAnn Smith, Megan's mother, said.

JoAnn Smith is proud of her daughter's achievements.

"Megan's always been one that's worked really hard and set her mind to things she wants to do. It's nice to see that recognized," JoAnn Smith said.

Smith was recently out of town for a college visit at University of Pennsylvania, an Ivy League school, where she will be attending.

"Penn only let 25 a year into the program she got in. I was shocked. The look on her face when she found out was amazing," JoAnn Smith, said.

Smith attended a five day scholarship conference, the 2012 Horatio Alger National Scholars, in Washington D.C. After that, she'll be going to a science fair to compete again.

"I qualified for the Intel International Science and Engineering Science Fair (ISEF) which will be held in May," Smith said.

Smith has specific studies that she likes to focus on.

"I am mainly interested in neurobiology, specifically neurodegenerative diseases such as Parkinson's," Smith said.

When she's not researching subjects like *C. Elegans* (little worms) and Parkinson's disease, Smith runs, bakes and spends time with her siblings.

"Outside of science, I love to bake basically anything, but I'd have to say my favorites are cheesecakes and cookies," Smith said. "I am a strong believer in eating raw cookie dough."

As graduation nears, Smith has set her eyes on University of Pennsylvania.

"I am super excited about going to Penn. I would say I'm a little apprehensive about moving so far away from home and my family, but I am grateful for the opportunity to stretch myself and learn lots," Smith said.

She's still feeling stuck in between on the college and high school transition.

"I think I'm definitely in the middle between being really ready for high school to end and wanting to stay," Smith said. "I am super excited for the new adventures and excitement college will bring, but at the same time, I have thoroughly enjoyed high school and it will be strange to adjust to college life."

After college, Smith isn't exactly sure what she wants to do, but she wants to try to work in her interests with whatever she chooses.

"I'm not exactly sure what I want to do in my future. Ideally, I will find a way to combine my interest in science with my interest in business, perhaps by working in some area of the biotech industry."

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