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Category: Students

SOCIAL MEDIA SCHEDULING: 6 days *editor please note any differences or specifications here*

WORD COUNT: 763

SITE TITLE (max 110 characters): The start of a successful young woman's career– Laila Henderson

SEO / SOCIAL TITLE (max 62 characters): Brandon High School Valedictorian Laila Henderson

EXCERPT (max 50 words): Laila Henderson, an honor student during her years at Brandon High School, was introduced to coding in elementary school, which later played a major part in her education and career decisions. Her teachers also played a part in her high-school educational experience.

SEO DESCRIPTION (max 150 characters): Laila Henderson, the 2025 valedictorian at Brandon High School, has aspired to become a software engineer since her teachers helped her find her love for coding.

BANNER IMAGE: 

CAPTION: Laila Henderson, the 2025 valedictorian of Brandon High School, stands in front of the “class of 2025” poster at Rouse Elementary. Photo courtesy Laila Henderson

ALT TEXT: Young lady standing in front of sign

TITLE (max 110 characters): The start of a successful young woman’s career– Laila Henderson

BYLINE: Lula Davis

It was the Monday before Brandon High School’s 2025 graduation, and Laila Henderson had stayed after school tutoring a freshman in Spanish and algebra. Henderson had long been awaiting an email, continuously checking her phone with anticipation. She took one more look at her phone, and there it was, the awaited news that had her bouncing all day. The email informed Henderson that she was that year’s valedictorian for the school.

Henderson did not expect to be named valedictorian, believing instead that she would get the salutatorian nod. When she opened the email, an exciting sentence flashed up at her. “We’re proud of you and your accomplishment,” the email read. “Attached you’ll find a criteria for a valedictorian speech.” The criteria included the submission of the draft by the next day at 10 p.m. and a mandatory meeting with an English teacher, Tracey McKay. Henderson’s tutee congratulated her on this exciting news, saying: “I’m so proud of you! You’re the best tutor I’ve ever had.”

With the short deadline, Henderson got started on the draft as soon as she got home, turning it in two hours ahead of schedule the next day, Tuesday, at 8 p.m. Henderson started out the draft with “even though I don’t know you, we are all family....”

PHOTO:

<https://www.jxnpulse.com/2024/07/laila-hendersons-lifelong-passion-for-music-and-science/>

USE SAME CAPTION

On the following day, Henderson had to meet with McKay to help her plan the speech. McKay advised her to “make it more personal to the class of 2025,” something everyone in the class could relate to. With that advice, Henderson decided to discuss the way the COVID-19 pandemic affected them.

Henderson then practiced her speech extensively. Taking hours to reread it to herself and aloud, the only time she looked down was to turn the page.

Finally, the Delivery

The day of the speech, Monday 12, 2025, Henderson was well prepared. Henderson had edited the speech to be more personal, talking about the experience each of those students had to go through during the process of trying to achieve the goal of graduating.

Henderson told the graduation audience about how she would love to see them her fellow students achieve many things in life. “I want to be the one that goes ‘Oh my gosh! I went to high school with him,’” Henderson said she expected to say later. “Or ‘Whoa, I was in her English class!’”

Henderson went on to talk about how members of the class of 2025 have left a legacy at the high school, and now they must venture off to leave legacies elsewhere.

The third-year Youth Media Project participant worried afterward that she talked too fast. “I’m a fast talker in general—if I didn’t practice slowly, I’d probably stumble over my words,” Henderson says.

After the speech, Henderson went to ask her friends and family if she had spoken too quickly but was happy to hear she didn’t have that issue not once.

Earning the Role

In order to earn the top title Henderson had to make sure she stayed on top of everything in school. She has always realized the importance of staying focused. “We didn’t have to encourage you to do any of this,” Henderson’s mother said to her daughter. “You did this yourself.”

She and her family were shocked and ecstatic about the honor. Henderson’s family rewarded her with an after-graduation cruise vacation to Cozumel, Mexico.

PHOTO:  **RIGHT SIDE**

LINK TO:

CAPTION: Laila Henderson stands next to the mascot “Bully” at Mississippi State University’s freshman orientation. Photo courtesy Laila Henderson

ALT TEXT:

Henderson’s grades and accomplishments showed exactly how dedicated she had long been. Her elementary days were filled with awards such as “Perfect Score ELA & Math” for state tests or

perfect attendance. During this time she developed a love for coding, and nothing changed when she made it to high school.

Henderson's accomplishments continued in high school, as she enrolled in several honors and Advanced Placement courses. Henderson achieved a 34 on the ACT.

Road to Henderson's Future Career

Henderson's introduction to coding influenced her future. As Henderson continued through school, she started classes that touched on the subject, including statistics and data. These classes helped her map out her future professional career.

PhOTO: (left side mug, Kristin)

https://www.jxnpulse.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Laila-Henderson_cred-Imani-Khayyam-1024x683.jpg

Caption: Laila Henderson first joined the Youth Media Project in the summer of 2023, when this photo was taken. She has returned two summers since then as a student-mentor.

Photo by Imani Khayyam

The valedictorian decided to attend Mississippi State University to study Statistical Engineering. She applied for many scholarships to pay for her college tuition, as well as working at the Mississippi Youth Media Project for the third summer in a row, her second as a YMP student-mentor.

Henderson credits the program for helping her build her working experience. She has advice for young people wanting to join the rigorous YMP program. “Just stay on top of your work,” Henderson said. “Don't be afraid to ask questions and be organized.”

[Click here](#) to read more about YMP student-mentor Lula Davis, who wrote this piece about fellow Youth Media Project student journalist and mentor Laila Henderson.

TAGS: Brandon, Brandon High School, Rankin County, Valedictorian, Computer Science, Statistics, Data, Engineering, Mississippi State University, Mississippi, Youth Media Project, Mississippi Free Press