

THE GATEKEEPERS

How school district policies can open or close the door for students to take advanced coursework

INTRODUCTION

The New York Equity Coalition's Spring 2018 report, *Within Our Reach*, found that New York's education system is not providing students of color with equitable access to the middle and high school courses that will prepare them for college, careers, and civic readiness.

Across New York State, White students were given nearly twice as much access as their Latinx and Black peers to a range of key gatekeeper and advanced courses in the 2016-17 school year. Notably, White students were nearly three times as likely to be enrolled in advanced high school courses such as Advanced Placement Math and Science.

The data revealed a two-fold challenge:

- 1 Students of color are far less likely to attend schools that offer a full range of college- and career-prep courses.
- 2 And where they do attend schools that offer these courses, students of color are far less likely to be enrolled in college- and career-prep courses proportionate to their share of enrollment in the school.

As an example of this second challenge, in high schools that offer Calculus, Latinx students represented 21% of all students but only 12% of students enrolled in Calculus; Black students represented 13% of all enrolled students but only 7% of students enrolled in Calculus.

These enrollment disparities are what educational injustice looks like.

And we wanted to find out *how* this educational injustice is perpetuated.

THE NEW YORK EQUITY COALITION



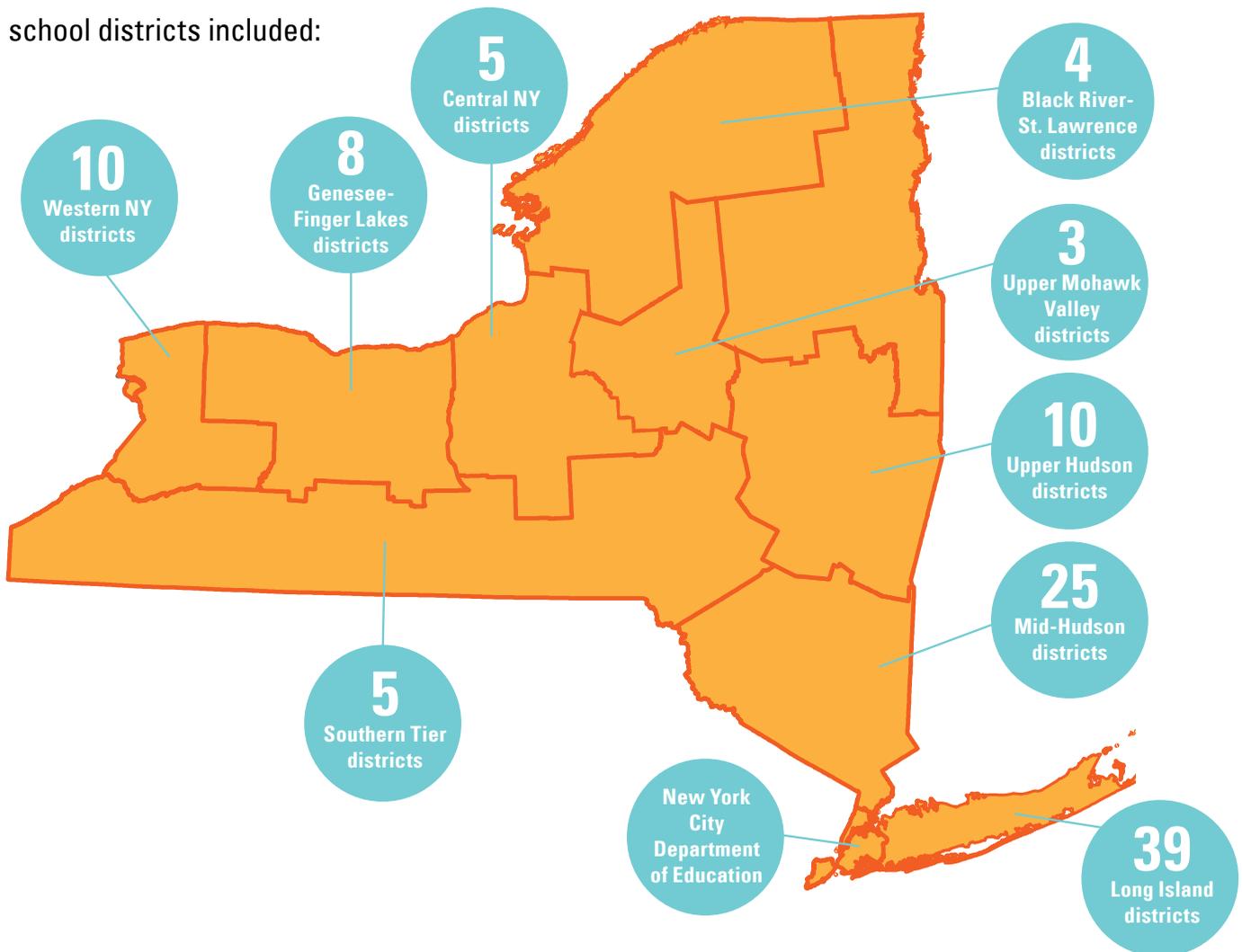
OUR APPROACH

Beginning in Summer 2018, we filed a Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) request of the 100 largest school districts in the state plus 10 additional rural high-need school districts to take a closer look at the policies districts put in place to either encourage access to gatekeeper and advanced courses or erect unnecessary barriers.

Our FOIL request asked for:

- **Enrollment practices** for students to enroll in Algebra I and Regents Science in middle school; and Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), Honors, and Dual Enrollment courses in high school;
- Whether the district/school offers **support services and resources** to students who enroll (e.g., tutoring, technology access, exam fee coverage); and
- How the district **communicates course enrollment opportunities** to parents and students, including whether they do so in multiple languages.

The school districts included:



WHAT WE FOUND

Consistent with guidance recently released by the New York State Education Department, we would hope to see school district policies demonstrate five key principles:

- Providing a course sequence and foundation-building in earlier grades that make later, advanced coursework a viable option;
- Creating multiple access points to advanced courses;
- Using only enrollment access criteria that are educationally necessary;
- Offering a robust set of student supports that help all students succeed in advanced courses; and
- Publishing materials that encourage all students to participate in advanced courses and making these materials available in multiple languages.

Yet a detailed review of the information that school districts provided revealed:

- 1 Only a limited number of school districts with positive messaging that encourages all students to enroll in gatekeeper and advanced courses and signals high expectations for all students.**
- 2 Only a limited number of school districts offered multiple entry points to advanced coursework,** meaning that a student had to be deemed “accelerated” as early as middle school in order to be eligible for course opportunities later in their academic career.
- 3 Many unnecessary enrollment barriers,** including:
 - Rigid pathways and tracking;
 - Large numbers or nonessential (and burdensome) course prerequisites;
 - Heavy reliance on GPA requirements and teacher recommendations, which may reflect implicit bias; and
 - Protocols that could have a particularly negative impact on English language learners/ multilingual learners and students with disabilities.
- 4 School districts often required students to sit for AP/IB exams and penalized students that did not** – even when the district does not cover the fee for low-income students.
- 5 Few school districts made information on accelerated or advanced courses available in multiple languages.**

OUT OF THE 110 SCHOOL DISTRICTS WHOSE COURSE ACCESS POLICIES WERE REVIEWED BY THE NEW YORK EQUITY COALITION...

12

districts provided examples of positive messaging that signals high expectations for all students.

4

districts provided examples of information on accelerated or advanced courses made available in multiple languages.

17

districts provided examples of multiple entry points to accelerated coursework in at least one subject area at the middle school level.

33

districts provided examples of multiple entry points to advanced coursework in at least one subject area at the high school level.

68

districts provided examples of heavy reliance on GPA requirements and teacher recommendations at the high school level.

43

districts provided examples of rigid pathways and tracking at the high school level.

42

districts provided examples of a large number or nonessential course prerequisites at the high school level.

62

districts provided examples of unnecessary enrollment barriers for high school English Honors, AP, and/or IB courses.

66

districts provided examples of unnecessary enrollment barriers for high school Social Studies Honors, AP, and/or IB courses.

34

districts provided examples of unnecessary enrollment barriers for middle school Algebra 1 and/or Accelerated Math courses.

66

districts provided examples of unnecessary enrollment barriers for high school Math Honors, AP, and/or IB courses.

32

districts provided examples of unnecessary enrollment barriers for middle school Regents Science courses.

65

districts provided examples of unnecessary enrollment barriers for high school Science Honors, AP, and/or IB courses.

47

districts provided policies requiring students to sit for AP or IB exams (even when the district does not cover the fee for students who are low-income) and

15

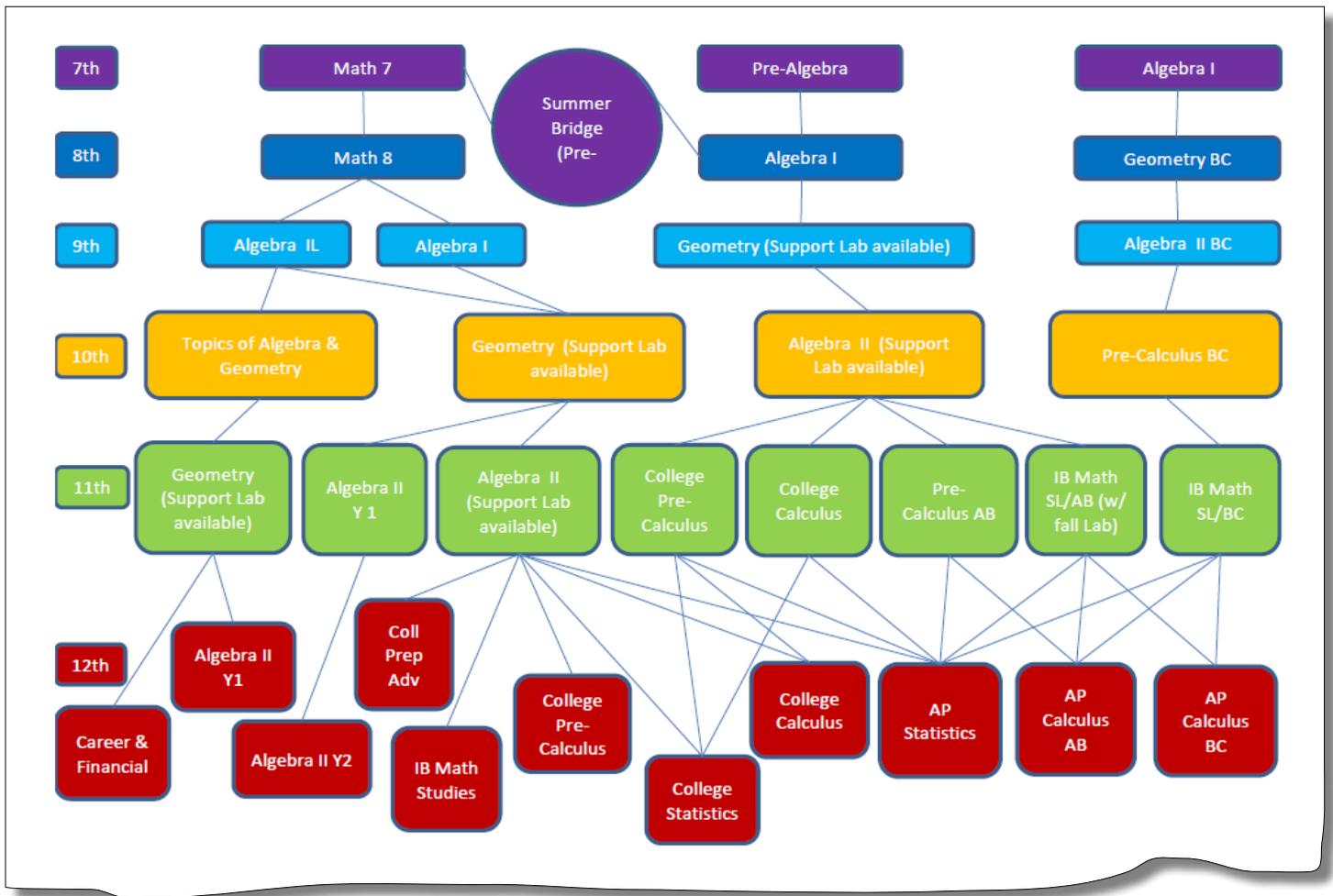
districts provided policies that penalize students if they do not sit for the exams.

In the following pages, we show examples of actual, unedited documents from school districts of both positive and negative practices. We have removed identifying information about the school districts.

CREATING MULTIPLE ACCESS POINTS

POSITIVE PRACTICE

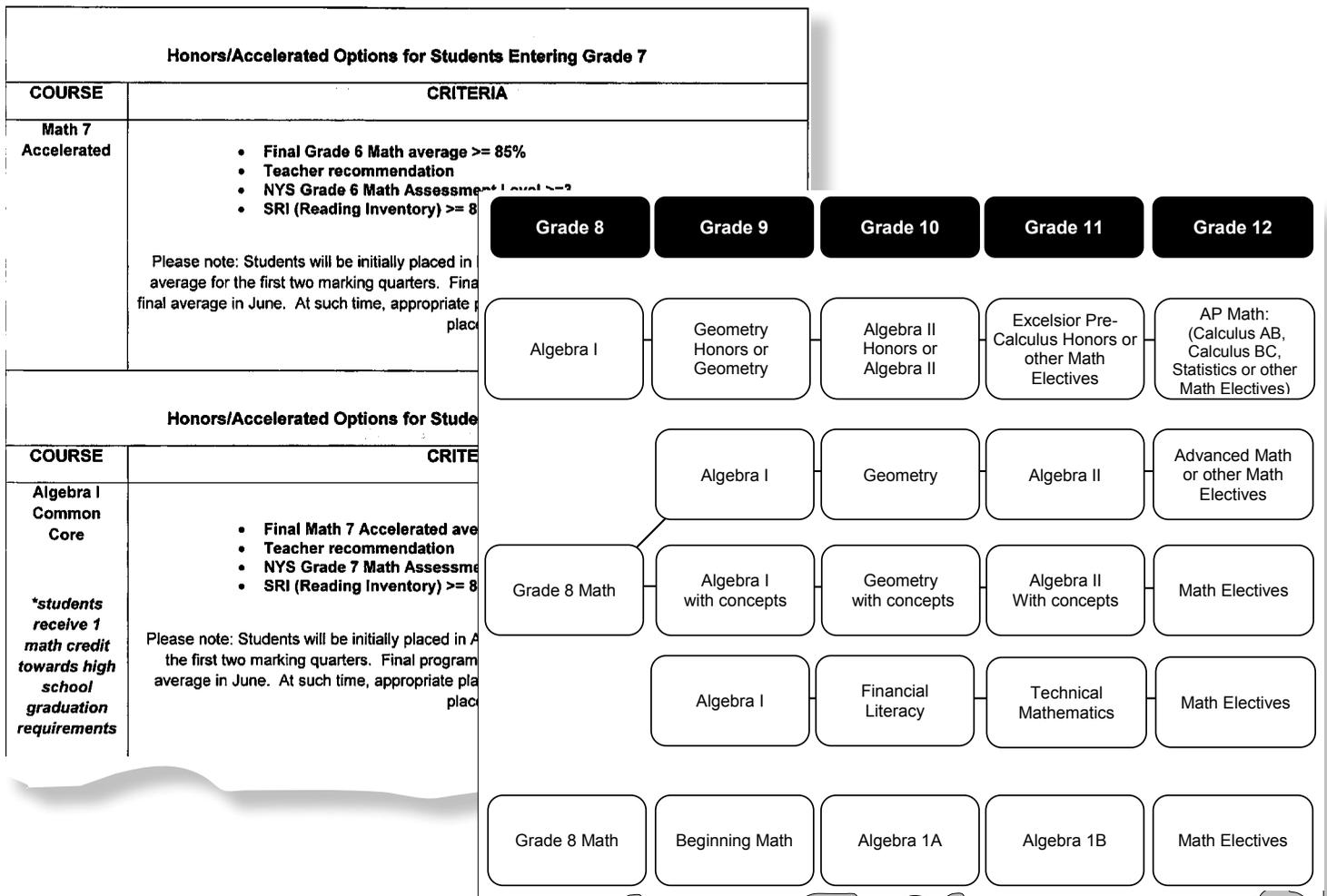
In this example, the school district has multiple entry points to advanced coursework by the end of high school, no matter where a student begins in 7th grade.



CREATING MULTIPLE ACCESS POINTS

PRACTICE THAT SHOULD BE ENDED OR AVOIDED

In this example, the only advertised pathway to AP math courses in grade 12 requires having taken Accelerated Math in grade 7 (and scoring at or above 85%).



AVOIDING PROBLEMATIC AND UNNECESSARY ENROLLMENT BARRIERS

POSITIVE PRACTICE

In this Dual Enrollment example, prerequisites are based solely on college requirements (and not additional requirements set by the high school) and there is no cost to students for attainment of college credit.

2325 ECO 105: ECONOMIC ISSUES

(1/2 Unit – 1 Semester)

(Factor 9)

This course allows students to simultaneously complete NYS requirements for high school and earn [REDACTED] credit. The prerequisite for this class is the successful completion of the Compass test used by [REDACTED] to determine student placement.

In this class, students will engage in activities to develop their economic literacy. Students will apply economic reasoning to evaluate national policies. Topics of analysis will vary to reflect current economic issues, and will require some independent reading and research on contemporary issues. Students who successfully complete the course will earn three college credits from [REDACTED] at no additional cost. Student will may however, be required to purchase a textbook or other materials for the course.

AVOIDING PROBLEMATIC AND UNNECESSARY ENROLLMENT BARRIERS

PRACTICE THAT SHOULD BE ENDED OR AVOIDED

In this example, students are required to complete an intimidating hurdle that is not necessarily a good indicator of the student's ability to succeed in the course.

ALGEBRA 1 ENTRANCE ASSIGNMENT

In order to be accepted into the Algebra 1 class here at [REDACTED] you must complete this entrance assignment. This assignment is one aspect to your entrance into the Algebra 1 class and if the entrance assignment is not completed, then you will not be considered for acceptance into the class.

The Pythagorean Theorem

The Pythagorean Theorem, also known as Pythagoras' theorem, is a relation in Euclidean geometry involving the three sides of a right triangle. The theorem states that the square of the hypotenuse of a right triangle is equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides.

Your mission is broken up into three components:

- 1.) First you must **research proof** the Pythagorean Theorem.
 - Research the many proofs of the Pythagorean Theorem and choose one that makes the most sense to you.
 - Be sure to understand the concept of the theorem so you are able to write and complete questions regarding the theorem.
- 2.) Next, you are to use your new-found knowledge of the Pythagorean Theorem to **write three word problems** involving the Pythagorean Theorem.
 - Meaning, in order to solve your word problem, a student must use the theorem to come to the correct answer.
 - Along with your word problems, you must write an answer key, with the correct answers as well as all of the work shown to come to the correct answer.
- 3.) Finally, you are to **answer the following three attached questions**. Be sure to show all work and clearly box your final answer.

AVOIDING PROBLEMATIC AND UNNECESSARY ENROLLMENT BARRIERS

PRACTICE THAT SHOULD BE ENDED OR AVOIDED

In this example, students are required to create a package of application materials and sit for a “qualifying examination” in order to participate in Honors and AP English.

English Department

Honors/Advanced Placement Application 2017-18

10th grade honors

11th grade honors

AP English Language and Composition (11th Grade)

AP Capstone Seminar (11th Grade)/ AP Capstone Research (12th Grade)

AP English Literature and Composition (12th Grade)

English Honors and Advanced Placement courses at [REDACTED] offer students the opportunity to study literature, composition, and language in an accelerated and challenging setting, culminating with Advanced Placement English courses at the junior and senior level. These courses are suggested for students who have a strong interest in English and have demonstrated an outstanding performance in previous high school English classes.

Each student interested in taking Honors English at [REDACTED] must complete this application. Follow the checklist below to complete the application process. The Department Chair and teachers will review the application of all students, in order to collaboratively determine which students have demonstrated the ability to successfully enroll in English Honors/AP. **Applications must be submitted to your English teacher by Friday, March 23, 2018. Students will be notified of the outcome by May 11, 2018.**

A student’s application will be considered using the following criteria:

- A strong teacher recommendation
- Excellent English grades
- Submission of an application folder, including two graded writing assignments and information forms
- Performance on a qualifying examination (Not Applicable for 12th grade AP)

AVOIDING PROBLEMATIC AND UNNECESSARY ENROLLMENT BARRIERS

PRACTICE THAT SHOULD BE ENDED OR AVOIDED

In these examples, the school district's required prerequisites for AP courses (shown above) far exceed the College Board's actual recommended policies (shown below).

4750 AP CHEMISTRY (1 Physical Setting Credit)
7 1/2 periods per week (1 Unit - Full Year) (Factor 10)

Prerequisites: (1) Regents Chemistry exam score of 85 or higher
(2) Regents Physics exam score of 85 or higher
(3) Precalculus exam score of 85 or higher. Note that completion of Precalculus H will better prepare the student for AP Chemistry.

COMPARE TO



RECOMMENDED PREREQUISITES CollegeBoard

Students should have successfully completed a general high school chemistry course and Algebra II.

350 AP Environmental Science (AP) (7 periods / week) (11-12) Full year, 1 credit 

Prerequisites: An 80 or better on the Regents Earth Science, Regents Living Environment and Integrated Algebra Regents / **Co-requisite:** Regents Chemistry and Regents Geometry. This

COMPARE TO



PREREQUISITE CollegeBoard

Students should have completed two years of high school

AVOIDING PROBLEMATIC AND UNNECESSARY ENROLLMENT BARRIERS

PRACTICE THAT SHOULD BE ENDED OR AVOIDED

In this Dual Enrollment example, students must meet high school GPA and Regents exam score requirements in order to be eligible to take college courses and must meet separate college entrance exam requirements.

██████████ – Early College Program

The requirements for students to participate in the Early College Program are: Students who are in eleventh and twelfth grades **must have at least an 85 average and must have scored at least an 85 on any Regents examination.** Students will be required to take the college entrance examination. If approved, students may register for courses from a select list of courses which they will take at the ██████████. Students who qualify may register for up to two courses. Transportation will be provided from Monday to Thursday at dismissal for students to attend classes from 3:30-4:45. Students would return to ██████████ take the late bus home. Students may choose a weekend course but must provide their own transportation in that case. Tuition is offered at a reduced cost per credit.

In these examples, the school district relies heavily on teacher recommendations and/or “departmental selection.”



HONORS ENGLISH 9

Code: E361 Full Year (9) (1 credit) (rank weight 1.05)

Prerequisite: Completion of ELA 8 Honors with a final average of at least 90% and recommendation of ELA 8 teacher or recommendation of 8th grade teacher with department approval.



ADVANCED PLACEMENT - LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION - HONORS

Code: E563 Full Year (11) (1 credit) (rank weight 1.10) (1.05 Honors)

Prerequisite: Must have successfully completed Honors English 10 with high marks and excellent writing skills. Students are accepted only by departmental selection and approval.

AVOIDING PROBLEMATIC AND UNNECESSARY ENROLLMENT BARRIERS

PRACTICE THAT SHOULD BE ENDED OR AVOIDED

In this example, the school district relies on teacher recommendations. The criteria may be subject to implicit/subconscious bias.

Grade 7 → 8 MATH / SCIENCE RECOMMENDATION FORM for 2018-19

Recommendation Rating Scale:
 1 – exhibits this behavior to a lesser extent than peers
 2 – exhibits this behavior to the same extent as peers
 3 – exhibits this behavior much more than peers

MATH TEACHER RECOMMENDATION

Teacher name: _____

	1	2	3
Self motivation			
Commitment to task			
Strong work / study habits			
Willingness to accept responsibility			
Expresses strong interest in subject matter			
Possesses strong academic skills (see previous page)			
TOTAL SCORE			

Do you recommend this student for honors? Definitely _____ With reservation _____ No _____

Why or why not?

SCIENCE TEACHER RECOMMENDATION

Teacher name: _____

	1	2	3
Self motivation			
Commitment to task			
Strong work / study habits			
Willingness to accept responsibility			
Expresses strong interest in subject matter			
Possesses strong academic skills (see previous page)			
TOTAL SCORE			

Do you recommend this student for honors? Definitely _____ With reservation _____ No _____

OFFERING ROBUST STUDENT SUPPORTS

PRACTICE THAT SHOULD BE ENDED OR AVOIDED

In these examples, students are penalized for inability to pay AP exam fees and/or a decision not to take the AP exam at the end of the course. Contrary to the school district in the third example below, this does not reflect the policy of the College Board.

Environmental Science. The fee charged by the College Board must be paid to the school by November 16 or the student will be placed in another science course.

ADVANCED PLACEMENT COURSES

A course requirement for any Advanced Placement Course is the Advanced Placement examination given in May. A satisfactory score could earn college credit, advanced standing or both. There is a fee for the AP exam which will be paid by the student. Failure to take the AP exam will result in an automatic 50% final grade for the course. If financial assistance is needed, please see your teacher or guidance counselor for more information.

8. Students in AP/IB courses are expected to take the appropriate examination and to absorb the cost (some AP courses are offered concurrently with IB courses, some over two years. Students in these courses may take either of the assessments). AP or IB Examinations must be taken to receive the 10% weighting for grade point average and determining cohort purposes only. A student enrolled in an AP course may, at mid-year, declare if they wish to take the AP exam. A student enrolled in an IB course may decide **before October 15th** whether they wish to take the IB exam. If a student chooses not to take an AP or IB exam, their course grade will be adjusted to receive a 6% weighting. For students enrolled in IB Math Studies SL and IB Language *Ab Initio*, their course grade will receive a 6% weighting. If a student in either of these courses chooses not to sit for the exam, no weighting will be applied. Additionally, students enrolled in an AP course that do not sit for the exam will have the designation of the course changed to "Honors," as per College Board policy. IB Diploma Candidates are required to take all exams related to their IB courses. Fee waivers are available for students who are eligible for free or reduced fee lunch; see your School Counselor to determine if they are applicable.

ADVANCED PLACEMENT

Advanced Placement courses are offered in Art, English, World Languages, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies and Computer Science. These AP courses prepare qualified students to take the Advanced Placement Examinations in May for college credit. All students who enroll in an Advance Placement class are expected to take the Advanced Placement examination in that subject. AP Exams occur during the month of May. The results from these examinations are reviewed on a national level and are integral to the validation of our program. **All students who choose to take an AP course must complete the course by taking the exam. Students who do not take the exam may not have the AP designation listed on their school transcript. The word "College" will replace the AP designation.** There is a fee for each AP exam. Students enrolling in AP classes must sign, along with their parents, the Advanced Placement Agreement Form distributed by the guidance counselors.

PUBLISHING INCLUSIVE MATERIALS

POSITIVE PRACTICE

In this example, the school district describes the benefits of participation in Advanced Placement courses.

ADVANCED PLACEMENT COURSES

The following AP courses are offered at each high school pending enrollment. Each AP course has a corresponding exam that schools worldwide administer in May, except for Studio Art, which is a portfolio assessment. Why participate? (1) Gain the Edge in College Preparation; (2) Stand Out in the College Admissions Process; (3) Broaden Your Intellectual Horizon; (4) Colleges may grant credit based on the results of the exam. Please check the full course descriptions in the individual department sections for more details. Students may take (or retake) an AP exam every time it is offered. They may also withhold or cancel their AP scores with a fee paid to the College Board. For further information, visit <http://collegeboard.com/student/testing/ap/about.html>

In this example, the school district invites students to participate in advanced courses using welcoming language.

requirements, and your post-secondary aspirations. I strongly encourage you to challenge yourself intellectually and to step outside of your comfort zone by taking challenging courses. There is no doubt in my mind that you, in collaboration with your family, teachers, and guidance counselors, will make informed decisions that will support your academic success both at [REDACTED] and beyond.

In these examples, the school districts make course listings and enrollment information available in multiple languages.

Escuela Media de [REDACTED]
MANUAL
CURSOS AVANZADOS

Escuela Superior de [REDACTED]
Programa de Estudios
Para el Año Escolar 2018 -2019

PUBLISHING INCLUSIVE MATERIALS

PRACTICE THAT SHOULD BE ENDED OR AVOIDED

In this example, the school district uses language that could intimidate students and their families (and/or have a disparate impact on certain groups including English language learners/multilingual learners and students with disabilities).

All IB courses are challenging and students participating in the program need to be highly motivated learners. In addition, students should be:

- Competent readers;
- Willing to challenge themselves academically and intellectually;
- Able to speak and write the English language clearly and effectively;
- Capable of analytical, critical thinking;
- In possession of or willing to acquire the necessary time and stress management skills the program requires;
- Open and tolerant of new ideas, cultures and beliefs;
- Willing to participate in school and community activities;
- Able to develop and use information effectively; and,
- Above all, be willing to deal with the precision of thought and pace of a highly demanding academic curriculum.

