

Proposed Changes to Board of Education Policies
#6052 High School Promotion & Graduation & #6020 – Basis for Grading, Avon High School
Questions & Answers as of February 3, 2015

#6052 – High School Promotion

1. Why is the number of credits for graduating being increased at Avon High School?

Response: The number of credits for graduation is being increased as a result of Connecticut General Statutes 10-221a - High school graduation requirements.

2. When does this new requirement begin at Avon High School?

Response: At Avon High School, the new requirement will begin with the class of 2019.

3. The legislation states that the requirement does not begin until the class of 2020. Why are we changing the requirements a year before impacting the class of 2019?

Response: The requirements reflect important changes that are valuable to high school students and will position them well for success in college and/or their careers. Among the proposed changes, you will notice a course in personal finance, more diverse elective requirements, a two-year world language requirement, and participation in a senior capstone project.

4. What courses are currently available at Avon High School students to fulfill this new requirement?

Response: The requirements are varied, and as a result we have many course offerings that will allow students the opportunity to fulfill these requirements in a variety of ways. Our new course of studies will be available online by 2/13/15. Our course of studies includes over twenty (20) new elective offerings developed over the past two years.

5. On average, how many credits have past Avon High School graduates obtained?

Response: When reviewing the performance data of the classes of 2012, 2013, and 2014, all graduates yielded an average of over 25 credits.

#6020 – Basis for Grading, Avon High School

1. How many academic levels currently exist at Avon High School?

Response: Avon High School currently offers four academic levels at the high school - Advanced Placement (AP), Honors, College Preparatory, and Academic levels.

2. How does this compare with other Connecticut High Schools?

Response: Connecticut public high schools typically offer anywhere from two to four academic levels. Currently, approximately 3% of high schools offer five levels, 22% of high schools offer four levels, 66% of high schools offer three levels, 6% of high schools offer two levels, and 3% were non-disclosed.

3. Why has the elimination of Academic Level (AC) courses been proposed?

Response: There are four reasons guiding the decision to eliminate the Academic Level at Avon High School:

a. All students deserve a guaranteed instructional experience to develop their content knowledge and skills as learners (core curricular experiences) as a result of their high school experience. Successful completion of courses at the College Preparatory Level will provide that experience and position them for success beyond high school regardless of their pursuit of college, university, military or employment.

b. Offering four academic levels has resulted in an overrepresentation of students that receive special services, accommodations through 504, and minority students in our lowest level courses. According to individual performance data, students in our Academic Level courses have demonstrated the ability to achieve at a higher level than the Academic Level permits.

c. There are observed differences in expectations for learning at different academic levels. The teacher Self Study and the NEASC visiting committee noted/concluded this observation as a result of the accreditation work.

d. Differentiated instruction has become a hallmark of high quality instruction. Offering four levels stratifies learning in a way that does not require instructional techniques that we know to be most effective for all learners.

e. These recommendations are in line with our accreditation by the New England Association of Schools & Colleges (NEASC). Please see question #9 for more information.

4. What is “Differentiated Instruction?”

Response: Differentiated instruction is defined by many experts but for purposes of simplifying what is complex work, it generally means “*strategies that teachers use to modify their instruction so that it's accessible to students with different backgrounds, skills, and prior knowledge*” (Ferlazzo, 2015). Additional resources about Differentiated Instruction are available at <http://larryferlazzo.edublogs.org/2012/01/09/the-best-resources-on-differentiating-instruction/> and http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/classroom_qa_with_larry_ferlazzo/2015/01/response_differentiation_is_important_because_we_teach_students_not_standards.html

5. Are all Academic Level courses being eliminated beginning with the 2015-2016 school year?

Response: No. Academic courses in the areas of math, world language, and math based science courses (physics/chemistry), will phase out so students may complete their course of study.

6. Why has a “phasing out” plan been proposed for some courses and not all?

Response: In the areas mentioned above in question #5, students would have a significant deficit with content knowledge making it difficult for them to achieve in those courses at the College Preparatory level.

7. How will my child be supported if he/she is currently enrolled in Academic Level courses and will now be required to take College Preparatory Level courses?

Response: Our first level of support at any level happens in the classroom between the student and the teacher. If the student is not successful with general instruction and after school help, there is an array of supports available. These supports include the Math Lab, English Lab, Writing Center, Student Activities Center (SAC), and support through our service providers in school counseling and related services.

8. Will the inclusion of students who were enrolled in Academic Level courses into College Preparatory Level courses change the expectations for students performance at the CP level, slow down the pacing of instruction in CP courses or in any other way adversely impact students enrolled in courses at the CP level?

Response: No. We will be working closely with teachers to further develop their skills in differentiating instruction to meet the needs of all students. The goal is to lower the standards for no one and raise the standards so all students are well positioned for success in college and/or their careers.

9. What did the Self Study for the recent accreditation visitation and the Recommendations made by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) suggest about the proposed change with respect to the elimination of Academic Level courses?

Response: The visiting committee identified the need for Avon High School to have high learning expectations for *all* students. This change will address an area that has been identified by the AHS faculty and reinforced by the visiting committee as an area to address.

10. How will staff be supported to gain the requisite skills to be able to differentiate instruction for all students with fidelity?

Response: The Avon High School staff will be supported in a variety of ways. Beginning this semester, teachers will have the opportunity to work with content area specialists who can specifically address differentiated instruction in their discipline. Additionally, teachers will have the opportunity to visit area teachers who have successfully navigated the transition of reducing levels and meet the needs of a wider variety of learners in their classrooms.

11. How will the elimination of Academic Level courses impact the assignment of teachers?

Response: Teaching assignments is a collaborative process between teachers, department coordinators, and building administration. As the largest instructional adjustments will be required at the College Preparatory Level, we will work to make sure that teachers at this level are well prepared to meet the needs of *all* students.

12. How does the curriculum revision process support the proposed policy revisions?

Response: The primary purpose of the curriculum review process is to provide all students with a guaranteed educational experience and multiple opportunities to demonstrate mastery of the specific concepts, skills and understandings identified for that grade/course. With the exception of mathematics at this time, all of the other content areas under review and revision have created units that identify the standards, understandings, essential questions and acquisition of knowledge of skills (what students will know and be able to do), which are the same for all levels (i.e., standard, honors, academic) in grades 7-12. This information is located in the Stage I section of the Understanding by Design curriculum model being used in all content areas. The level is defined through the Stage II (summative assessments) and Stage III (lesson design) work through the primary instructional materials used, types of summative assessments, and materials identified or created to differentiate the content.