

Proposed Changes to Board of Education Policies
#6052 High School Promotion & Graduation & #6020 – Basis for Grading, Avon High School
Questions & Answers from Public Information Session of February 11, 2015

1. When was the last student to graduate in less than 4 years?

Response: On February 11, 2015.

2. By a quick calculation, if there are still going to be five periods going forward, students that want to be in music all four years of high school will not have a study hall unless they drop language or science in senior year. How will this be addressed (move periods with shorter classes, less homework, etc.)?

Response: The primary goal in designing a master schedule is to maximize opportunities for students by meeting their requested courses. While the new requirements appear to limit choice, students should still be able to participate in their desired course of study as many electives meet different graduation requirements. For example, one year of chorus may meet the fine arts requirement, while another year can serve to fulfill the humanities requirement.

3. How does the changing from CP to H in an elective work? For example, I found one week before a mid-term that one of my children was eligible for an H level way back in September. My child and I never knew so he missed out on extra GPA points and extra projects.

Response: The process will be made very clear. As indicated in the 2015-2016 Course of Studies, students register at the CP level. In the opening weeks of school, they will have the option to contract up to the honors level. Doing this indicates the student's desire to complete elective course material in greater depth and be held to a higher standard of content mastery.

4. Please tell us what percentage or what number of students at AHS are in AC courses. Please tell us how many students are in CP classes at AHS.

Response: There are currently 39 different AC sections of courses at Avon High School. Class average ranges between 8-19.

5. It was mentioned that there was a significant gap in Spanish content between honors and academic. Could honors students in other courses achieve/complete/master that much more content as well? If so, why not provide that extra content in math, etc.

Response: The content gap exists as a result of varying experience among the students. For example, students new to Avon and students with only one year of middle school Spanish would end up in the same Spanish course. This model does not allow for teachers to meet the needs of all students. This problem does not exist in other disciplines. Students new to Avon take placement tests in the areas of math and English to assist in determining their learning needs.

6. Can you address the changes being made to the daily schedule and why?

Response: The schedule at Avon High School will be changing next year for several reasons. Most importantly the change will accommodate student learning needs related to external credit opportunities and student internships. This schedule will also allow for students at AMS to participate in appropriate courses at AHS. The current model provides extraordinary limitations on scheduling opportunities and events outside of Avon High School.

7. Can you discuss the block time scheduling? It's worked for years. Both students and teachers feel it works well. Why change it?
Response: Please see the response to question six.
8. Please explain the capstone graduation requirement.
Response: A capstone is a 1.0 requirement that allows students to explore a topic of interest as deeply as possible. Our new internship program will be one way students may fill the capstone graduation requirement.
9. Why are STEM courses being included in the graduation requirements?
Response: This is directly connected to state legislation. All requirements in high school reform were designed to prepare students for success during their high school years and position them well for success after.
10. c. How will the proposed schedule differ from the current one?
Response: There are three proposed models under discussion. The primary difference is the schedule will lock for at least four days a week. In other words, the new schedule will not feature a rotation with an extended block.
11. Do capstone projects need to be done in any specific subject? Can you give some examples of capstone projects in various disciplines (if available) like science, art, music, etc.? Also, where does this feature in a four year high school schedule?
Response: The capstone will not be fully in place until the 2018-2019 school year. A specific course description will be developed and approved by the Curriculum Professional Development Council prior to implementation.
12. College does not have differentiated learning. By providing differentiated learning in high school, how does that prepare students for college?
Response: Differentiated instruction assumes meeting the needs of the students in front of the teacher. This is an attribute of good teaching at any level. High quality instruction during the high school years will contribute to developing students' skills at the highest level so they are prepared for college and/or their careers.
13. How can we make sure the academic level isn't eliminated?
Response: Prior to engaging in efforts to stop the phase out of academic levels, please take the first step of discussing the rationale with the building administration or your child's school counselor. If there are areas of concern, present those areas as question for the administration to address. If you find the reasons for this change unnecessary, then express your concerns in writing to central office administration and/or members of the Board of Education.
14. Would you be able to require teachers to input assignment grades and test/quiz grades sooner into the student on-line grading system every week throughout each quarter, so that students and parents can address problems sooner? They often seem to be input many weeks late.
Response: We will continue to work with teachers to make sure grades are inputted in a timely manner. The most efficient way to resolve this is to have a conversation with the teacher.

15. How can teachers differentiate in an AP class when everyone takes the same test?
Response: Differentiating has four components; planning, process, product, and environment. The test speaks to only one component, the product, that will not be differentiated as AP tests are standardized measures.
16. What process is being done to work with the 8th grade teachers making current recommendations for the class of 2019?
Response: Teachers were directed to recommend students holding the same standard for honors. All other students will continue on to College Prep (CP) similar to the structure that is currently in place at the middle school in language arts and math.
17. Can students fulfill course requirements using virtual high school (online) or by attending summer programs in West Hartford schools or universities offering courses in summer or online?
Response: The student's first avenue of meeting requirements should be through the Avon High School course offerings. If their needs cannot be met through our offerings, these are all acceptable methods of earning credit.
18. By making all electives college prep and honors and including them in the GPA, you will have students taking honors sculpture or honors drawing for an easy honors A, and you will put more pressure on kids to take all honors which is so stressful. It will also discourage kids from trying something outside their comfort zone because of the potential for a negative impact on their grade. Why did you think this was a good idea? Will honors and college prep be in elective classes together if students will meet with the art teachers to determine their level?
Response: This is not an entirely new process at Avon High School. This model is currently in place for non-academic elective offerings. Teachers will work to establish appropriate standards and criteria to determine honors credit compared to college preparatory.
19. The special ed specific classes, i.e., the Executive Function class, that you mentioned, will it be offered to students next year? Or will it be a phase in?
Response: All special education programming is under review at this time.
20. If a child is not developmentally ready to take a class, why are we forcing them to take these classes? Especially in math.
Response: All identified gaps will be addressed through a robust SRBI program.
21. By not having an appropriate level class for these children on an IEP aren't they being placed in a restrictive environment?
Response: No. All accommodations required by a student's IEP will be met regardless of their academic course level.
22. When does the GPA calculation change become effective, with class of 2019?
Response: The entire scale changes with the class of 2019. Changes for next year for all students include the weighting of all electives and Wellness, as well as the range of "D" being expanded from 65-69 to 60-69.

23. With only one art required to graduate and one elective, what about the students who are passionate about art and music? How can they take four years of courses they love and still fit all the requirements?
Response: There is room in the schedule to meet the requirements. Students can fulfill their fine arts, humanities, and elective requirement through the arts.
24. Could you go into more detail on capstone – one credit? What does that mean – full year course/project, etc.?
Response: The capstone will not be fully in place until the 2018-2019 school year. A specific course description will be developed and approved by the Curriculum Professional Development Council prior to implementation. There will be multiple ways to fulfill this requirement.
25. Is capstone the same as this new internship program?
Response: No, but the internship program will likely be one way to meet the capstone requirement.
26. Like learners learn well together, so why disperse the current CP students amongst the new CP courses with the absorbed academic students?
Response: Differentiated instruction addresses the needs of all students. Phasing out the CP level will address the needs of all students.
27. How will you guarantee that courses will not be watered down? Teachers teach to the middle which will be a different level than the current middle.
Response: The curriculum development and revision process ensures that standards of learning are upheld in all disciplines.
28. How will parental input be included in the final decision and /or the decision making process? How can parents influence the decisions being made that directly impact their children? What level of support have parents given to these changes?
Response: Parent input is valued and factored in the decision making process.
29. Have you studied the ability of students at the other levels (honors, AP) to achieve higher levels? If yes, what are you proposing for them? If not, then why not?
Response: We are addressing the needs of all students through school-wide professional development in the area of differentiated instruction.
30. What about students feeling successful in class? Kids being placed in SAT and other supports in a class that is too difficult will severely affect their self esteem. Why not put resources into improving AC classes instead of eliminating them?
Response: Students of all academic levels access school supports for a variety of reasons. These resources are open and available to all students. Improving the AC classes is not the obstacle. The obstacle is the overrepresentation of students with special needs, 504, and black/Hispanic minority.

31. How does new academic leveling help the issue of students who are in academic levels in 7th, 8th or 9th , but then want to (and are ready to) move to honors? In particular, I'm thinking of Spanish.
Response: This will allow students more flexibility to move between levels because issues regarding curricular gaps will have been resolved.
32. How can we make sure all students of all levels are being challenged to their full potential?
Response: High quality instruction, a rigorous and viable curriculum, and a personalized learning experience are the best ways we can support all students.
33. I have heard from teachers in other districts, like Simsbury, that moving AC students into CP classes (even just 2-3) has been disastrous. Teachers are not able to accomplish what they used to; more “out of class” time is spent helping AC students and are no longer available to help CP students. Do you have these concerns and what about retaining our best teachers?
Response: Providing support for teachers is the best way to make sure they are prepared to meet the needs of students so they are able to learn at high levels. While we know this is a challenge, it is the right challenge.
34. Why can't increases/improvements/adjustments be made within the academic level without dropping the academic level?
Response: Improving the AC classes is not the obstacle. The obstacle is the overrepresentation of students with special needs, 504, and black/Hispanic minority.
35. Guidelines/requirements – is this consistent across all high schools in CT and also in the United States?
Response: Connecticut High School Reform applies to all public high schools in the state of Connecticut.
36. Differentiation within the classroom requires more work from the teacher and less appropriate instruction for the students, so why take this direction?
Response: Differentiated instruction is high quality instruction for all students.
37. Can you please explain how my child, who is in special education, will not get “swallowed up” or become totally overwhelmed in a college prep class?
Response: All provisions through a student's IEP will still be applicable. As we know, students with IEPs can learn at high levels. Therefore, developing high quality IEPs will be a paramount goal.
38. Currently ten students are piloting the internship program. How many students will be eligible for this program going forward? 2015-16 year?
Response: The entire senior class is eligible for the 2015-2016 school year.
39. Just like there are different athletic abilities, there are different intellectual abilities. Why don't we increase our levels and teach to each student? Why aren't all levels being examined and made more rigorous?
Response: That is the goal. That is why all teachers are engaging in training related to differentiated instruction.

40. Please share the statistics of AHS vs. other area schools (public and private) in placing students at the very top universities in the world. What is being done to enhance the results of AHS with respect to this?
Response: Being researched.
41. Class level choice - In the course of studies book it says “recommendation” and not “requirement”. Does this mean students could take classes they want (example, can a student take an AP science course even if they did (do) not have honors math or other science classes at the honors level prior to the wanted AP class)?
Response: The parental request for level change process originates with the student’s school counselor. There are steps required to make sure the decision is thoughtful and will position the student for success.
42. Will more CP level students be moved to honors? Will more honors students be moved to AP?
Response: Students are always encouraged to engage in the most rigorous course of study they can manage well. The standards for these classes are the same.
43. If all levels have the same standards, knowledge, skill, etc., what is the motivation for taking honors classes?
Response: The primary difference is the level of inquiry and independence that happens at each level. The motivation for taking a more rigorous course of study should be based on interest, aptitude, and post-secondary goals.
44. Foreign Languages: I currently have a daughter in 7th grade. She is taking French. Is it French I this year and in the 8th grade, it will be French II? And then the language requirement will be fulfilled after sophomore year – is that correct?
Response: Students are required two years of language while in high school; most competitive colleges require three to four at the high school level.
45. Sometimes repeating a class, especially in math, does not help a student do better or even understand the material better. In these cases, an AC class provides slower paces, different methods, etc. that can cater especially to these students. How will this be achieved with the elimination of AC classes?
Response: Struggling student needs will be addressed through a robust SRBI program.
46. Why are three levels not being kept for specific courses when AP courses are not an option?
Response: It will not address the issue of a guaranteed and viable curriculum for all students, and the overrepresentation of special education, 504, and black/Hispanic minority students.
47. Is there a possibility to take one full credit of Wellness in grade 9 (instead of ½ in 9, ½ in 10 and ½ in 11) and ½ in 10 or 11?
Response: It is possible, but may not be developmentally appropriate.

48. If current placement is based on academic performance that is fairly applied, why do you care about “demographic over-representation?” Are you confusing equal opportunity with equal results? Why not go all the way with your social justice agenda and get rid of all levels and treat everyone the same?
Response: This is not political, this is about meeting the needs of all of our students the best we are able.
49. Under the old grading system, a B in honors was the equivalent of an A- in CP. Under the proposed changes, a B in honors is equal to a B+ in CP. Why change in differentiation? Will honors classes be easier next year? If anything, merging Academic into CP means the original leveling should be maintained. Moreover, you are getting rid of some Academic classes in the higher classes, but their grade leveling stays the same – a B = A-.
Response: A major goal for this change is to create equity between the levels and close the .67 gap that existed between the honors and CP levels while all others had a .33 differential.
50. Why not focus on bringing up the performance of those AC students that can perform at a higher level, rather than risk the standards of college prep students? Please do not deny a risk exists that students without the aptitude or drive to perform will risk what can be achieved in the college prep classroom.
Response: The focus is on bringing up the performance of all students at all levels. Because the structural change is clearly to the AC level, the conversation has been heavily weighted there. This a positive school-wide change.
51. Talking with many different parents, a major theme is high anxiety in their children because of such high expectations. Don’t you think this will make their anxiety greater?
Response: The relationship between home and school is paramount. This move is designed to establish a climate of academic excellence. This includes improved relationships, access to resources, and communication.
52. If students enter Spanish in level 3 and most colleges look for two to three years of a language in high school, not middle school, where do they go from there? In other words, will languages go up to level 5?
Response: Colleges are looking for 3-4 years of a language at the high school level. While students have the opportunity to explore many languages, they will be able to continue with any language for the duration of their high school experience.
53. Why label it “College Prep” if we are looking at students moving on to other post secondary experiences?
Response: Regardless of post-secondary plans, part of our goal is to make sure students are prepared for college if that is their desired path. We have the responsibility of readiness.
54. How will these changes affect the availability of study halls or free periods? Also, availability of time to work on group projects, meet with teachers or work in the Math lab or learning center?
Response: There should be no change. Students typically graduate with 25 or more credits which is above the current requirement of 22.5.

55. The fact that the high school course selection bulletin has been published suggests that the decision to remove academic classes has been finalized. How final is this decision?
Response: The changes are proposed as indicated in the course of studies. Any corrections will be sent to families in a timely manner.
56. If dropping AC courses is still under review, why is there not an option to choose one while registering for 9th grade courses – is this already a “done deal?”
Response: The changes are proposed as indicated in the course of studies. Any corrections will be sent to families in a timely manner.
57. Will the elimination of AC classes put students that have always studied at AC levels in stressful and over challenging situations? If not, will CP students who stay in CP classes be pulled down to a less challenging learning environment?
Response: No, through a robust SRBI program, and differentiated instruction, student learning needs will be met.
58. Please share the definition of minority in your statistics? The 7.9% is made up of what groups? What is the minority representation at the AP level?
Response: The 7.9% represents black/Hispanic students at Avon High School.
59. How will honors art classes work? For example, our art intro class “Foundations in Design?”
Response: This is not a change for the art curriculum. This is a current practice in most art courses at AHS.
60. As an incoming sophomore, I will have to take Human Rights next year. It used to be a senior course. Why has that been changed?
Response: The sophomore class is Human Rights in the Modern World. Rising sophomores will not take Human Rights as seniors. This is a change as a result of the curriculum revision process.
61. Capstone – Now the Human Rights class/SMP is only half of a credit. The new mandate tells us that one credit is needed. Does that mean that this is a full-year course? Could you go into detail?
Response: This will be reviewed through the Curriculum Professional Development Council at the appropriate time.
62. Will students have Human Rights (courses) like we do now?
Response: Human Rights will not be a required course for graduation for the class of 2018 and beyond.
63. Please explain career/life skills better.
Response: Career/life skills electives are those that may also include career/vocational opportunities in addition to college preparatory skills.
64. Will changes affect current classes at AHS (specifically honors and CP levels of electives)?
Response: These changes will be in place starting next year.

65. Will you be adding more career and life sciences electives? Right now only six are offered, and students need 1.5 credits.

Response: Yes, that is a needed area of growth for AHS.

66. If your child goes to a resource room for special education for two periods out of the day, will they have enough time/classes to fulfill the 25 credits?

Response: We are reviewing service delivery model to meet the needs of students with IEPs.

67. In November of 2018, a new Governor will be elected, which may bring a shift back to local control as opposed to State control. Given that, why not wait until 2020?

Response: There are no indications that high school reform will be revisited in the near future.

68. Number and flexibility of electives has been reduced. This is restricting all students to do the same subject areas irrespective of whether they want to do engineering or medicine or arts, etc., in their bachelor's degree, example: students interested in:

Engineering – may prefer more technology electives

Medicine – may prefer more science electives

Arts – may prefer more art electives

Response: There are multiple ways of fulfilling these requirements. If a student is finding it challenging to meet the requirements as they plan their course of study, they should contact their school counselor to develop a plan.