



Update on 9th Grade Course Recommendations

School Committee
February 8, 2024



Overview

Problem Statement

Steps Taken

Where Do We Go From Here?





PROBLEM STATEMENT

The historical discrepancy between how students of different races are recommended for and enroll in higher level courses.

Historical Context

- ❑ Racial discrepancies in course levels
 - Publicly identified in March 2017 (Superintendent Bott)
 - Concern and discussion go back to at least ~2000 based on discussion with staff and alumni
- ❑ Lack of defined objective standards
- ❑ School by school recommendation process
- ❑ Minimal guidance from central office



STEPS TAKEN

Working Group

Data Examined

January 2024 Guidance

Working Group

- Mix of K-8, K-12, and 9-12 admin
- Short timeline, but productive discussions
 - Surfaced variables outside of recommendation process that impacts class enrollment
- Settled on consistent process guidance
- Feedback was that process guidance did not go far enough and did not include concrete guidance

Data Examined

- Long-term interest in using more objective sources of data during the recommendation process.
- Long-term data work at BHS around identifying early warning signs that a student may need additional support.
 - **8th-grade grades are the best predictors of 9th-grade grades.**
 - Students earning a B or higher in 8th-grade Math and Science typically perform well in 9th-grade Honors Physics and Honors Geometry.
 - Students performing below a B have been found to be more likely to experience difficulties in 9th grade (e.g., earning a D+ or lower), with this finding be particularly true for grades of C+ or lower.

January 2024 Guidance

*8th-grade students earning **grades of B or better** in 1st and 2nd marking periods for Math or Science courses **must be recommended for at least Honors level courses** in 9th grade - except in circumstances where a team has decided that placement in Standard or College Prep is required to meet a student's documented needs.*

Full Guidance Document:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1PnwG0XLtPTi3pMkd0VL0OOP72EhszgFU6YQORHPj6p4/edit?usp=sharing>

January 2024 Guidance

Grades are not a prerequisite for a student to enroll in Honors or Advanced classes nor are they the only factor that should be considered.

The Chart Below summarizes the guidance:
For Math and Science

1st & 2nd Marking Period 8th Grade Math or Science Grade	Possible 9th Grade Course Recommendation
B's or higher	Honors, Advanced
B- or lower	Standard / College Prep, Honors, Advanced

Generally speaking, if a student is on the edge between levels, BHS encourages recommendations for the more rigorous level.

Potential Impact

- If guidance were applied to last year's cohort:
 - 16 more students placed in Honors Geometry (3 students of color)
 - 33 more students placed in Honors Physics (7 students of color).
 - The vast majority of these students earned an A or B in their class during the first quarter.
- Concerns Identified
 - Grading practices differ across schools
 - Supports that students receive in 8th grade to earn a B or higher might not be available in 9th grade.



**WHERE DO WE GO
FROM HERE?**

This year

Future years

Recommendations for this year/fall:

- Evaluate how guidance impacts recommendations (compared to previous years).
- In the fall, evaluate the number of students that switch levels.

Recommendations for future years:

Reconvene a new working group starting this spring and continuing into next fall and winter.

- Group should be more inclusive with teachers and guidance counselors
- Improve timeline for informing schools
- Solicit broader feedback before making changes



Closing

