



Secondary District Honors Coursework Proposal

Wednesday, March 10, 2010

Discussion on the Secondary District Honors Coursework Proposal has taken place at board meetings on February 2 and March 2, 2010. There have also been three district-sponsored meetings for parents, students and community members to share their suggestions, concerns, and thoughts on the proposal. In response to the direction provided by individual board members at the March 2nd board meeting, as well as feedback from other stakeholders through meetings and written correspondence, the original proposal has been revised to reflect the thinking and research of various interested parties.

Although the proposal includes changing GATE course titles to Honors, this change does *not* eliminate the existence of the district's GATE Program. Gifted and talented education programs are funded by the state to provide unique opportunities for high-achieving/accelerated students. State funding is not tied to specific labeling of accelerated coursework. The secondary district GATE Program will continue to provide services for high-achieving students, as required by the California Education Code:

The Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) program is authorized under California Education Code sections 52200-52212 and California Code of Regulations sections 3820-33870. The purpose of the GATE program is to provide funding for local education agencies to develop unique opportunities for high-achieving and underachieving pupils in California public elementary and secondary schools that have been identified as gifted and talented. It is the intent of the legislature that special efforts be made to ensure that pupils from economically disadvantaged and varying cultural backgrounds are provided with full participation in the program. (California Department of Education)

The Santa Barbara Secondary School District is committed to providing an academic environment in which all students who meet prerequisite criteria have equal access to accelerated coursework. We believe the following proposal will substantially improve delivery of the instructional program and services to all accelerated learners in the district, including our GATE-identified students.

A. Honors Course Label

The GATE course label will be changed to Honors and these courses will continue to offer the highest level of rigor, pacing, depth, breadth, and complexity. The district will also offer accelerated coursework through Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate and Dual Enrollment college courses.

With this course label change the district's standards-based curriculum will continue to be delivered at students' appropriate academic levels. District schools follow the state-identified proficiency levels and use multiple measures for student placement. The academic levels not only provide appropriate rigor, pacing, and support, but also allow flexibility for students to move between the levels.

Note: In addition to Honors courses provided for accelerated learners, grade-level courses are provided through a two-tiered structure that includes rigorous, fast-paced grade-level courses as well as an additional tier that provides students more time and support to master grade-level standards. A comprehensive intervention level is also provided for students whose skill level falls below basic mastery of grade-level standards and performance expectations.

B. Honors Course Access Guidelines

Note: The following guidelines apply to students enrolled in the Santa Barbara School Districts, or our local feeder school districts. Other students will be placed in courses on a case-by-case basis, following a review of the student's academic record.

1. Students must meet at least two of the following access guidelines for 7th grade Honors course placement:

- GATE identification
- Staff-provided “District Honors Course Teacher Recommendation” form, which will include multiple measures such as above grade-level benchmark assessment results
- Advanced level (level 5) on the California Standards Test (review up to three years)
- Score equivalent to above grade-level on the diagnostic placement assessment that is externally created and normed from the district instructional materials

2. Students must meet one of the following access guidelines for 8th-12th grade Honors course placement:

- Grade of “A” or “B” in a prerequisite course
- Or, staff-provided “District Honors Course Teacher Recommendation” form, which will include multiple measures such as above grade-level benchmark assessment results

Note: The access guidelines will be reviewed as part of the annual program evaluation.

C. Honors Course Descriptions and Performance Expectations

Honors course descriptions will be completed this spring before the end of the 2009-2010 school year. Teachers will be given time to work together by core curricular area and grade level to develop common descriptions of each district Honors course. The course descriptions will include details of the level of rigor, tiered assignments, and the depth, breadth, and complexity of the curriculum. Also included will be rubrics to define and evaluate student performance.

Note: Many of the current GATE courses have detailed course descriptions that are compiled by the Secondary GATE program coordinator. These course descriptions will be used as a foundation for creating common district-wide course descriptions.

D. Elements of Teacher Preparation for Accelerated Learners

1. Teachers assigned to honors level coursework will be provided with at least two of the following professional development trainings focused on instructional strategies:
 - differentiated instruction
 - Pre-Advanced Placement or Advanced Placement
 - International Baccalaureate
 - district-adopted instructional materials support for differentiation
2. District funding will be allocated to support teacher GATE certification through UC Santa Barbara
3. Teachers will use a variety of effective accelerated learning instructional practices including the following essential differentiated instructional strategies:
 - depth, breadth, and complexity of the curriculum
 - grouping strategies
 - tiered assignments with rubrics

Note: Many district teachers have already participated in professional development to prepare them for honors level instruction. The essential differentiated instructional strategies are used currently in the majority of the district honors level courses. This proposal ensures that all teachers will receive common high level training to be able to effectively use the essential differentiated instructional strategies in all honors level coursework.

E. Professional Development Plan

Teacher professional development to meet the needs of our GATE and other accelerated learners is an on-going activity supported by the district and the Secondary GATE District Advisory Committee. As part of this proposal, the district is placing greater priority and emphasis on this type of training, as well as funding to support the training. The district has designated Title II federal funding for teacher training. In the past several years, much of this funding has been used to provide training on the new instructional materials and the district-wide intervention

reading/language arts program. Currently, a greater amount of this funding will be made available for meeting the needs of accelerated learners. A sample of some of the training opportunities for teachers includes:

January 8	How the Gifted Brain Functions – Barbara Clark (eight teachers and the GATE coordinator attended)
March 1-2	Preparate – Educating Latinos for the Future of America (five teachers, two counselors, one assistant principal, and the GATE coordinator attended)
May	Honors teachers will meet to complete common course descriptions including performance expectations and differentiation strategies. Teachers will also coordinate training and curriculum development dates (two-day training, half-day in each core curriculum area).
June 7-11	Pre-Advanced Placement Training (three days), Social Emotional Needs for Gifted Students (one day) Interactive White Board Training for the Differentiated Classroom (one day)
June-July	Advanced Placement Trainings for experienced teachers (five-day training)
July 26-28	California Association of the Gifted, Summer Institute (Santa Barbara) on Differentiated Instructional Strategies
July-August	Teacher Planning Days (two four-hour days are proposed) Lesson development to implement summer training (coach available)
September	Site administrator training on best practices to support and monitor classroom differentiated instruction
August-June	Throughout the 2010-11 school year, on-site coaching through class observations and debriefing, as well as department and grade level Professional Learning Community work

F. Monitoring of Student Progress and Program Evaluation

1. Student performance will be monitored by the District and each school on a quarterly basis through district benchmark assessments. These assessments are provided as part of the district-adopted instructional materials and are externally created, normed and scored. This benchmark assessment process is currently in place in the district.
2. Program evaluation will be completed through an outside agency. The proposal for evaluation services will be developed in the summer of 2010 before the 2010-2011 school year begins.

G. Student Contracts and Levels of Support

1. Students enrolled in Honors courses, and their parent(s), will be required to complete a contract with the district that clearly states the expectations for student responsibility and performance in the accelerated honors-level coursework.

Note: The district/student/parent contract will be designed by district and school staff and will be implemented at the beginning of the 2010-2011 school year.

2. Academic and social/emotional support will be provided for all students through each school's Pyramid of Interventions. A "C" grade in any honors level course will trigger a conference with the student, parent(s) and teacher to create an improvement plan. If the improvement plan does not sufficiently address the student's academic performance, the student's school counselor will be included in subsequent meetings. Although each student's situation may be unique and individual needs will be addressed in the student's improvement plan, students unable to maintain at least a "C" grade will not be recommended to continue in Honors-level courses.

H. GATE Program Enrichment Opportunities

Enrichment opportunities for GATE students will be provided during and outside of the school day. The Secondary GATE District Advisory Committee with the guidance of the GATE coordinator and site liaisons will develop the GATE Program enrichment opportunities. Examples include:

- year-round leadership institute with a summer camp
- community mentors
- philanthropic projects
- service learning projects
- annual career fair at the junior high schools sponsored by Secondary GATE District Advisory Committee
- special seminars in various current topics such as environmental issues, financial planning, emotional and physical health and self concept

Note: Design and implementation of the GATE enrichment opportunities will occur during the 2010-11 school year. The program will expand annually.

I. Parent Education and Outreach

Parent education and outreach will include such activities as special speakers and presentations, family information nights, college visitations, and alumni visits. Each school's GATE Advisory Committee will partner with the school's English Language Advisory Committee for joint information meetings. (1-2 events per semester starting in fall 2010)

Note: Design and implementation of the parent education and outreach component will take place in the fall of 2010 with 1-2 activities per semester.

Revised March 12, 2010