

# YORK COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL

RECOGNIZED FOR EXCELLENCE BY THE UNITED STATES OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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Dear District 205 Families:

The transition from 8<sup>th</sup> grade to high school can feel overwhelming: new halls, new people, new classes, new teachers, and new challenges. In the past, these changes became even more stressful with multiple placement tests, intending to help students and their families make informed choices; therefore, District 205 has made a concerted effort to talk about ways to both reduce the stress for our incoming freshmen while also giving families information that will help them make decisions about freshman courses at York.

In an effort to streamline this process and place students in courses in which they are likely to be successful, Elmhurst D205 staff reviewed current research on indicators of high school course success as well as data from the past two cohorts of 9<sup>th</sup> grade students. Through these discussions and analysis of student data, we discovered that there are data points for our core freshman courses that accurately predict students' success and do not require any additional testing. For example, a recent report by researchers at the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research (Allensworth et al 2014) finds eighth-grade core GPA to be the best predictor of passing 9<sup>th</sup> grade courses and being on track overall at the end of 9<sup>th</sup> grade.<sup>1</sup> They find test scores to be a weak predictor of high school grades. Their work builds on previous studies (e.g. Kieffer and Marinell, 2012; Baltimore Education Research Consortium, 2011) which find similar relationships. Data from Elmhurst D205 students also suggests that middle school grades are significant in predicting student grades in their high school courses.<sup>2</sup>

Because of these findings, we will no longer be using placement tests at York High School; instead, we have listed the criteria for each course below to help families make decisions about the courses that will challenge their student and will help their student maintain a healthy life balance during their freshman year. For each course, we have listed students' placement criteria, and we have supplied a number of other data points to consider as your family begins to enroll at York.

Because we know that sometimes numbers do not tell the whole story, we encourage your family to talk about your student's past successes and challenges to determine his/her best educational path. If—after looking at the criteria listed below—your family would like to opt to take the honors-level course even if your student does not meet the criteria below, please fill out the attached “opt-in” form. This form lets our counselors know that your family has reviewed the suggested placement criteria, and your freshman student is ready and willing to take on the

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<sup>1</sup> They also find attendance to be related to high school performance.

<sup>2</sup> Based on a statistical model predicting high school course grades in English, math, science, and world language from middle school core subject grades (including math, English, social studies, and science) and PSAT scores (Total, EBRW, or Math depending on subject). PSAT scores also appear significant in predicting success in Biology Honors.

challenge of these honors-level courses for at least one semester: no level changes are made during a semester. If your family decides that your student's schedule seems overwhelming or would prevent him/her from maintaining a healthy school / life balance, your student can decide **not** to take an honors course with his/her counselor at their meeting in January without the need for a form.

We are excited to continue to open access to courses at York High School, and we appreciate your continued support of our students as they look toward their futures—challenging themselves and maintaining a healthy balance between school, friends, extra-curricular activities and family.

We wish all of our incoming students a happy and successful year in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and we look forward to seeing each of you walking the halls of York.

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