



# A Parent's Guide to Sylvania's Junior High Honors Program

## Implementing in 2020-2021

### Why an Honors Program?

Currently in Sylvania Schools, students in our high schools enjoy a diverse array of opportunities to explore advanced instruction in their areas of interest and aptitude. Courses such as Honors English, AP World History, Honors Biology, AP Statistics, AP Music Theory, Honors Senior Art Studio, and dozens of others allow students to select paths for themselves that will push them to advance in areas that could become careers, lifelong passions, or both. One of the many values of Sylvania Schools is this diversity of opportunity.

The Honors Program in our junior high schools will extend this opportunity to students in grades six through eight, empowering them to explore math, science, social studies, and English in more creative, critical, and connected ways. Now, students with passions for history, the natural world, numbers, books, and language will enjoy full opportunities to explore those passions.

### What is an Honors course like?

Honors courses derive their unique identity from their content, so each honors course will be a bit different from the others. Honors Science may take more opportunities to connect to math concepts or offer more independent projects of inquiry. Honors Social Studies may offer those independent opportunities as well and add to them more sophisticated research skills. However these courses distinguish themselves as honors, some similarities will be evident. All honors courses will provide instruction and learning appropriate to students capable of more sophisticated inquiry, greater complexity of ideas, and deeper connections to other subjects and the real world.

### Are these Accelerated courses?

Honors courses are opportunities for advancement, not acceleration. Advanced instruction means that a student is learning grade-appropriate content and skill standards in a more sophisticated fashion. Acceleration means that a student is learning content at least one grade level above their expected grade. For that reason, an eighth grade student enrolled in Honors Math 8 is pursuing an advanced course, but one enrolled in Honors Algebra I, which is typically a 9th grade course, is accelerated.

#### English

Currently, Sylvania Schools offers GATE Reading to gifted sixth grade students and GATE English to gifted seventh and eighth grade students.

This opportunity is not a multidisciplinary program for all areas, but only an advanced English language arts program. That program will remain as our GATE Reading and English teachers take the Honors English courses in grades six through eight. All of the exceptional learning of books, writing, and research will continue in the Honors English courses.

#### Math

Currently, junior high students learn math in three basic levels: Math I, Math II, and Math III. That leveling will continue, but Math III will become Honors Math. This course has always served advanced math students with grade-level advanced instruction and will continue to do so. Students accelerated into Algebra I in junior high will now take that course as Honors Algebra I. This course is still a high school course and will now count for a high school honors credit.

#### Science Social Studies

No opportunity for advanced instruction in social studies or science presently exists in Sylvania's junior high schools. The Honors Program will address that gap, implementing Honors Social Studies and Honors Science in grades six through eight. These courses will follow the path created by existing advanced courses in English and math.

## How will parents guide students into these honors courses?

As we do in our high schools, we will implement a clear process of course recommendation for junior high honors courses. Teachers from fifth through seventh grades will recommend their students for the next grade's courses. For math, that will include a recommendation of one of three or four courses. For all other areas, that will include a recommendation of one of two courses. Recommendations will be based on objective assessment data, including state tests, STAR assessments, and the Iowa tests, combined with the teacher's evaluation of a student's classroom performance in the area for recommendation.

## Is this developmentally appropriate?

In Sylvania Schools, we are always concerned with our students' mental and emotional well-being, not merely their academic improvement. High school students pursuing a slate of honors and AP courses can handle those courses because of their increasing maturity and experience. Junior high students do not share the same level of maturity and experience as their high school counterparts. For that reason, we will make sure junior high students pursuing honors learning do so in manageable ways through course enrollment caps. Students will only be allowed to enroll in two honors courses in grade six and three in grades seven and eight. Accelerated courses count toward this total. These limits will help us ensure that junior high students are able to succeed in the advanced coursework that will address their interests and skills.

## So, what does this look like?

*Let's take all of these rules and ideas and tell a story of a couple of hypothetical students in Sylvania Schools.*

### Hailey



Hailey is a fifth grade student this year at Maplewood Elementary. Hailey has done very well on her math state tests, but was not identified gifted in math through the Iowa test. She did well on that test, though, scoring in the 93rd percentile. Hailey's engagement in math in class is excellent as well. She does not do quite as well with reading activities, though. In the second semester, Hailey's teacher, Ms. Frank, recommends Hailey for Honors Math 6, Honors Science 6, English 6, and Social Studies 6.

Hailey follows these recommendations and does very well in math and science, earning recommendations for continuing these honors courses in math and science. In addition, she receives a recommendation for Honors Social Studies 7, which she takes in seventh grade. Hailey's time at McCord Junior High continues with those three honors courses, but moves to Honors Algebra I in eighth grade.

Upon registering for ninth grade at Northview High School, though, Hailey decides to focus on math and science only, enrolling in Honors Geometry and Honors Physical Science. In talking to her Northview counselor, she has learned on the ample opportunities for advanced math and science instruction, and she wants to devote her energies to those courses throughout high school, adding them to her schedule in sophomore year. She wants her freshman year to be a time to adjust to high school and complete required credits and electives so she can make the rest of her career a math and science exploration.

Hailey graduates with six math credits and seven science credits, including six AP courses. She earns admission to a biology program in college and uses it to start a career in biomedical engineering.

# Elijah



Elijah is a fifth grade student at Stranahan Elementary. Unlike Hailey, Elijah is skilled in reading, writing, and spelling and loves them all. In fact, he spends some of his time during the summer at the library and plans to volunteer there when old enough. But, Elijah is not only skilled in English language arts. He has been identified as gifted in all four core content areas through the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. This earns him recommendations for all four honors courses in sixth grade. In discussing the opportunities with his parents, they and he agree that he will make his two allowed honors courses Honors English and Honors Social Studies.

The gifted identification continues to earn Elijah recommendations for all four honors courses, and in seventh grade, he decides to take Honors Science 7. He continues with these three honors courses at Timberstone Junior High School, never taking Honors Math. In registering for freshman courses, Elijah chooses Honors English 9, AP World History, Honors Physical Science, and Honors Algebra I. He adds to that Journalism and Drama, deciding to expand his exploration of the humanities.

Elijah continues exploring the humanities and succeeding in many honors courses. He graduates with four credits of math, five credits of science, four credits of English, and five credits of social studies, all of which are exclusively honors and AP courses. Upon graduation, Elijah enters an English literature program and eventually becomes a professor of American Literature at the college level.

## So, what can I expect now?

Teachers, counselors, and administrators are working together to ready the Honors Program. This includes a refinement of the recommendation process, attention to the new complexities of scheduling, building of honors curricula, and more. Parents can expect to hear more about this during the scheduling process for the 2020-2021 school year. At that time, parents will receive notification of their child's course recommendations and be able to read about the courses in the junior high program of study. These notices are expected in early January 2020.

## What if I would like to talk to someone about my child's education in light of this new program?

The best place to start is always your child's teacher. Feel free to contact a teacher regarding the courses that make sense for the next school year. The classroom teacher is the most expert educator to speak on this subject. Just remember that teachers will not be making their recommendations until late December, so waiting to hear about these recommendations for your child is advisable.



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