

Danbury High School: The Future for ALL Students

Frequently Asked Questions, March 2010

FRESHMEN ACADEMY

What will the freshmen program of studies include?

All freshmen will be required to take:

- *English I*
- *Pre-Algebra, Algebra, or Geometry*
- *Physical Science or Biology*
- *World Studies*
- *Physical Education/Health*
- *Reading and/or Math Lab Electives will be required for those students who did not meet proficiency in middle school (students in these courses can choose their third elective)*

What other changes will be made for freshmen next year?

All freshmen students will be placed on a team with English, Math, Science, and Social Studies teachers. The Freshmen Academy will be housed on the fourth floor of DHS and will have its own administrator, guidance counselors, and a Dean of Discipline.

Why is a Freshmen Academy being planned?

Data indicate that many freshmen have demonstrated difficulty with the transition from middle to high school. Freshmen get more failures and suspensions than any other class of students at DHS. The Freshmen Academy has been designed to grow successful programs in an effort to provide more support to all freshmen.

CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION & ASSESSMENT

What is tracking?

The State Board of Education defines tracking as the practice of permanently assigning students for instructional purposes to an instructional group that denies voluntary association and instruction with higher achieving students, based on assessed or perceived readiness.

When was the decision to de-track DHS made?

The Danbury Enhancement Collaborative (TDEC) developed an improvement plan in 2009, as is required by all Partner Districts who have been identified by the State Department of Education as being in need of improvement. The TDEC plan includes a strategy that calls for DHS to present a revised course sequence that reflected increased rigor. The plan was approved by the State Board of Education in November 2009 and Danbury is legally obligated to implement it. TDEC included Board of Education, district, school, parent, and community representatives.

What is the State Board of Education's position on tracking?

The State Board of Education issued a position paper this month condemning the use of tracking. They state: "High academic achievement will result only if all students are expected to achieve at high levels and have equal access to challenging curriculum and instruction, and adequate and equitable resources; and are taught by excellent educators who believe that all students, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity or socioeconomic status, can achieve at high levels."

Why is DHS de-tracking?

- 1) *The State Board of Education has prohibited the use of tracking in schools.*
- 2) *Tracking is an outdated and ineffective practice that adversely impacts the success of many students.*
- 3) *DHS achievement scores indicate that the current practices for curriculum and instruction are not empowering all students to be successful.*
- 4) *The Danbury Enhancement Collaborative Plan calls for a revised course sequence in response to feedback from the Cambridge and NEASC assessments.*

How is DHS preparing to de-track?

- 1) *This year, professional development and teacher collaboration time are being focused on using assessment data to inform instruction so that teachers are planning differentiated lessons to meet the needs of individual students.*
- 2) *The district is currently writing curriculum at the College Prep and Honors levels for grades 6-12 in the following areas: Algebra, Geometry, Algebra II, English I, English II, English III, Physical Science, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, World Studies, Modern World, U.S. History, Civics, and Health. Curriculum will be written at the College Prep and Honors levels. Curricula approved by the College Board is already in place for AP courses.*
- 3) *The administrative structure was changed this year to provide more instructional leadership. The Administrative Leadership Team is now comprised of the Principal, Associate Principal of Instruction for Secondary Schools, Assistant Principals, Secondary Supervisor of Special Education, and Department Heads in English, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Fine & Applied Arts, World Language/English as a Second Language. The Freshmen Academy will have its own Principal and Dean of Discipline.*
- 4) *A Scientific Research-Based Intervention system has been designed to identify struggling students early so that interventions can be planned to ensure that all students are successful.*

What will the detracked DHS look like next year?

All courses in all grades will be offered at the College Prep, Honors, and Advanced Placement levels to ensure that all students are prepared for post-secondary school and career choices.

How have the elective courses changed?

Elective courses have not changed.

How will my high-achieving student be challenged?

High-achieving students will continue to be challenged in the Honors and Advanced Placement (AP) levels. Curricula in the core content areas are currently being written to ensure that every course is rigorous and challenging to students. New AP courses will be offered in the fall, bringing the total number of courses available to 19.

How will my struggling student be supported?

DHS has designed an early intervention system to identify and provide assistance to students who are struggling in accordance with new state guidelines that require schools to have a system of Scientific Research-Based Interventions. Reading Labs and Math Labs have been designed to provide additional time and support to those students who need it.

What is Project Opening Doors?

Project Opening Doors (POD) is a partnership program that provides participating high schools with funding to improve and expand AP courses. POD provides teacher training, student study sessions, and other resources.

What will Advanced Placement offerings look like next year?

AP courses will be expanded to include: English Literature, English Language, U.S. History, European History, World History, Geography, Psychology, Macroeconomics, Government & Politics, Calculus AB, Calculus BC, Statistics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Computer Science, French Language, Spanish Language, and Studio Art.