

CPS Middle Schools

Honors Pilot Program Proposal

Objectives

Academically lift up all middle school students by:

- Promoting a climate of academic rigor and high-expectations in every middle-school classroom
- Providing a challenging classroom environment for students in need of more advanced study
- Ensuring that students from under-represented communities participate in classes offering intensive academic challenge

Enhance Cambridge Public Schools by:

- Attracting families to the Putnam and Rindge middle schools and bringing socio-economic balance to Putnam
- Keeping families from leaving CPS
- Winning back families from charter and private schools

Option One – Innovative Honors Classes

This proposal follows the innovative recommendations by Nancy Brigham Associates in *Perceptions and Realities: An Evaluation of the Intensive Studies Program*. Many of the ideas are based upon the Fairfax County, Virginia honors model recommended by NBA.

- The Intensive Studies Program (ISP) will be replaced by a pilot program that offers elective honors classes in ELA, math, science, and social studies.
- Although we prefer honors to be offered at all four upper schools, we ask that the pilot program be available at the Putnam and Rindge upper schools – in keeping with the academic traditions and strong support for ISP at K-Lo & Peabody.
- The pilot program meets the Innovation Agenda requirement that high academic expectations be achieved through shared standards, not standardization, across the four schools. It also follows the district’s model of using pilot programs to explore innovative ideas, e.g. the wraparound zone at one elementary school.
- Alternative options, such as embedded honors, could be offered at Cambridge Street, Vassal Lane, and Amigos to ensure that all students have access to challenge opportunities appropriate to the academic culture of their respective schools.

Meeting High Academic Expectations

- Students will enroll in individual classes, some honors, some general education, so that, as NBA states, “the effect will be to maintain the academic challenge *and* create more heterogeneous classrooms” throughout the middle schools.
- These will not be “embedded honors” classrooms, but rather complete honors classes that give students access to a peer group.

- All honors classes will have open enrollment with the sole entrance requirement being a willingness to accept additional academic rigor and a heavier course load.
- All honors classes will follow the Innovation Agenda curriculum with the added objective of providing more depth and complexity in each subject.
- All students in honors classes will undertake more intensive, advanced work; therefore the classes may be renamed Intensive Study (IS) classes.

Creating Opportunities for Under-represented Populations

- Schools will actively publicize honors classes to all middle school families with a strong emphasis on recruiting students from under-served and low SES populations.
- Teachers will encourage all students at Putnam and Rindge to try at least one honors class during their middle school years.
- The courses will be risk free for students. Students will be free to move from one class to another at the conclusion of each term (or whatever timeframe teachers deem best). Teachers will maintain a culture of support around movement.

Enriching Support for Teachers & Students

- Teachers will receive professional development with a specialized focus on advanced learners to give them strategies to challenge and engage a diverse group of learners.
- The District will devise a separate academic solution for students substantially advanced in mathematics. Entrance to this program will be based upon testing.

Option Two – Intensive Studies at Putnam and Rindge

This option calls for the continuation of the Intensive Studies Program (ISP) at the Putnam and Rindge upper schools. It is composed of many of the same programmatic elements as the first option:

- The Intensive Studies Program (ISP) will be offered at Putnam and Rindge for three additional years and will offer new enrollment each year in the sixth grade.
- The program will have open enrollment with the only entrance requirement being a willingness to accept additional academic rigor and a heavier course load.
- ISP classes will use the Innovation Agenda curriculum but with the goal of adding depth and complexity.
- Schools will actively publicize ISP to all middle school families with a focus on recruiting students from under-served and low-income SES populations.
- Teachers will receive professional development with a specialized focus on advanced learners to give them strategies to challenge and engage a diverse group of learners. This has never happened before.
- The District will devise a separate academic solution for students substantially advanced in mathematics. Entrance to this program will be based upon testing.

Both Options

Program Oversight

We recommend that the upper school Honors Classes or Intensive Studies Program be overseen by a CPS administrator who will ensure that the program is equitably available to all middle school students, facilitate communication among the Honors or ISP teachers across the district, and oversee ongoing assessment and improvement of the program.

Preparing Young Scholars for Academic Rigor

The success of the honors model in Fairfax county is based on a foundation of scholarship available to students in that county, from 3rd grade on, called the *Young Scholars Program*, specifically designed to support academic challenge for disadvantaged children. We strongly urge the CPS administration and School Committee to adopt policy and programming that addresses the need for academic challenge throughout all grades in our district.

A Comprehensive Evidence-based Evaluation

Beginning in 2012-13, an outside evaluator will conduct a rigorous, data-driven evaluation of the advanced learning models undertaken in our middle schools – whether they include an honors program, ISP, or other programs such as embedded honors. This evaluation will look closely at all students in the middle schools, comparing the effectiveness of the different teaching models and the overall academic and social impact of IA. At the conclusion of the third year, the evaluator will report findings and recommendations to the Superintendent & School Committee.

Connect to Innovative Ideas...

ISP Evaluation

www3.cpsd.us/media/network/10516/media/CPS%20Redesign/documents/SchoolCommittee/ISP_Report_Dec_3_2011.pdf?rev=0

Fairfax County Honors Program

www.fcps.edu/is/aap/honors.shtml
www.fcps.edu/is/aap/pdfs/MSHonors_Final.pdf

Fairfax County Young Scholars Model

www.fcps.edu/is/aap/column/columnyoungscholars.shtml