

ACE¹ Statement on Honors Course Designations

1. Leveling is inequitable and damaging to students.

Honors classes operate as racist, sexist, ableist, and classist gatekeepers, promoting a false narrative of meritocracy that serves to perpetuate systemic oppression.

- a. Current ability segregation at BHS is entirely arbitrary. There are no specific guidelines across or between disciplines - nor could there be. Education is inherently complex and no single instrument is capable of measuring a students' aptitude or intelligence across the board. Diversity of knowledge, skills, and dispositions are a fact of humanity and enrich classrooms and humanity.
- b. Arbitrarily segregated educational facilities and programs “[instill] a sense of inferiority that ha[s] a hugely detrimental effect on the education and personal growth of African American, [socioeconomically disadvantaged, and neurodivergent] children.” ([Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka](#)). Referring to students as “standard” kids is inherently dehumanizing and disrespectful. All students are honorable and deserve our esteem. Students categorized as “standard” internalize a sense of inferiority that artificially limits their potential, furthering systemic oppression.
- c. Justifications for academic segregation such as “ability to work independently” and “rigor” are code for white supremacist ideology.
 - i. For example many students who are currently coded as “honors” are students who have been entitled to request teacher approval and guidance at every step of their education. Our implicit biases code these students as “independent” despite their reliance on teacher support and scaffolds.
 - ii. Similarly, what has been coded as “rigorous” frequently follows hegemonic, Eurocentric, arbitrary, and vague justifications.
- d. “Honors” is code for assimilation to White, upper middle class, neurotypical systems and ideals. This fact is born out by the overwhelming body of evidence in our own school and across the nation.
 - i. See, for example, [Barsky-Elnour](#) (2022).
- e. All students deserve high standards, deep learning, authentic assessments, and purposeful differentiation.

¹ ACE is an innovative, competency-based program at Brookline High School for students entering grades 10-12, who feel they will find more intellectual satisfaction and be more academically successful in a non-traditional setting. ACE provides a rigorous college-preparation pathway in which students are placed in multi-age classes based on their skill levels and can go at their own pace and graduate when they complete their content and skill competencies.

2. ACE Courses are unleveled, intellectually challenging, equitable and effective.

Heterogeneous, competency based, differentiated, and collaborative learning provides equitable access to intellectually challenging education at a deep, holistic level.

- a. Competency Based education provides clear benchmarks for mastery. Instruction and assessments are aligned to clearly defined discrete competencies and learning benchmarks for content, academic skills, and literacy standards. In ACE:
 - i. benchmarks meet both state and Common Core standards.
 - ii. students can demonstrate basic competency, competency, or high competency; a “D” is not a passing grade, and if at least basic competency is not achieved, credit is not earned.
 - iii. students demonstrate competency by showing mastery of their learning independently, frequently, and using content-specific language.
 - iv. students have agency to work at their own pace as the drivers of their learning, while teachers guide and provide feedback.
 - v. rubrics enhance self-directed learning and are used to assess final levels of competency.

- b. Differentiation provides equitable access to content, concepts and skills. In ACE:
 - i. unleveled and mixed-age classrooms give *every* student the opportunity to leverage the supports and scaffolds they need, encouraging student growth at every level.
 - ii. student collaboration and flexible grouping provide additional layers of structure and support that teach students to access resources beyond the teacher and allow students to progress beyond the confines of teacher expertise or bias. Peer instruction deepens student learning and reveals gaps.
 - iii. differentiated instruction addresses multiple intelligences; stimulates engagement and interest; and requires students to extend to the very edge of their zone of proximal development.
 - iv. differentiated assessment, particularly performance based assessment, provides opportunities for students to demonstrate mastery in a variety of ways, focusing on content and skill development over memorization.

- c. Other high leverage pedagogies for equity in ACE offer critical support for the above strategies, including but not limited to project based learning, teaching the whole child, restorative justice, culturally responsive teaching and a focus on community.

As a laboratory for the best practices in heterogeneous learning and Competency Based Education, we welcome members of our educational community to come see how and why these components (and many more) are so effective within our [ACE Program](#).

3. Opting out of BHS leveling is not an option.

The ACE program has attempted to opt out of the inequitable BHS system of leveling but the *impact* of our choice has had deleterious and inequitable effects on our students.

- a. Within a system that categorizes some students as “Honorable” or “Advanced”, without this designation, the default is “Standard”.
 - i. An assumption of being “standard” negatively impacts ACE students’ self image and treatment by the community.
 - ii. An assumption of being sub-honorable negatively affects ACE students’ college applications as well as their weighted GPAs, which closes doors and limits their future opportunities arbitrarily.

4. Until BHS delevels, all ACE courses will be designated as Honors.

Thus, all students, regardless of Race, Impairments, Neurodivergence, SocioEconomic Status, or previous history *are* Honors students deserving of respect and esteem and the high standards that accompany them.

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