

Is an Advanced Academic Class Right for Your Student?

Traditionally, school districts have provided advanced academic programs and left it up to students to decide whether to enroll in them. In Federal Way, we're taking a different approach, thanks to a policy approved by the school board in the spring of 2010.

Research shows that students strongly benefit from taking advanced classes. Among the advantages: they are better prepared for college course work and tend to earn better grades; they are more likely to graduate from college than students with similar SAT scores who did not take advanced classes; and, finally, better colleges are more likely to admit students who have taken advanced courses and to offer academic scholarships to them. Without an extra push from adults, teens will often choose to avoid more challenging classes.

Now under the district's policy, Academic Acceleration Policy 2191, students in grades 6-12 will be automatically enrolled in the appropriate advanced classes. Students who pass state tests like the MSP, HSPE, and WASL have proven that they have the knowledge and understanding of a subject necessary to take advanced courses.

We will use standardized state test results in reading, writing, math, and science to determine the students' class placement. Students who want to sign up for advanced courses may do so, even if their test scores don't prequalify them. Additionally, students may opt out of these classes with their parents' permission. The goal is to encourage all students to achieve at their highest level.

Parents of this year's juniors and seniors were notified of their students' HSPE scores in June. Students who passed at least one section of the state test received a letter that indicated the student would be enrolled in an advanced class. Parents of all students in grades 6-10 are encouraged to review their class schedules in August. If your student wants to be removed from an advanced class, take the time to talk to him or her first and to consider the benefits or drawbacks to your student. If your student opts out, s/he will complete an "Advanced Programs Refusal Form" at a meeting with their parent/guardian and a school administrator. If the parent or guardian is unable to attend a meeting, please contact via phone, email or fax your school's administrator to confirm your child's request to opt out. Copies of the form will be retained in the student's permanent file and submitted to the school's Curriculum Support Specialist (CSS). This information will be used to improve our school system and ensure students have an academically appropriate education.

If you would like to learn more, please go to www.fwps.org/info/advanced or contact your child's school.