

ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOLS

*UNDERSTANDING*

*COURSE SELECTION AT*

*R. J. GREY JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL*

*AND*

*ACTON-BOXBOROUGH*

*REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL*

**IMPORTANT**

**KEEP THIS DOCUMENT FOR**

**FUTURE REFERENCE**

*Spring, 2008*  
<http://ab.mec.edu>

Out of a desire to help parents make informed decisions about the appropriate course placements for their children, we provide parents of 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders with information regarding the course selection process in general, and also information from the Mathematics, English, History/Social Studies, Science, World Language, Performing Arts, and Visual Arts Departments, in time for the spring course selection process.

We ask that you put this document in a safe place – where you will be able to retrieve it next year and the year after. We will update it annually; updates will be posted on the A/B website, at <http://ab.mec.edu>

Questions about how to navigate course selection within a given subject area should be directed to the contact person/s identified in each section. Please refer any general comments or concerns about this document to:

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Parents and educators are keenly aware that each child undergoes social, physical and intellectual development on his/her own unique timetable. During early adolescence – the time encompassed by the end of elementary school, the move through junior high and on to high school – that divergence of timetables both between and within individual youth can be truly breathtaking. Visualize, for example, the thirteen-year-old boy who looks like his father and is already shaving, playing touch football with his buddy who could pass for a fifth grader . . . or the teenage girl who has yet to enter puberty but who is intellectually ready for college.

Against this reality of physical and personal development, the schools attempt the challenging task of providing every student with an academic program consistent with his/her skills, learning needs, and interests. To meet the needs of developmentally and otherwise diverse learners, teachers have developed an array of classroom strategies. Through group work, independent projects, cooperative learning, and numerous other techniques, teachers support students' use of varied aspects of their intelligence and, thus, enable students with varied learning styles opportunities to achieve. By providing varying levels of challenge within a given heterogeneous classroom, teachers often meet the needs of diverse learners within a single classroom.

Such strategies are the mark of good teaching in this day and age and can be extremely successful. However, there are limits to what flexible teaching techniques can achieve. Thus, in addition to employing a range of teaching approaches in classrooms, the Junior High Mathematics Department begins to level its academic courses. "Leveling" is distinct from the much-maligned practice of "tracking." In a "tracked" system, once students are placed in courses at a particular level, it becomes nearly impossible to get back out. In traditional tracked systems, students tended to be placed in the same track for all subjects. In a "leveled" system like ours, students have many and ongoing opportunities to move up or down through levels when doing so becomes appropriate. Students are likely to take classes at different levels in different subject areas. And in a leveled system, parents also have the right to override the placement decisions of their children's teachers.

In this memo, we seek to provide parents with background information about the course leveling approach in each department that clarifies:

- How leveled courses differ from one another.
- The criteria upon which teachers recommend students for leveled courses.
- Important academic/curricular implications associated with being placed in a course at a given level.
- The process by which parents can influence and/or override level placements.

## Issues to Keep in Mind as You Consider the “Right” Level Placement for Your Child

- Some students achieve at the same level across all subject areas. Many others have stronger aptitude or achievement in one or two areas and are weaker in others. Even when students have comparable aptitudes across a variety of disciplines, they are typically more interested in some subjects than others. Therefore, it often makes sense for students to take classes in different subjects at different levels. By varying the level of challenge across subjects, students can challenge themselves appropriately, and they can leave time in their lives for extracurricular activities, family, and social activity. Among the district’s highest achieving students, only a small percentage take all-honors schedules. Doing so is extremely demanding – a potential source of stress even for the most able and disciplined students – and can result in lowering a student’s GPA.
- At the high school (but not at R. J. Grey), across all subject areas, the level of a course determines its “weight” in the calculation of students’ “QPA,” or Quality Point Average. The QPA is used to determine students’ rank in class (RIC). RIC is one piece of information used by colleges and universities in their admissions decisions. The relationship between course level and calculation of QPA is illustrated by the following table. Students’ grades in heterogeneously grouped classes are not included in the calculation of their QPAs.

<u>Q.P.A. Utilized to Determine Rank in Class</u>						<u>G.P.A.</u>
<u>Grades</u>	<u>H/AP</u>	<u>AE</u>	<u>CP</u>	<u>SP</u>	<u>Hetero- geneous</u>	<u>Honor Roll Formula</u>
A+	20	18	16	14	-	4.0
A	19	17	15	13	-	4.0
A-	18	16	14	12	-	4.0
B+	17	15	13	11	-	3.7
B	16	14	12	10	-	3.3
B-	15	13	11	9	-	3.0
C+	14	12	10	8	-	2.7
C	13	11	9	7	-	2.3
C-	12	10	8	6	-	2.0
D+	11	9	7	5	-	1.7
D	10	8	6	4	-	1.3
D-	9	7	5	3	-	1.0
F	0	0	0	0	-	0

- Students' abilities, interests and commitments evolve over time. Those who would like to move, at some future date, to a higher-level course in a particular subject area may be able to do so. This document describes what is entailed in each subject area to make such a switch.
- Outside reading makes a difference. If you want to help your child make a transition to higher academic achievement and higher-level courses, encourage reading and model reading yourself. Reading broadens horizons, deepens understanding, and sharpens intellectual

faculties. If your child makes a habit of it, reading will also improve his/her academic achievement. The instructional leaders of the system agree that the paramount skill for academic success is reading.

- Proficient readers tend to succeed across many subjects because they have good comprehension: of text in general, of textbooks, of test questions. Their breadth of vocabulary enhances their grasp of nuance. Habitual pleasure readers bring a breadth of context to many subjects – literature, history, the social sciences, science, the arts, world language – to which they can more easily add new knowledge. Skillful reading tends to kindle the curiosity and imagination required for successful completion of upper-level courses. Writing and reasoning skills, maturity and motivation all play a role in academic success at the high school level, but reading above all provides a grounding for academic success as maturity and motivation grow.
- **“Doubling Up”**: Within a given academic year, students at the high school often “double up” (i.e., take more than one course within a single department.) Thus, a student enrolled in AE Chemistry might also enroll in BioForum; another student enrolled in U.S. History might double up by enrolling in Psychology; a third might enroll in Spanish and French simultaneously. Given the number of courses that most students must take within each discipline in order to meet college entrance requirements, there are limits to how much doubling up is possible within a given subject area. But doubling up is one of the best ways for a student to “dig deeper” within a given academic area.

### **Teacher Level Recommendation and Parental Override Processes at R. J. Grey**

*The criteria by which students are placed in particular levels vary from subject to subject. Also, the implications of placements are different in each subject area. However, some aspects of the placement process apply across subject areas.*

Prior to the conclusion of grade 6, students will be recommended for placement into one of the two mathematics levels offered the following year at R. J. Grey Junior High School – Standard or Accelerated grade 7 Mathematics. Both of these levels are Pre-Algebra courses, using the same textbook. The Standard grade 7 Pre-Algebra course covers about 90% of the material covered in the Accelerated course, with a pace that focuses on applications and practice of the concepts. Both the Standard and Accelerated classes experience enrichment lessons to accompany the text. The factors used to make the level recommendation will be the student’s performance in grade 6 mathematics and his/her performance on the grade 7 placement examination, which will be administered in early June while the students are in grade 6. After considering these factors, the grade 7 mathematics teachers will grade this exam in mid-June and make the level recommendations for the upcoming September. Parents will be notified as to the specific placement for their child by mail and, if they disagree with the recommendation, will have two weeks to pursue the override process. If they do wish to override the recommendation for placement, they must:

- a. Obtain an override form from the Junior High Counseling Department.
- b. Complete this form and return it to Mr. Philip Stameris, the Building Department Leader for Mathematics at R. J. Grey Junior High School, within the two-week period.

By completing and returning this form, they are indicating that they realize this was not the placement recommended and that they agree to provide their child with additional outside academic support if he/she is struggling in the higher level.

- c. Questions regarding placement may be sent by email to either Mr. Stameris or Mr. William Noeth, Regional Department Leader for Mathematics, by email.

### **Note**

To perform well on the placement exam described, students need to have very strong knowledge of the basic operations of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division of integers, fractions, decimals, and percents and must be able to accurately perform calculations *without a calculator*.

In order to perform well in the accelerated Pre-Algebra course in grade 7, students must also have developed requisite problem-solving capabilities and be committed to accurately completing home assignments and classwork.

In March, for 7<sup>th</sup> graders preparing to move to 8<sup>th</sup> grade, mathematics teachers will be making level-placement recommendations. For 8<sup>th</sup> graders preparing to move to 9<sup>th</sup> grade, mathematics, science, English, and world language teachers will be making level-placement recommendations; in early April, a form will be sent home to parents detailing these recommendations. Parents will have two weeks to either accept or reject the placement recommendations.

- If a parent has concerns about any teacher's placement recommendation, s/he is strongly urged to call the teacher about the concerns.
- If, after the conversation between the parent and teacher, the parent continues to disagree with the teacher's recommendation, the parent has the right to initiate a placement override. To do so, the parent must:
  - ✓ obtain an override form from the Counseling Department, and
  - ✓ fill it out, and submit it by the deadline specified on the form.

Parents may wish to call either the Building Department Leader (BDL) or the Regional Department Leader (RDL) if they have any questions about course expectations in a particular department. Once submitted, the override form must be signed by the teacher, BDL and counselor.

### **Teacher Level Recommendation/Parental Override Processes at the High School**

The scheduling process at the high school is designed to involve students to the fullest extent. Students are given more control over their course loads and planning. The process begins in late winter when the Program of Studies booklets are distributed to students.

Students are given several days to review the Program of Studies' course listings with their parents. Students will be given a Pupil Course Request (PCR) Form and will be asked to take it to each one of their teachers. Teachers will make course and level recommendations for the next year based on the student's performance in their classes. For some heterogeneously grouped courses, no teacher placement recommendation is necessary. At the end of this process, the

student is asked to take home for parental review a copy of the PCR form with the teachers' recommendations and signatures. Once the data from all PCR forms has been compiled, a list of the student's course requests will also be mailed home to parents (mid-March for students in grades 9 through 11, mid-April for 8<sup>th</sup>-grade students). The same computer-generated list of course requests is also distributed to students in homeroom.

Students wishing to add or drop a course will need to pick up in the Counseling Department a Pupil Course Request Change Form, which will require a parent's signature and can be dropped off with the student's counselor.

Level changes to a higher-level course than was recommended for a student will require going through the override process. Forms can be picked up in the Counseling Department and require student, counselor, teacher and Department Leader meetings.

There are deadlines that apply for all course change requests. Please see current information to determine this year's deadlines.

## **Understanding the Distinct Approach to Course Leveling and Course Selection in the Five Leveled-Subject Areas**

*Given changes in such areas as curriculum, staff, demography and standardized testing, the information provided in this section is subject to change on an annual basis.*

### **Mathematics**

The Mathematics Department is the first department in the secondary system to separate students into homogeneously grouped levels.

#### **At R. J. Grey**

- Students in grade 7 are placed into levels as described earlier (see pages 3-4).
- Students who have maintained an A- or higher in grade 7 Accelerated Pre-Algebra are placed in Honors Algebra I in grade 8. The other students in that level are placed in grade 8 Accelerated/Enriched (AE) mathematics, along with the top students from the Standard Pre-Algebra classes. The grade 8 AE course uses a regular algebra textbook and largely parallels the Algebra I College Preparatory (CP) class taught in grade 9. The rest of the students in Standard Pre-Algebra are placed in grade 8 Standard mathematics, which reviews and extends the basics of algebra begun in the 7<sup>th</sup>-grade standard level. (From here on, readers may want to refer to the chart, *Potential Sequences of Mathematics Courses, 7-12*, below.)
- Based on their performance in grade 8, students will be recommended for grade 9 mathematics classes. For descriptions of specific high school math courses, see the link for the High School *Program of Studies*: <http://ab.mec.edu/abrhs/academics/index.shtml>. Students in Honors Algebra I who attain B+ or higher grades are recommended for Honors Geometry. The remainder of the Algebra I students are placed in Geometry AE. Students in grade 8 AE Algebra are placed in Algebra I H if they attain an A for the year, in Algebra I AE if they attain grades between C+ and A- for the year, and in Algebra I CP otherwise. Students in grade 8 Standard who attain C+ or higher grades are placed in Algebra I CP (see "special situations," below). Those with grades from D to C are placed in Standard

Preparatory (SP) Elementary Algebra I-1, and students with D- or F grades are placed in Foundations for Algebra SP. Elementary Algebra I Part 1 SP and Elementary Algebra I Part 2 SP each do one-half of the Algebra I CP course, and so completion of those two years has the equivalent content to one year of Algebra I CP. Foundations for Algebra reviews the grade 7 material. By teacher recommendation only, a small number of students will take mathematics in the Transition Program.

Some special situations/information:

1. Students in grade 8 Standard who would like to take Algebra I AE the following year need to learn the material that the grade 8 AE students learned. This can be done by taking Algebra I CP in summer school or by learning the equivalent material with a qualified math tutor during the summer after grade 8. The Algebra I AE course does use an Algebra I text, but it moves very quickly through the first half of the text, since students from grade 8 AE math have already covered that material, and then proceeds to cover the rest of the text in its entirety, along with a good amount of supplementary material from other texts.
2. Students who attained A grades in grade 8 Algebra AE and who would like to take Algebra I AE in the A-B Summer School can be placed in Geometry H or AE if they complete that summer course with at least an 80. (Students who attain an average over 95 are placed in Geometry H).
3. At the high school, all H and AE mathematics classes beginning with Geometry use the same text. The difference between H and AE lies in the number of chapters covered (H does the whole book and AE does about 85%) and the depth of the problems assigned. For example, in the Jurgenson geometry text, the “C” exercises, which are quite difficult, are assigned in class and are given on tests, whereas they are not done routinely in AE courses.

### **At A.B.R.H.S.**

From Algebra I on at the high school, students are recommended for level placement based on their performance in the present math course, as follows:

- At the H level, students who attain B- or higher grades for the year may continue at that level, whereas students who cannot attain B- grades are recommended for follow-up AE classes.
- At the AE level, students who attain C+ or higher grades for the year are recommended to stay at that level; students with C or C- grades are recommended to take the next course at the CP level. Students at the AE level in Algebra I or Geometry or Algebra II who maintain consistent A grades are asked if they would like to try H the following year; the extra material covered at the H level in these classes is not critical for success in the next H course.
- Students at the CP level who attain the needed C- average for the year are moved into the next course. If they maintain high A averages in Algebra I CP or Geometry CP, they are invited to attend our summer school to take the Algebra I AE course so that they can learn the missing algebra material that will allow them to successfully handle Geometry AE or Algebra II AE.
- Students who take Elementary Algebra I-1 SP proceed to Elementary Algebra I-2 SP and then to Geometry SP or CP, depending on their performance in the two-year algebra sequence, and then to Algebra II CP in grade 12.

- Students in Foundations for Algebra SP are recommended for an algebra class depending on their mastery of the pre-algebra material and then move along the sequence as far as possible.

Mathematics teachers make a placement recommendation for each student based on the student's academic performance, as described above. However, according to procedures detailed in the *High School Handbook*, if a student meets or exceeds the indicated minimum average to continue to the next course in the sequence, his or her parents have the right to override teacher course-level recommendations.

Generally, a student must attain an average of 70 or higher in this year's mathematics course in order to continue to the next course in the sequence; for a few upper-level courses, to move on students must attain an average of 80 or higher. Some parents choose to override teacher recommendations and then hire a private mathematics tutor to support their child. In some cases this method has been successful; in others it has not.

### **Factors to Keep in Mind as You Consider the “Right” Mathematics Level Placement for Your High School Student**

1. We believe that mastery of the material in Algebra I is absolutely critical for future success in mathematics. As the following course-sequencing map indicates, students who do not take Algebra I H in 8th grade, and who do not shift levels upwards at some later juncture in high school (see below), will not be eligible to take calculus in their senior year. However, we do not encourage families to override teacher recommendations and reach for Algebra I early in order to reach calculus by senior year. Rushing to take more advanced math classes too early can undermine a student's developing mathematical understanding, enjoyment of the subject, and self-confidence as a learner.

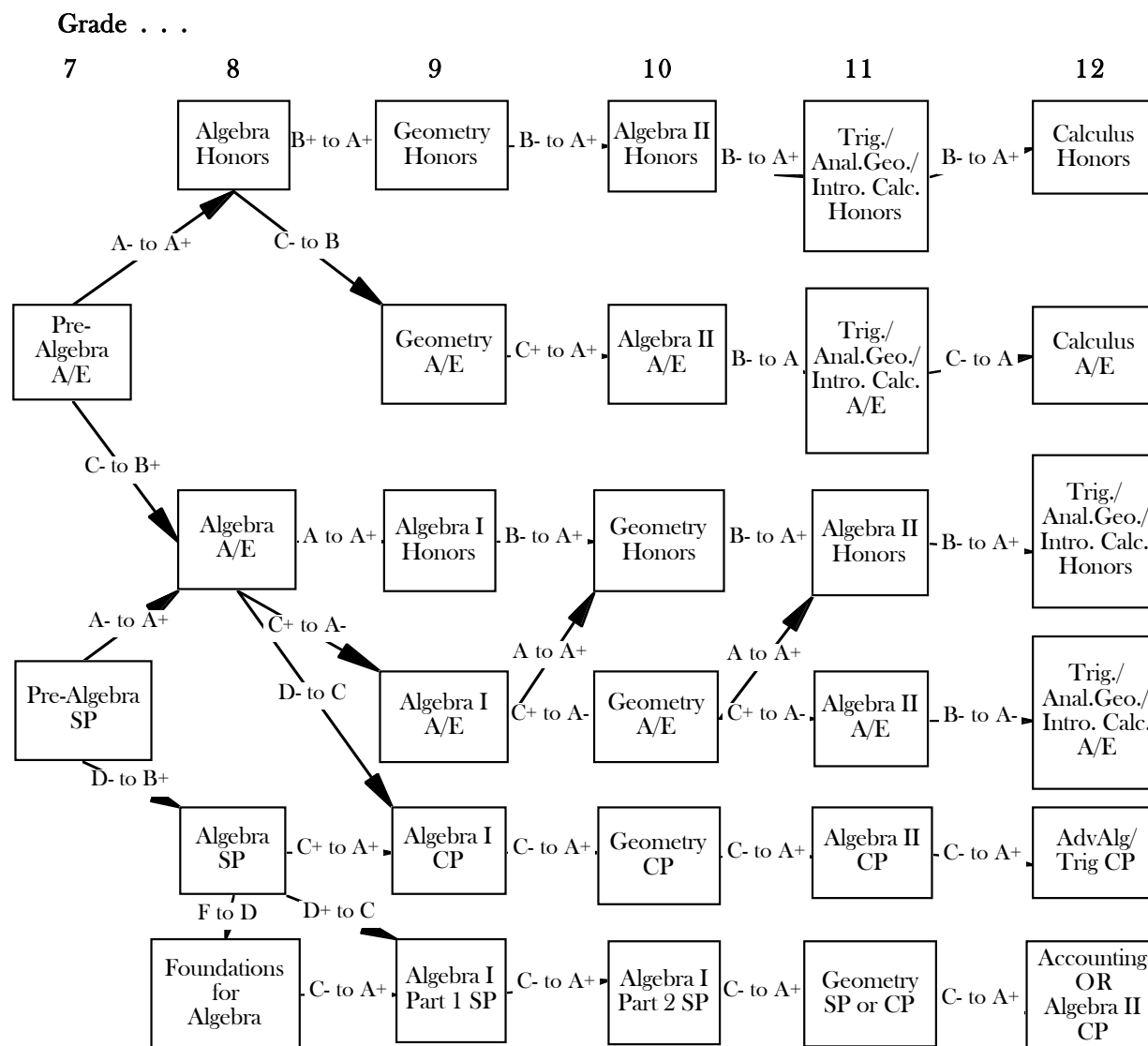
Many students who do not take the most challenging math track available at the high school will enroll, in senior year, in either Trigonometry/Analytic Geometry/Introduction to Calculus H or AE. The last two months of these courses is calculus; the last two units are titled “Introduction to Limits” and “Introduction to Differential Calculus.” When they arrive in college, students from these classes have found themselves quite well prepared for collegiate Calculus I.

2. Students who do not take Honors Algebra I in grade 8 have two avenues later on if they do want to get to calculus in high school, however.

After 8<sup>th</sup> grade, they can attend the summer class in Algebra I AE, described above. Alternatively, they can take Algebra I H or AE in grade 9 and then, if they demonstrate in grade 9 by their high grades and strong work ethic that they are capable and interested, take two math courses – Geometry (H or AE) and Algebra II (H or AE) in grade 10.

3. Movement from CP to AE at the high school *requires* summer catch-up work. For example, Algebra I CP covers about 2/3 of the content in Algebra I AE and does not cover the more difficult problems covered in AE. Thus, in any given year, students could not possibly go from CP to AE without filling the gaps. Likewise – and this is illustrative of various pedagogical differences between the course levels – at the SP and CP levels, teachers provide a supported, structured review process and “practice test” before every test and most quizzes after first term. This level of support is not provided at the AE or H level. For these reasons, a move from CP to AE must be considered very carefully.

Potential Sequences of Mathematics Courses, 7-12



The above chart lists the Mathematics courses Grade 7 through Grade 12. Advancement to the next course is based upon student achievement. Each subsequent course in a level sequence is based upon the curriculum from the previous math course in that same level at the high school. To continue in a course sequence, students need a C- or better grade.

If students wish to advance up a level (e.g. A/E to Honors), they may need to make up material they have missed due to the increased pacing and depth of the higher level courses. To advance a level, students need an A or A+ in their present level and their present teacher's recommendation.

Key: A/E = Accelerated/Enriched CP = College Preparatory SP = Standard Preparatory

Note: Parental overrides are accepted so long as the parent(s) meet with the math teacher in the junior high or Mr. Noeth in the high school to discuss the change.

## Math Textbooks

### Junior High School:

Grade 7:		<i>Glencoe Pre-Algebra</i> , 1999
Grade 8:	H:	<i>McDougal Littell Algebra I</i> , 2001
	AE:	<i>DC Heath Algebra I</i> , 1998
	STD:	<i>Mathematics Course 3, McDougall Littell</i> , 2003

### High School:

Foundations for Algebra SP:		<i>Mathematical Connections</i> , 1997
Algebra I H:		<i>Dolciani Algebra I</i> , 1992
Algebra I AE:		<i>Glencoe Algebra I</i> , 2003
Algebra I CP:		<i>Glencoe Algebra I</i> , 2000
Elementary Algebra I-1 and I-2 SP:		<i>Glencoe Algebra I</i> , 2000
Geometry H and AE:		<i>Jurgensen Geometry</i> , 2004
Geometry CP:		<i>Glencoe Geometry</i> , 2000
Algebra II H and AE:		<i>Dolciani Algebra II</i> , 1992
Algebra II CP:		<i>Glencoe Algebra II</i> , 2001
Advanced Algebra/Trigonometry CP, & Trigonometry/Analytic Geometry/ Intro. to Calculus H or AE:		<i>Advanced Mathematics, Precalculus and Discrete Mathematics with Data Analysis</i> , 2004
BC Calculus H or AB Calculus AE:		<i>Calculus: Analytic, Geometric, and Numerical</i> , Finney et al, 2007

### **For further information, please contact:**

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## **English**

### **At R. J. Grey**

The continuing development of communication skills is the primary focus of the R. J. Grey English curriculum. The overall goals for the students are the following:

- To write well in a variety of forms
- To read accurately and with critical insight and analytical judgment
- To participate effectively in discussions and other oral activities
- To demonstrate an understanding of the nature of language in writing, reading, and speaking
- To demonstrate personal involvement in and enjoyment of the spoken and written word

*Essential Skills and Objectives* for reading, writing, speaking, and grammar have been determined for the students at R. J. Grey and are on the district website. In general, these skills are developed in grade seven and reviewed, reinforced, and expanded in grade eight. They are the foundation of every activity and align with the state learning standards.

Thematic units and genre studies comprise the curriculum content. Each unit consists of focus questions about the theme or genre and activities that address these questions and provide opportunities for students to develop and address the essential skills. Students are actively involved in a range of activities within the communication spectrum, either individually or with groups of varying sizes. These units, from which teachers choose according to their needs and interests, are divided between grades seven and eight. The seventh grade units are: Conflict, Family Relationships, Historical Perspectives, and Social Justice. Genre studies include: Short Story, Poetry, Biography, Mystery, and Drama. The 8<sup>th</sup> grade units are: Self-awareness/ Identity, Cultural Perspectives, Drama/ Shakespeare, Justice, War and Peace, Memoirs, and Science Fiction.

Each unit is designed to reflect the interests and needs of the early adolescent. In many units, to provide for individual differences and interests, students have a choice of readings. They are introduced to several novels, varying in story line and reading difficulty, but all on the unit theme. Students also may have independent reading opportunities throughout the year. The choice of thematic units and the literature involved in the unit may vary from team to team and year to year; however, the *Essential Skills and Objectives* are consistent for all students.

### **At A.B.R.H.S.**

Four years of high school English are required to graduate from A.B.R.H.S. As students prepare to leave R. J. Grey, English teachers will recommend most of the 8<sup>th</sup>-grade class for English I, a heterogeneous class. A smaller number of students will be recommended for honors-level English. Students who require more substantial instructional supports will be recommended for placement in more-specialized English programs.

Students in honors and heterogeneous classes read the same set of core texts. Beyond the required works, students in advanced classes will read additional, more-challenging titles and will be expected to read in greater depth and with a greater degree of independence.

In all 9<sup>th</sup>-grade English classes, students are regularly expected to complete writing assignments. At the heterogeneous level, writing instruction is focused on developing students' organization and expanding the use of evidence to support an argument. At the honors level, in addition to reinforcing these skills, teachers expect students to build more complex, nuanced arguments and to attend to matters of style.

Teachers recommend students for honors English based on criteria we have found to be reliable predictors of success. These criteria include:

- A proficiency with language, both spoken and written.
- An ability to compose a statement of argument and support it logically and fully with evidence from a text.
- A love of reading.
- The skill to read with insight, coupled with the maturity to consider a variety of points of view regarding a piece of literature.

After 9<sup>th</sup> grade, English courses are offered at the Honors/AP (H), the Accelerated/Enriched (AE), the College Preparatory (CP) and the Standard Preparatory (SP) levels. As in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, to succeed at the Honors and AE levels in subsequent grades, students must typically be independent learners who love to read and talk about what is read; in addition, these are students who write well and easily. Often, AE and Honors English students write outside of school as a means of personal expression.

There are differences in the level of challenge in Honors, AE, and CP English classes. As would be expected, those students who have been succeeding in upper-level English classes during their freshman and sophomore years have developed a facility with language that will give them an advantage as they continue in advanced English courses in the junior and senior years. However, by its nature, English allows for more movement among levels than is possible in math and science where, in order to make sense of the next set of concepts, one must first have sequentially acquired the previous sets. In English classes, whenever a student acquires the core reading, communication, and thinking skills and whenever he develops sufficient interest in the subject and combines all of these with strong work habits and a willingness to take responsibility for the additional work load – and often, a student will develop these capacities and inclinations sometime during high school – he can succeed in upper-level English courses.

**For further information, please contact:**

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## **History and Social Studies**

Social Studies **at the junior high** is comprised of a seventh-grade American studies course entitled, *Voices of America*, and an eighth-grade course entitled, *World Cultures*. The seventh-grade course focuses on the theme of identity: how identity impacts the experience of individuals and various groups in American society. Students explore our identity as a nation as they study the founding documents as the foundation and promise of the American Dream. The eighth-grade course focuses on the culture, history and geography of East Asia (Japan and China), Russia, the Middle East, and Latin America. Social studies classes at the junior high are heterogeneously grouped.

The initial goal of the seventh-grade curriculum is to establish a cooperative and comfortable environment in which students coming from many different elementary schools learn to recognize and respect differences that exist in our classrooms and community. Skills and concepts developed in this unit carry throughout the entire Social Studies curriculum and help create a sense of community throughout the school. The major emphasis of the seventh-grade curriculum is on the experiences of immigrants and African Americans in the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries and their continued search for full participation in the American Dream. Students are introduced to the use of primary sources and critical thinking skills, including: making conclusions, inferring, and using supporting evidence. These thinking skills are reinforced in Grade 8.

Students in Grade 8 learn to recognize the unique qualities and important contributions of each of the featured cultures/regions. An initial goal of the eighth-grade curriculum is for students to appreciate the “universals” of culture – the ideas and activities common to *all* cultures – as well as the roles that people, products and ideas of other cultures have played in the development of our own culture. Students develop an open-minded approach to the study of different cultures. Physical and human geography are emphasized in each of the units.

Underlying goals for Grade 7 are for students to respect differences among people and to cultivate active citizenship in our representative democracy. These goals are developed further in Grade 8, as students learn to respect and appreciate the diversity of our global community and determine ways they can make a positive difference as citizens of that global community.

The considerations that help to guide level-placement recommendations for English classes are a good starting point for determining the most appropriate level in **high school social studies** classes as well: proficiency with language, strength as a reader and writer, enthusiasm for the subject matter, capacity to attend to multiple points of view on an issue.

All students are required to take a three-year social studies core curriculum, which begins with World History and continues with a two-year sequence of U.S. History and Government. This configuration allows for an in-depth consideration of the development of the American governmental system. The core curriculum is offered at the H/AP, AE, CP, and SP levels. In the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, the World History course is also offered through the Transition Program, by teacher recommendation only. The chronologically sequenced units and uniting themes are consistent across levels. The major differences across levels are the amount of reading required, the expectations regarding written work, the level of detail and abstraction that students must handle, and the sophistication of classroom discussion.

As the eighth-grade staff makes level recommendations, they will evaluate students' demonstrated abilities in reading and writing. In addition they will consider students' consistency of performance, ability to organize materials and thoughts, and level of enthusiasm for the subject matter.

Leveling decisions in Social Studies are often more flexible than in the other subject areas and may reflect a student's interests and needs in a given year. Students may successfully move from a lower to a higher-level course from one year to the next, so long as they have the reading and writing skills – plus the enthusiasm – to support a more-detailed and abstract approach to the work.

A special option exists for sophomores – American Studies AE. Team-taught by a social studies teacher and an English teacher, the history and English classes are taught during two contiguous periods. Although the curriculum includes the same major units from the two disciplines that students would encounter in “regular” sophomore English and social studies classes, the American Studies faculty are also able to illustrate American history through works of literature. Conversely, English teachers are able to place their literature offerings in a more complete historical context. Class work – including presentations, testing and field trips – can be more flexibly scheduled.

Beginning in the junior year, students may select from a wide variety of elective courses offered by the department. Leveled courses include Psychology (H/AP, AE and CP), European History (H/AP) and International Relations (H and AE for seniors only). Non-leveled courses include the yearlong Economics class and semester classes: You and the Law, Political Science, and Sociology. The former require considerable reading and research and/or integration of concepts. The latter tend to focus more on current events and projects. Consequently, appropriate level decisions reflect a combination of individual skills, available time, and enthusiasm.

**For further information, please contact:**

- Ms. Pamela Lynn, Regional Department Leader for grades 7–12  
(978) 264-4700, x3413; [plynn@mail.ab.mec.edu](mailto:plynn@mail.ab.mec.edu)
- Ms. Lynne Bover, Building Department Leader for grades 7–8  
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**Science**

The science curriculum 7–12 encourages students to utilize the process of scientific inquiry to discover and interpret scientific knowledge. The curriculum is designed to support a variety of teaching strategies, including cooperative, peer and project-based learning; lecture; group discussions; and audio-visual presentations. Throughout all grades and courses we emphasize the laboratory as a focal point for learning.

In the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade, all science classes are heterogeneously grouped. The 7<sup>th</sup>-grade curriculum is based on the texts: SciencePlus, Technology and Society (Level Red) and the Science Explorer Series (Astronomy and Inside Earth texts). The 8<sup>th</sup>-grade curriculum is based on the text: Science Plus, Technology and Society (Level Blue). The SciencePlus series promotes conceptual and skill development, as well as student interaction. A range of topics in

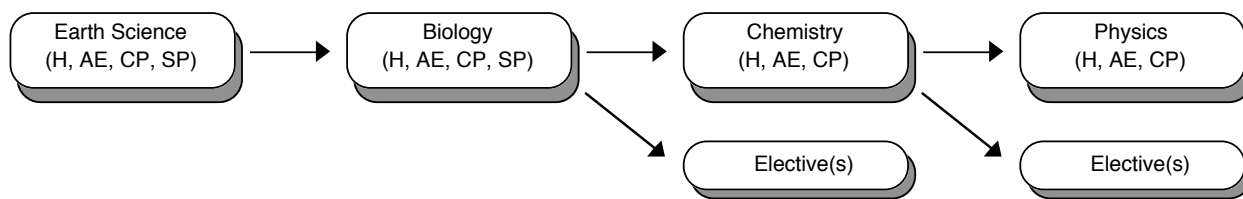
physical, biological, earth/space and environmental science is covered; in addition, the curriculum aims to explore the interrelationships. Our junior high science program introduces the students to myriad scientific themes and topics in preparation for the 8<sup>th</sup>-grade MCAS exam; it also imparts the fundamentals necessary for a successful transition to the 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

Two years of science, including biology, are required to graduate from A.B.R.H.S. Most four-year colleges require at least three years of high school science, including two lab courses, as a prerequisite for admission. In contrast to the generalized nature of the junior high science curriculum, high school course offerings are specialized. The core curriculum in the high school begins with Earth Science in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, followed by Biology in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, Chemistry in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade, and lastly Physics in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade. All of the core curriculum courses are leveled: Honors (H), Accelerated & Enriched (AE), and College Preparatory (CP). In addition, there is a fourth level, Standard Preparatory (SP), offered in Earth Science and Biology. While the higher-level classes cover material in greater depth, with more applications and at a faster pace, the basic curriculum is similar between the levels. All of the core curriculum is aligned with the subject matter Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks.

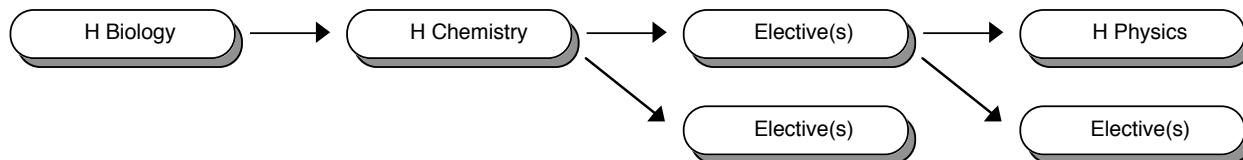
Biology and Earth Science are descriptive in nature and consequently rely more heavily on language skills. Chemistry and Physics, on the other hand, are more quantitative; therefore, mathematics plays a more critical role. Since the high school science courses are not rigidly sequential, students have some choice regarding how to sequence their courses. (See **Potential Sequences of Science Courses, 9-12**, below, for an illustration of some – but by no means all – of the sequencing possibilities.)

### Potential Sequences of Science Courses, 9-12

#### Traditional Sequence



#### Alternate Sequence



In addition to the core curriculum, students in grades 11 and 12 have a number of electives from which to choose. Some are full-year leveled courses, while others are semester courses and unleveled. (See the table below for a complete listing.) Students may take these electives in addition to the Chemistry or Physics that most juniors and seniors take.

### Elective Options for Grades 11 & 12

#### Full Year Courses

Advanced Biology (H/AP)
Advanced Chemistry (H/AP)
Environmental Science (H/AP)
Physical Science (CP)
SciTech (SP) *

#### Semester Courses

Anatomy & Physiology	Forensic Science *
Astronomy *	Human Body (SP) **
BioEthics	Oceanography & Marine Biology **
Engineering Principles **	Science & Environment (SP) **

\* offered even years

\*\* offered odd years

### Leveling and Teacher Recommendations

All science placement recommendations are made in an attempt to ensure that the student will have a positive and successful experience.

In the spring of 8<sup>th</sup> grade, science teachers will recommend all students for a 9<sup>th</sup>-grade science course. Most students will be recommended for Earth Science in H, AE or CP level. A few students will be recommended for the Transition Program's Earth Science course. The most advanced students will be recommended for Honors Biology.

Student placement is recommended based on their performance in both science and mathematics in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Factors that are considered in the placement process are term averages (which are based on tests, quizzes, homework, and various other assignments), class participation, teachers' perceptions of the students' ability to work independently and of their motivation, and teachers' overall assessment of students' critical thinking skills. The 8<sup>th</sup>-grade science teachers will also take into account the recommendations made by the 8<sup>th</sup>-grade mathematics teachers.

In order to be recommended for an Honors Earth Science in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, students must have a minimum of an A- average in 8<sup>th</sup>-grade science. In addition, they should also be recommended for at least AE Algebra I in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. In order to be recommended for Honors Biology in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, students must have a minimum of an A average in 8<sup>th</sup>-grade science and be recommended for Honors Geometry in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. It should be noted that Honors Biology is a mixture of 9<sup>th</sup>- and 10<sup>th</sup>-grade students, because students who successfully complete Honors Earth Science could go on to take Honors Biology in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. (After Honors Biology, students would typically take Honors Chemistry, which is therefore a mixture of 10<sup>th</sup>- and 11<sup>th</sup>-grade students.)

We believe that the study of earth science is an important element of a well-rounded science education. Earth and space sciences are also emphasized in our Massachusetts Curriculum Framework. We **strongly** recommend that parents whose children are recommended for Honors Earth Science rather than Honors Biology do not override the teachers' recommendations. Students in Honors Biology progress to Honors Chemistry in 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Typically, only those students who are capable of excelling in Honors Geometry at the 9<sup>th</sup>-grade level and who

progress to Honors Algebra II in 10<sup>th</sup> grade are ready for the mathematical and abstract reasoning challenges of 10<sup>th</sup>-grade Honors Chemistry. Taking Honors Earth Science in 9<sup>th</sup> grade in no way locks a student out of a rigorous science course sequence. Students placed in 9<sup>th</sup>-grade Honors Earth Science still have the opportunity to remain in honors-level science straight through to senior year. If they choose to double-up in science, they can still take up to two A.P. science courses before they graduate. By starting in Earth Science, they simply allow themselves an additional year to develop the mathematical reasoning skills necessary for success in Chemistry and Physics.

### **Important!**

As in the other subject areas, parents do have the right to override a science teacher's level-placement recommendation. Although science teachers do take your child's math level-placement recommendation into consideration when making a level-placement recommendation for science, **you do not have to override your child's math teacher's placement recommendation in order to override a science teacher's placement recommendation! In fact it would be imprudent to do so.** If overriding the teacher's science placement recommendation will mean that your child is "reaching" to succeed in science, overriding both math and science will mean that your child must "reach" in two settings.

If you *are* considering making an override, please take into consideration all of the factors outlined above, as well as the comfort level of your child. We share your desire to see your student succeed.

### **For further information, please contact:**

- Mr. Christopher Clinton, Regional Department Leader for grades 7–12  
(978) 264-4700, x3442; [cclinton@mail.ab.mec.edu](mailto:cclinton@mail.ab.mec.edu)
- Ms. Mary-Frances Doiron, Building Department Leader for grades 7–8  
(978) 264-4700, x3353; [mdoiron@mail.ab.mec.edu](mailto:mdoiron@mail.ab.mec.edu)

### **World Languages**

Acton and Boxborough students typically begin their formal language studies at Raymond J. Grey Junior High School, where they elect French or Spanish in grade seven. It is a two-year program, equivalent to French I or Spanish I at the high school. The curriculum is designed for the middle school child by allowing more time for practice, hands-on-activities, games, music, and cultural experiences. The students will learn the rudiments of the language that they have selected, while practicing the four communicative skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Seventh and eighth graders study language as a core subject on their junior high team. In grade 8 the students will complete the French I or Spanish I curriculum.

1. By the conclusion of their junior high language studies, successful language students (*those who have earned a final grade of 70 or higher in grade eight*) are ready to continue their study of French II or Spanish II at Acton-Boxborough Regional High School, having earned five high school credits for their junior high language studies. In the spring of grade eight, during the pupil course request process, world language teachers will recommend grade eight students for French II or Spanish II at the appropriate ability level grouping: College Preparatory, Accelerated/Enriched, or Honors (see ***Potential Sequence of World Language***

*Courses, 7–12*, below). This recommendation will be based upon a student’s grade, as well as other factors: motivation, work ethic, writing and reading proficiency, and speaking ability. Grade eight students generally transition well into the recommended course, since the French II and Spanish II programs build upon the R. J. Grey Junior High curriculum. Teachers in both buildings work collaboratively to properly sequence students from grade seven through twelve.

2. At Acton-Boxborough Regional High School, most students will continue their language of choice from the junior high. They also have the option of beginning the study of another or of “doubling up” by starting an additional language, may it be French, Spanish, Latin, Italian or Chinese. (See #4 and *Potential Sequence of World Language Courses, 9-12*, below.) *Grade eight students who would like to elect two languages for their freshman year* should plan their schedule carefully with their grade eight counselor, since carrying six demanding courses in one’s freshman year is not recommended. In order to accommodate two world languages, it may be advisable to postpone a required course.
3. *For students who have not met with success in their junior high language studies (those who have earned a final grade of 69 or lower in grade eight)*, world language teachers will recommend French I, Spanish I AE, or Spanish I CP (either Part I or Part II) at the high school. With added maturity and the further development of study, organizational, and/or language skills, these students may indeed be successful at the high school.
4. *Students who have not begun their language studies in junior high* also have options for beginning their studies at ABRHS (see *Potential Sequence of World Language Courses: 9-12*, below). In an effort to meet the different needs of our beginning language learners, the department offers several options for studying first-year Latin, French, Spanish, Italian or Chinese.

For students who prefer to study a classical language that focuses on reading, grammar, vocabulary and Roman culture, the department offers **Latin**. These courses are recommended for the student with strong language skills – that is, for those with grades of B- or higher in their English language courses.

**Latin I H** and **Latin I AE** are introductory courses, with heavy influence upon grammar, vocabulary, writing and reading comprehension. Units in mythology, history and Roman culture are also integral parts. At the honors level, material is covered at a faster pace.

For students who prefer to study a modern language that focuses on listening and speaking, as well as reading, writing and culture, students may elect French, Spanish, Italian or Chinese.

**French I** is an integrated approach to language learning that includes the study of grammar. This course teaches the equivalent of two years of junior high language instruction in one year. It is recommended for those with strong language skills – that is, for those with grades of B- or higher in their English courses.

**Italian I H** is a fast-paced course that provides a foundation in the basic skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking. There is written and oral practice, as well as vocabulary building. Students are introduced to useful and practical expressions, in addition to grammatical structures. Some time is dedicated to Italian culture, geography, customs and

routines found in Italy. Audiovisual material and ancillary materials are used regularly, and language lab activities are an integral part of the course. It is recommended for students with a grade of B- or better in a previously studied world language, or by permission of the department head.

**Italian I (non-leveled)** has the same goals as the honors level course, but it proceeds at a more moderate pace. It is recommended for students who have some previous experience studying a world language.

Students who want to initiate their study of Spanish at the high school have two options. **Spanish I AE** is an integrated approach to language learning that includes the study of grammar. This course teaches the equivalent of two years of junior high instruction in one year. It is recommended for those with strong language skills – that is, for those with grades of B- or higher in their English courses.

**Spanish I CP, Part I**, which is open to all language learners, is an integrated approach to language learning that includes the study of grammar. This course teaches language learning at a more moderate pace than the Spanish I AE. Students at the CP level finish one half of the textbook during the first year of study and complete the textbook at the end of Spanish I CP, Part II. Slower-paced instruction and repetition help the students to acquire vocabulary and structure. Students begin to speak, read and write Spanish by understanding, retelling, expanding, revising and creating stories, dialogues and visual presentations. Spanish I CP, Part I students will continue at this moderate pace in Spanish I CP, Part II.

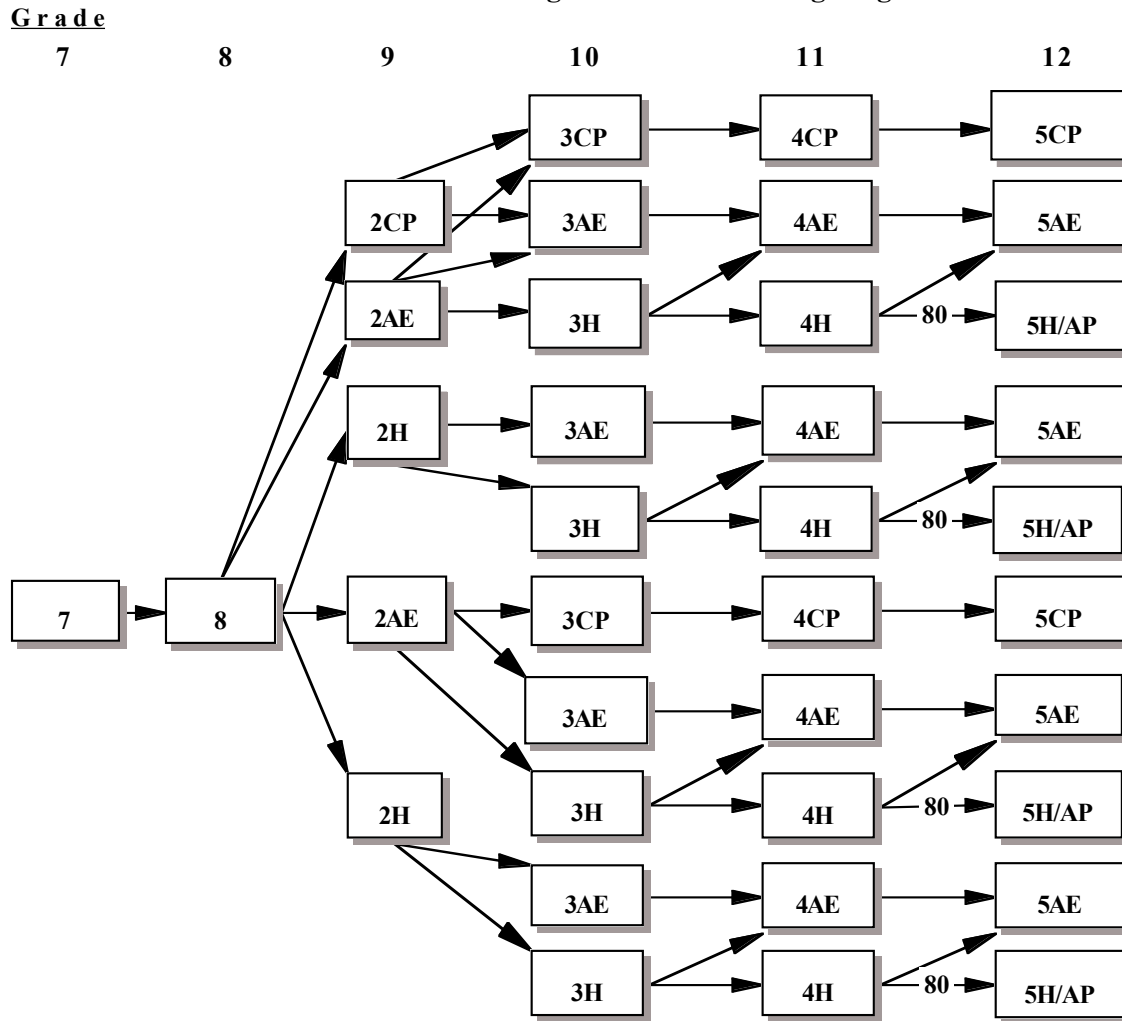
**Chinese I (non-leveled)** is an integrated approach to language learning that includes the study of grammar. It is an introduction to spoken Chinese, using the Pinyin system of Roman letters. Students learn to converse simply and are introduced to the writing of Chinese in traditional characters. Students will begin to develop an appreciation of Chinese culture that will better prepare them to interact in a global society.

To determine which language offering best meets the needs of a student initiating new language study at the high school, a junior high student should meet with the R. J. Grey World Language Building Department Leader in the spring of grade 8 for a course recommendation.

Once at the high school, students will progress through language courses as indicated on the World Language Course Sequence Chart. World language teachers will recommend an appropriate course and level for their students. World language students are not “tracked”; there are many instances of students who move to a higher or lower ability-level grouping throughout their sequence of language studies. However, due to the building-block nature of language learning, it becomes increasingly difficult to move to a higher ability level after year two of language study. In addition, there are some courses that are sequential in curriculum content (Spanish I CP, Part I – I CP, Part II; Spanish II CP – III CP; Spanish IV CP – V CP; French II CP – III CP; Spanish III AE – IV AE; French III AE/IV CP – IV AE/VCP). In these courses, students master one textbook program over the course of two years. Therefore, a teacher would not recommend that a student progress, for example, from II CP to III AE unless the student were prepared to master a year’s coursework over the summer. Even when a teacher recommends that a student move to a higher ability level, a student should prepare himself or herself for the next course with study over the summer in order to avoid any gaps in the understanding of structure or mastery of vocabulary.

*continued on page 21*

**Potential Sequence of World Language Courses, 7-12**  
for students who initiated world language study in the 7th grade  
and who will be continuing their studies through high school.



A grade of 70 or higher is required to continue to next year  
(with the noted exceptions)

The above chart lists the World Language courses Grade 7 through Grade 12. Advancement to the next course is based upon student achievement. Each subsequent course in a level sequence is based upon the curriculum from the previous World Language course in that same level at the High School. To continue in a course sequence, students need a C- or better grade.

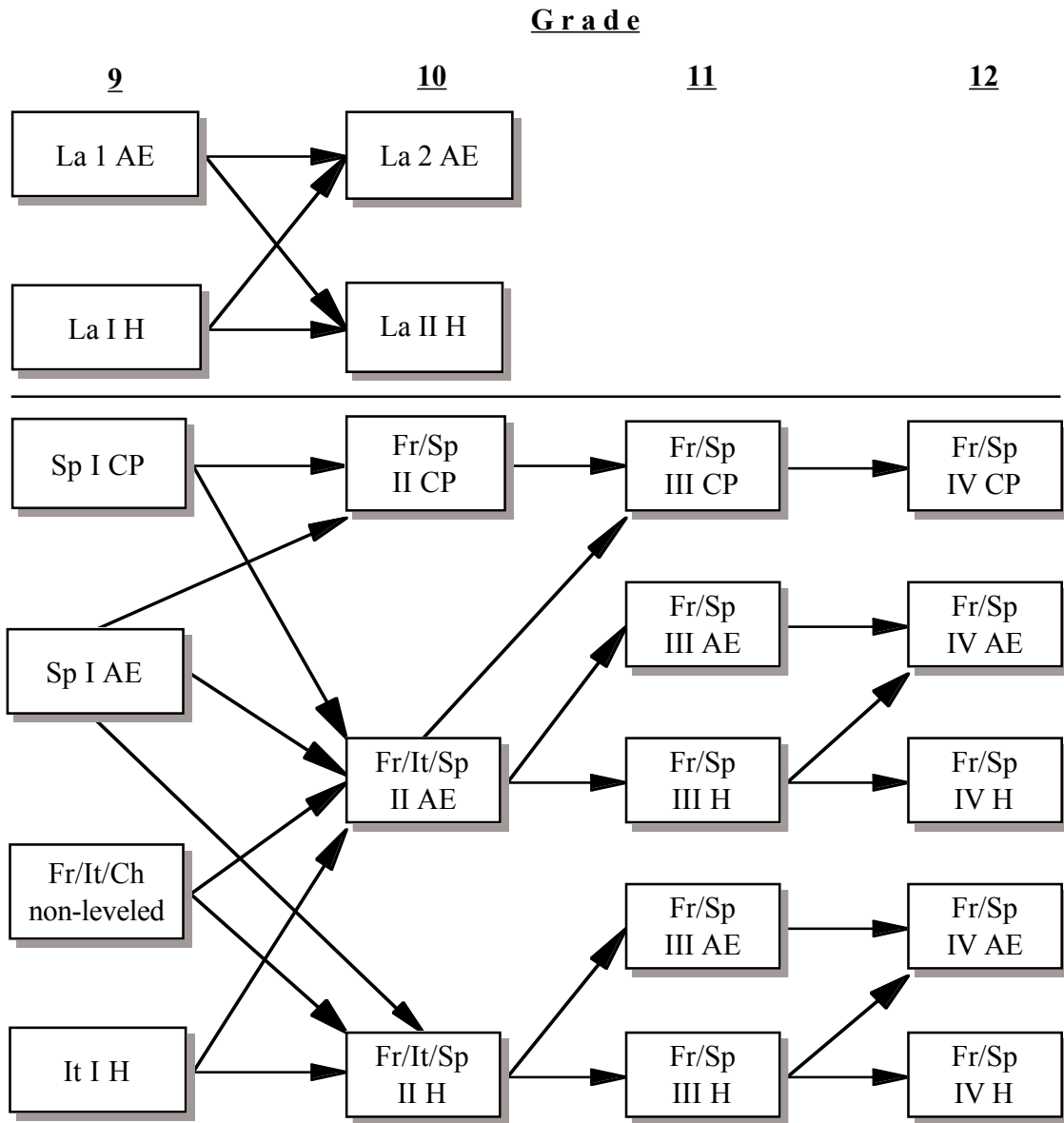
If students wish to advance up a level (e.g., A/E to Honors), they may need to make up material they have missed due to the increased pacing and depth of the higher level courses. To advance a level, students need an A or A+ in their present level and their present teacher's recommendation.

**Key:** H = Honors                      A/E = Accelerated/Enriched                      CP = College Preparatory

**Note:** Parental overrides are accepted so long as the parent(s) meet with the World Language teacher in the Junior High or Mrs. Dix in the High School to discuss the change.

**Potential Sequence of Courses for:**

- A. Students who are initiating the study of a world language for the first time in 9th grade or later.**
- B. Students who are initiating the study of a second language (either because they are adding a second language or because they are changing their language of choice).**
- C. Students who did not successfully complete their world language studies at the Junior High.**



**A grade of 70 or higher is required to continue to the next year  
(with the noted exceptions)**

A frequently asked question is: “How many years of language study are required for graduation from A.B.R.H.S.?” The answer is “none at this time,” although a future language requirement is under consideration. Of course, many colleges have entrance requirements in world languages. For example, the Massachusetts Board of Regents of Higher Education has established a minimum requirement in languages for admission to the four-year state colleges and universities: two years of one foreign language. Very competitive schools look for students who have studied one language in depth – i.e., for four or five years. Students are advised to consult particular colleges of interest for their specific admission and placement requirements in order to keep their options open.

As at R. J. Grey, all A.B.R.H.S. world language students will have opportunities to enroll in national language examinations and participate in National Foreign Language Week or VOICE Day activities. In addition, A.B.R.H.S. offers students some opportunities that they may not have had before. First of all, students will access the Digital multi-media language laboratory, both as part of their language class and outside of class for individual practice.

In recognition of achievement in language studies, the high school supports local chapters of the National French, Latin, and Spanish Honor Societies. Society members are recognized, along with our local winners of national language examinations and recipients of our outstanding course achievement awards, at the end of the school year.

The school district’s program is, of course, only the beginning. The long-term goal of our grade seven through twelve program is that our students use and enjoy their world languages beyond the confines of the Acton-Boxborough School District. Our intent is to offer them an excellent start toward this end.

**For further information, please contact:**

- Ms. Claire Dix, Regional Department Leader for grades 7–12  
(978) 264-4700, x3473; [cdix@mail.ab.mec.edu](mailto:cdix@mail.ab.mec.edu)
- Ms. Robin Crown, Building Department Leader for grades 7–8  
(978) 264-4700, x3378; [rcrown@mail.ab.mec.edu](mailto:rcrown@mail.ab.mec.edu)

**Performing Arts Department**

Within the Performing Arts Department, courses are not leveled. The department offers courses that fall into the “heterogeneous” category in determining class rank. These grades do not contribute to a student’s “Q.P.A.”; however, they do contribute to a student’s “G.P.A.” A wide range of students will be involved in these courses; for example, our band will have a range of musicians from beginner to highly advanced. The band director is able to assign parts that will suit all students’ needs and abilities.

The following junior high school courses are taught pass/fail and have no prerequisites:

- Grade 7 Chorus
- Grade 8 Chorus
- Music 7 – Exploratory

- Grade 7 Band (It is recommended but not required that students have prior experience on a band instrument.)
- Grade 8 Band (It is recommended but not required that students have prior experience on a band instrument.)

The following junior high school programs have some entry requirements.

- ✓ Dramatic productions are offered as an after-school activity. Open auditions are held for all interested students.
- ✓ Jazz Band is offered as an after-school activity. Students must be members of the band program to participate. Some auditioning may be required depending on instrumentation.

The following high school Performing Arts courses have no prerequisites or requirements:

- Band (It is recommended but not required that students have prior experience on a band instrument.)
- Color Guard
- Concert Choir
- Women's Ensemble
- Basic Keyboard Skills
- History of Rock & Roll and Contemporary Music
- Drama One: An Overview of Theater (Fall Semester)
- Drama Two: An Introduction to Acting (Spring Semester – It is recommended but not required that this course follow Drama One.)
- Public Speaking and Debate

The following high school courses have some kind of prerequisite or requirement:

- ✓ Music Theory and Technology (Some basic music theory understanding is needed; see department for approval.)
- ✓ Jazz Band (by audition only)
- ✓ Madrigal Singers (by audition only)

**For further information, please contact:**

- Mr. Mark W. Hickey, Director of Performing Arts, K–12  
(978) 264-4700, x3415; [mhickey@mail.ab.mec.edu](mailto:mhickey@mail.ab.mec.edu)

## **Visual Arts Department**

All grade 7 and grade 8 students are required to take an Art Exploratory each year: Art 1 in grade 7, based on the Art Elements; Art 2 in grade 8, based on the Art Principles. These courses explore units of drawing, painting, clay sculpture, and computer-generated graphic design. While many of the high school art courses require no prerequisites, the R. J. Grey program does provide a broad experience so that students may make informed choices from the high school course offerings.

The Visual Arts program in the high school offers a variety of studio courses in two-dimensional and three-dimensional art forms. Students experiment with a wide range of media while studying the Elements of Art and Art Principles. Learning how to communicate visually is essential, given the importance and significance of visual media in our technological society. Learning to think critically, to generate new ideas, to develop multiple solutions to a problem, to evaluate possibilities and consequences are important thought processes enhanced in the visual arts curriculum. An overview of the high school Visual Arts program is found below.

<b><u>Group A</u></b>	<b><u>Group B</u></b>	<b><u>Group C</u></b>
<p data-bbox="272 890 548 919"><i>Courses Open to Grade 9</i></p> <ul data-bbox="250 936 529 1444" style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ceramics I, II</li><li>• Sculpture</li><li>• Drawing/Painting I</li><li>• Photography I</li><li>• History of Modern Art</li><li>• Web Page Design I</li><li>• Animation</li><li>• Digital Imagery I, II</li><li>• Mixed Media Studio*</li><li>• Advanced Web Page Design* (Prerequisite: WPD I)</li></ul>	<p data-bbox="667 890 1002 919"><i>Courses Open to Grades 10-12</i></p> <ul data-bbox="667 936 1002 1150" style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Any course from Group A</li><li>• Advanced Drawing/Painting (Prerequisite: Drawing/Painting I)</li><li>• Advanced Photography (Prerequisite: Photography I)</li></ul>	<p data-bbox="1096 890 1432 919"><i>Courses Open to Grades 11-12</i></p> <ul data-bbox="1096 936 1406 1161" style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Any course from Group A and B</li><li>• Junior–Senior Portfolio (Prerequisite: 10 or more credits in art; 5 credits in Drawing/Painting strongly recommended)</li></ul> <p data-bbox="1138 1188 1390 1218"><i>Open to Grade 12 only</i></p> <ul data-bbox="1096 1234 1390 1291" style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Studio Assistant (Faculty Recommendation)</li></ul>

**\* Courses not offered for the 2008-2009 school year.**

For further information, please contact:

- Ms. Diana Woodruff, Director of Visual Arts, K–12  
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**ACTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOLS**

**Notice of Nondiscrimination**

The Acton Public and Acton-Boxborough Regional School Districts do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, veteran status, handicap or homeless in admission or access to, or treatment or employment in, its programs, and activities.

Any person having inquiries or complaints concerning the Acton Public and Acton-Boxborough Regional School Districts' compliance with Title VI, Title IX, Section 504, ADA or Chapter 622 is directed to contact the Director of Pupil Services, Administration Building, 15 Charter Road, Acton, MA, telephone number 978-264-4700, x3265, who has been designated by the Acton Public and Acton-Boxborough Regional School Districts to coordinate the Districts' efforts to comply with these laws, or write to:

Office for Civil Rights  
33 Arch Street, Suite 900  
Boston, MA 02110

or

Massachusetts Department of Education  
Office of Program Quality Assurance  
350 Main Street  
Malden, MA 02148