

My name is Laura Farrelly and I am an English Language Arts teacher at Springfield High School where I teach English 9, English 9 Honors, and Heroes, a senior selective ELA course. Over the past six years at SHS, I have also co-taught English 9 with an instructional specialist where 40% of our students received special services. I am well-versed in differentiating instruction for students who are performing near college-level as well as students who are not performing at grade level. I am proud of the services that my department provides for all of our students. We strongly believe and our actions illustrate our devotion to our district's mission of "delivering an experience that serves every student, every day." This is why I feel compelled to voice my strenuous objection to embedding honors into our English 9 and English 10 classes rather than maintaining and strengthening our successful English 9 Honors and English 10 Honors as separate courses.

Equity and inclusion should be at the heart of every decision our district makes which is why the structure of SHS's English courses should be emulated by other departments and schools in our district. The King Center which was established in 1968 by Coretta Scott King recently shared a chart which explains the main differences between equality and equity. Equality is defined as "everyone *gets the same*-regardless if it's needed or right for them" while equity means that "everyone *gets what they need*-understanding the barriers, circumstances, and conditions." One could argue that embedding honors gives all students the opportunity to have a voice and choice in their education. For example at THS, students in English 9 and 10 could choose to answer a few extra questions or complete an essay that involves deeper analysis and that would be considered "honors" and is shown as such on their transcripts. However, this is not the honors experience at SHS where students in our honors classes move at a much faster pace than our other English classes which affords more time to delve deeply as a whole class into discussions, skill-building, and more enrichment opportunities. In addition, students partake in more independent reading at a higher Lexile level than our other English classes and complete more challenging writing tasks. While we work to expose these learning experiences to all of our students, we ensure that students *opting* for these experiences in an honors class get them.

It is important to note that instruction in our honors courses is differentiated based on enrichment needs and instruction in our general education classes is differentiated on intervention needs. Obviously, we strive to give all of our students what they need, whether that is an intervention or enrichment, but the beginning of our planning is focused on these two separate directions. The English department at SHS strongly adheres to the true meaning of equity where every student "gets what they need."

Currently, our department has six co-taught inclusion classes from 9th-11th grades along with two English 9 Honors and three English 10 Honors classes. This is a vast improvement from 2013 when our department only had 30 honors students and no co-taught inclusion classes. In the past, students had to be recommended by a teacher to take honors courses. Since then, our school

has actively broken down barriers for our students—SHS no longer requires students to have this prior approval. Rather, students get to choose if they want the extra challenge of taking an honors course. Our students know that if they choose to take an honors class that they will be challenged and supported. They are also aware that if honors is not a good fit for them that they can move into a course that they feel supports their needs better. Today, we have 160 students enrolled in our English 9 and 10 honors classes. This is more than a 500% increase from a decade ago. This is cause for celebration, not for a restructuring into an “honors lite” program that does not adequately prepare students for their AP and College Now classes.

Our English department holds high expectations for all of our students regardless of whether they are in co-taught, general education, or honors classes. We believe in the power of student voice and encourage our district to seek out how our students feel about the structure of our honors program before they make any changes.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Laura Farrelly

My name is Kyle Johnson, and I have been an English Language Arts teacher at Springfield High School since the 2016-17 school year. I have been the English 10 Honors teacher since the 2019-20 school year, and the ELA department lead since 2022-23. In light of other departments restructuring their honors programs, I am writing to advocate for keeping English 9 Honors and English 10 Honors as separate courses at our school, and to oppose any proposal to embed the honors option into standard English 9 and English 10 classes.

For context, I would like to tell you a little bit about my teaching assignment, as I feel it provides me with a unique perspective. I teach three sections of grade level English 10 classes, two of which are co-taught inclusion classes, and three sections of English 10 Honors. I am grateful for this teaching assignment, because I get to work with an extremely wide diversity of students with different abilities, skills, and goals. I get to support students who are achieving below grade level all the way up to those who are ready for college-level coursework. Since many of my English 10 Honors students go on to AP Literature and Writing 121 their junior and senior years, I feel that it is my responsibility to prepare those students as well as I can for the next level.

Our English 9H and 10H courses are not just grade level classes with a couple of extra assignments. These are inherently different courses that build skills students will need for college-level coursework. While some curriculum occasionally overlaps with the grade level classes, the honors courses move at a much quicker pace, which allows time for extra units, discussion, and skill-building. This is all work that better prepares students who choose to take college-level work their 11th or 12th grade year. Even with the most skilled teachers and the best of intentions, students would not get this same experience should honors classes be done away with, or if they are embedded into standard English courses. It is not uncommon for approximately 100 SHS students to earn Writing 121 credit each year. Embedding honors into other classes means students will not be as well prepared to earn college credit.

In our department, we are proud of the work we have done around inclusivity, differentiation, and meeting our students' needs. In our English 9H and 10H courses, we are not gatekeepers, students are not tracked, and we are welcoming to all. There is no prerequisite or teacher approval at all to take our honors courses. This isn't an accident, but a core principle for us. We want all students to feel like they can try taking honors, and then feel supported once they do. This equitable approach has created outcomes we are proud of. The demographics of honors classes typically resemble the demographics of our whole student population. When there are areas for improvement, our department analyzes the data and is fully committed to doing the work of inclusion.

This approach to inclusivity and differentiation is not just a principle in our honors classes, but for our whole department. Our department was one of the first in the district to fully embrace collaborating with our special education department in offering co-taught inclusion classes, and we have successful co-taught instruction for grades 9-11. This is work I can attest to myself, as I have also personally co-taught grade level English 10 courses at SHS for six years. I am proud of the differentiation our department is able to provide for our students, some who are on grade level with their reading and writing skills, and some at an elementary school level. Our special

education inclusion classes are already beyond capacity, as are classes with other needed supports. Embedding the honors option in standard English 10 would add another level of needed support for *all* of our English classes. This is not merely an added stressor for teachers. It would greatly impact all students and make it even more challenging for students at *any* level to receive the differentiation they need. Making sudden changes to how we provide services to students, especially if done without necessary training and staffing, does not seem like a decision that benefits students.

Those who may support embedding honors in grade level classes may point to the fact that this is the model that Thurston High School uses. While this is true, the number of students who select the honors option at Thurston is significantly below Springfield's. This year at Springfield High, we have 73 students enrolled in English 9 Honors and 84 students in English 10 Honors. Because Springfield High's honors numbers have remained steady, it seems imprudent to ask our department to simply model ourselves after Thurston. Even through distance learning and the return to in-person learning, our honors program enrollment has remained durable. Over the past decade, our honors level classes have grown from needing a single section in each grade to often needing three sections to accommodate the number of interested students. This growth has happened using our *current* model. Given these facts, it is difficult to understand why we would throw our current model away. If the goal is to increase our honors numbers and promote access to rigorous coursework, it is difficult to understand why Springfield High would have drastic changes imposed upon our students.

Lastly, I would hope all district decision makers would talk to students who have taken honors English courses at Springfield High School, as they are the very ones who would be affected by a potential change. The fact that our honors numbers remained strong and consistent during – and recovering from – the most challenging time in education speaks to the work the English department at Springfield High School has done. I encourage all district decision makers to speak to our students about their experiences before making a decision that would fundamentally change their educational reality.

I appreciate your time and willingness to read my concerns.

Kyle Johnson