

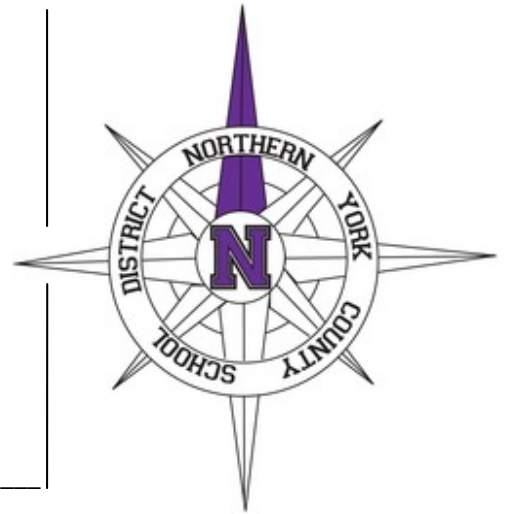
Northern High School Memorandum

To: NHS 9th grade teachers and Department Leaders (Eng, SS, and Science)

From: NHS Administration Team

Date: 1/2/17

Subject: 2017-2018 9th Grade Course Consolidation



1. Plan: Combine Academic Level and Level formally known as “Standard” for 2017-2018 NHS Freshman (only) in English, Western Heritage, and Earth and Space.

1. Keep Academic Weighting
2. Seek support/coaching (from PLN coaches) for teachers in regards to how they can differentiate instruction. The people from PLN have said that they are willing to help.
3. Evaluate change along the way with monthly reflection
4. When going through course selection during the winter of their freshman year, Northern High School teachers and students (and their families) get to make decisions on whether they want to continue in an academic level setting or drop a level.

2. Why: Each year that I’ve been at NHS, I’ve had the same concern...our traditional “standard level” students. (In no particular order)

1. Low expectations- self-fulfilled prophecy (for four years)
2. Behavior issues: A group of unmotivated students are grouped together and follow each other around for the better part of the day.
 1. Struggling students who are part of heterogeneous groups and classrooms observe and learn the techniques of less-inhibited learners.
 2. Students in low-track classes are cut off from exposure to the habits of successful learners.
3. Not comfortable having a clearly defined problem and doing little to nothing to correct it...knowing all along that the problems will continue to surface.
4. No longer want Middle School teachers (nothing against them) charting the course for our high school students for the next four years. I want students to make their own choices after experiencing academic/college preparatory work. I imagine some will drop a level for their sophomore year, but I also imagine some will remain in an academic track.

3. Measuring Outcomes:

1. Compare failure rates from 2016/2017 to 2017/2018 in English, Western Heritage, and Earth and Space Science
2. Compare the amount of disciplinary write ups from 2016/2017 to 2017/2018
3. Teacher survey
4. Student survey

4. What is needed:

1. Remembering that EVERY child can learn
2. Provide real challenges for students
 1. Authentic/meaningful learning opportunities
3. Do not water down academic work, but do differentiated instruction and assessments (as needed)
 1. Teaching to the middle will hurt everyone
4. Don't depend on textbooks as the central focus for student learning
5. Give students many opportunities to make decisions (voice and choice)
6. Essay options
 1. Allow students to submit more than one draft before a final product is due so you can provide feedback
7. Projects as a way to show/reinforcing learning
 1. Use rubrics and exemplars as road maps to help with student success
8. Professional Development to support teachers (from PLN staff)

5. Closing Statements:

Knowing that some support this and some do not, we are planning to strip away the third level of course options for incoming 9th graders in Earth and Space Science, English, and Western Heritage for the 2017-2018 school year. By doing so, all incoming freshman will be taking either an Honors level course or a college preparatory "Academic" level course.

This plan allows our students to take ownership of their education. Their "place" at Northern High School will no longer be dictated by people who do not even work at our school. They will have a voice and a choice in the academic pathway beginning with their sophomore year after experiencing college preparatory type classes during their freshman year.

The original plan was to potentially move this up to 10th grade the following year, 11th grade in two years and eventually to 12th grade. After meeting with a group of 9th grade teachers and department leaders, there was an overwhelming lack of support for this. It seemed that this was a road block for moving forward with the plan to move forward with the incoming freshman. Some key points that were shared included the fact that the coursework becomes increasingly more academically concentrated as you move to higher grades (biology, chemistry, research projects, etc...). It was also shared that it is the freshman (mostly boys) who are the most immature and it is with the freshman where most of the problems exist. In talking to upper grade teachers who teach our lower track, we are not seeing the same consistent level of disengagement and behavioral issues that we see with our freshman. Thus, the new proposal is for incoming freshman only and whether successful or not, there is no intention of taking away a third track at the upper grades (10-12). We will use the 2017-2018 school year as a pilot to see how this goes before making a final decision on what this looks like moving forward in the future (beyond 2017-2018).