

Honors Courses in Middle School

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Middle School Principal

Our students are now four weeks into the 2nd semester, and I hope the second part of the school year has gotten off to a great start for our middle school students. We have hit the ground running in the middle school since we have returned from break. Our basketball and swimming teams are competing at a high level, trying to finish their seasons strong. Baseball, soccer and track are all gearing up to get started. We have a number of students preparing for the spring production of *The Lion King* in late February. We are sending a group of students to the Academic Team finals very shortly, and we have students preparing for Math Olympics, ACSI Spelling Bee and ACSI Geography Bee. These are exciting times for the Prince Avenue Middle School.

Possibly getting lost in all the excitement is that in the coming weeks your middle school student will start choosing classes for next year. Can you believe we are rapidly approaching that time of year again? Even though picking new classes can be an exciting time for students, I know that it can also be a stressful time for parents when trying to decide if their student needs to be in Honor's classes. At PACS middle school, we offer accelerated math courses for the 6th and 7th grades, and we offer Honors classes in Math, English, Science and History for 8th graders.

Prince is a college prep school, meaning our goal is to prepare students for success in college. To be able to best meet that goal, we feel offering higher-level classes in the middle school and high school is essential; however, this does not mean that each student in our school will qualify for the Honors courses. In our school, we have students with all different strengths, gifts and talents. We have one of the strongest Fine Arts and Athletic programs in the area because of the gifting and talents of our students as well as the instruction of great teachers and coaches. We have students who are proficient at band and are earning awards for their talents. As the middle school principal, I want to make sure each student is appropriately challenged in the classroom. A student gifted in math and science who takes honors classes in those two subjects might not be as gifted in English and history and, thus, should not take those classes. Additionally, there are students who are appropriately challenged in our regular track courses.

One of the main concerns I hear from parents is that their child will be left behind if not placed in Honors classes. In my 10 years in high school and middle school education, I have not seen this to be the case. A student who is placed in classes properly and performs well in those classes, and then supplements their time with athletics, fine arts, student leadership, volunteer hours or club participation, is equally ready and qualified for college. A student who is misplaced in Honors classes tends to cut back on co-curricular activities in order to stay on top of his/her course work. This leaves those students with a transcript of Honors classes, but little else to show potential colleges.

If you are contemplating whether taking Honors courses for your student is the right decision, I suggest that you start by talking with your student's teacher(s). They have been teaching your child almost every day for the last five months and will have valuable insight into his/her ability to take Honors classes.

I look forward to working with you and your student on finding just the right track for his/her gifts and talents.