

# Freshman Curriculum Restructuring

## Equity & Excellence Through Access for All

**Beginning with the 2022/23 school year**, freshmen at Oak Park and River Forest High School (OPRFHS) will no longer be separated into class levels of honors or college preparatory. Instead, these two levels will be combined to provide our students with equitable access to a newly designed and rigorous curriculum at the honors level.

### What exactly will the freshman curriculum restructuring look like?

In science, history, English, and world languages, students will receive instruction at the rigorous honors level and will be provided academic and social-emotional support, both inside and outside the classroom.

Revised science course sequences will begin in the 2022/23 school year. English, history, and world language sequences will remain the same.

### How will students and the community benefit?



**Detracking helps students with lower academic scores without negatively affecting students with higher academic scores.**

A systemic review of 15 detracking studies found that students with historically lower academic scores performed better in detracked classes and detracking did not affect the achievement of students with historically higher academic scores.<sup>i</sup> Teachers will receive professional development on effective differentiation of instruction to ensure students are challenged and enriched in their learning.



**A diverse classroom will lead to thoughtful discussions in which students will learn from their peers.**

Research has shown that racial diversity leads to a deeper understanding of race and allows for an environment in which students, particularly students of color, feel more comfortable expressing their opinions. The ability to empathize with others is an important quality that will be valuable in all stages of life.<sup>ii</sup>



**Students will have access to honors curriculum throughout their high school career.**

Research has shown that enrollment of Hispanic and Black students in Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate courses increased once equitable access was provided.<sup>iii</sup>



**Rigorous high school courses will better prepare students to pursue further studies in STEM fields.**

Opening up rigorous courses to our students, particularly Black students, means that more students will be better situated to take STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) courses in college, have an increased interest in majoring in a STEM-related field, and be better positioned to pursue jobs in STEM fields.<sup>iv</sup>

## Why are you making this change?

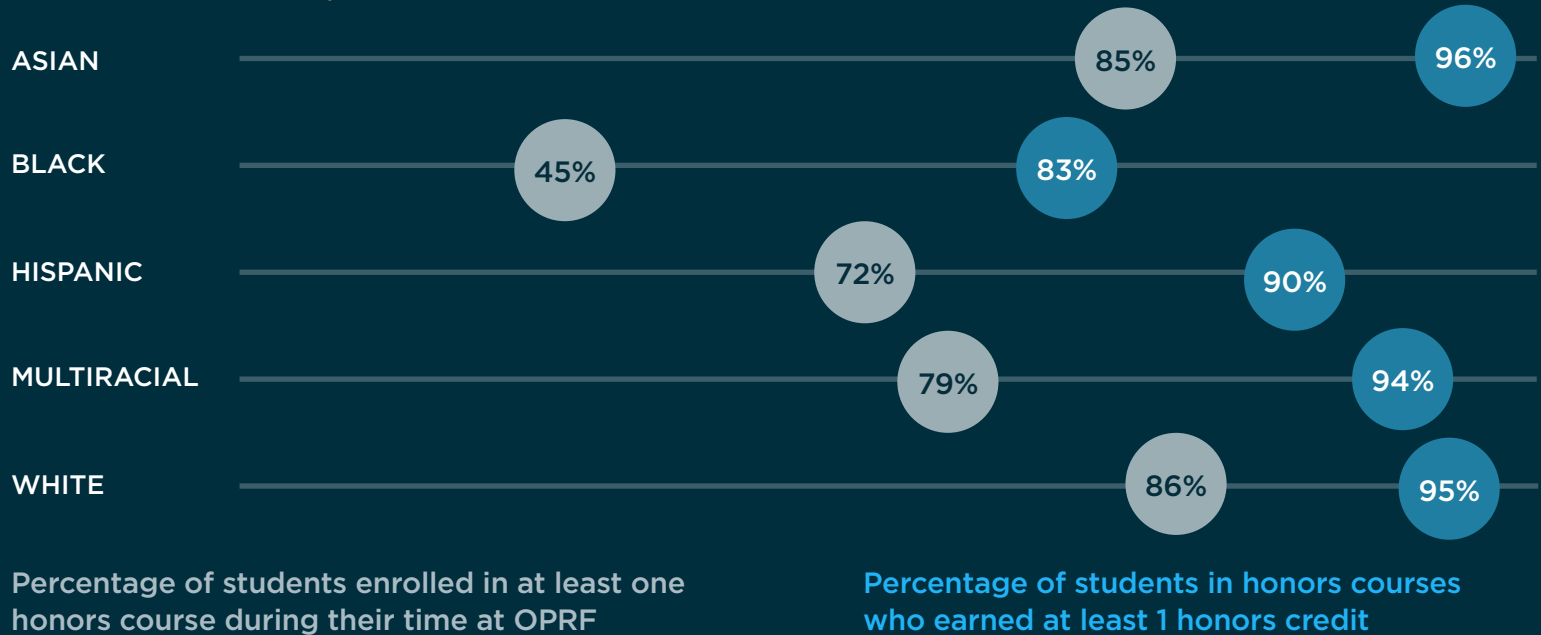
The mission of OPRFHS is to provide a dynamic, supportive learning environment that cultivates knowledge, skills, and character and strives for equity and excellence for all students. In the current tracking system, there is a significant opportunity gap between White students and Black and Hispanic students. In order to ensure our students have fair access to a curriculum that appropriately challenges them, the system of sorting students needed to be redesigned for equitable access.

### OPRFHS Definition of Opportunity Gap

The fact that the circumstances in which we are born (such as race, ethnicity, ZIP code, and socioeconomic status) too often define the different opportunities available to people throughout their lifetimes.

**Black and Hispanic students are less likely to enroll in honors courses, but most students in honors earn credit.**

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Even in schools with a diverse study body, students of color are underrepresented in AP classes and less likely to take AP exams than their White and Asian classmates.<sup>v</sup>

Consistent with the literature, tracking students has created classrooms that are not racially diverse but segregated,<sup>vi</sup> essentially creating “schools within schools.”<sup>vii</sup> Therefore, we need to work toward a system in which race and ethnicity cease being predictors of enrollment in high-level coursework, so that students earning honors and AP credits will mirror the demographics of our overall student population.

## What's next?

The OPRFHS team will continue developing the new curriculum, identifying professional development needs, establishing the timeline of divisions for upcoming presentations, and creating support structures so implementation will occur as planned in fall 2022.

**Fall 2021:** Continued design and professional development, unit-specific action research.

**Fall 2021–Spring 2022:** Final design, continued professional development, action research.

**Fall 2022:** Full implementation; plan for a rigorous evaluation of our work, done both internally and with external research assistance.

## References

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- <sup>vi</sup> Carter, P. L. (2012). *Stubborn roots: Race, culture, and inequality in U.S. and South African schools.* Oxford University Press; Modica, M. (2015). “My skin color stops me from leading”: Tracking, identity, and student dynamics in a racially mixed school. *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, 17(3), 76–90. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1104981>; Oakes, J. (1995). Two cities’ tracking and within-school segregation. *Teachers College Record* 96(4), 681–690; Tyson, K. (2011). *Integration interrupted: Tracking, Black students, and acting White after Brown.* Oxford University Press; Welton, A. D. (2013). Even more racially isolated than before: Problematizing the vision for “diversity” in a racially mixed high school. *Teachers College Record*, 115(11), 1–42.
- <sup>vii</sup> Solorzano & Ornelas, 2002.