Restructured Freshman Year Initiative
Evaluation Report #2

Research, Evaluation & Assessment
Evanston Township High School
May, 2015
ETHS restructured its 1 humanities and biology courses and implemented a system that provides students with access to a challenging, guaranteed curriculum that focuses on skill development and is aligned with national standards. This includes students who, in the past, would have been placed in a regular or mixed-level regular course.

Prior to revisions to the courses, there was great variability in the curriculum experienced by students. This variability was independent of course level. In the new courses, the curriculum is aligned with Advanced Placement, Common Core and ACT College Reading standards, high-level skills are taught by all teachers and common assessments are administered to students. Through revising these courses, ETHS is able to increase expectations and guarantee a curriculum.

A multi-year evaluation is underway and this is the second evaluation report. Like the first report, this is not a final, summative report. This report is formative and its purpose is to help adapt and improve the initiative. This report presents findings for three courses taken in the freshman year: English, history, and biology.

A majority of grade 9 students put forth effort in their English, history, and biology courses. Locus of control is the extent to which individuals believe they can control events that affect them. Students with a high locus of control believe they have command over their learning. White students are more likely than African American/Black or Hispanic/Latino students to put forth effort and to have a high locus of control in their English, history, and biology class. It is too early in the evaluation to make any generalizations about what these findings mean. Future evaluation reports will include grade 11 locus of control results. At that time a more complete analysis and interpretation will be possible.

A primary goal of the initiative is for more students to have access to and be successful in honors and AP courses as they progress through grades 11 and 12. Across all of the historical placement groups there was an increase in the percent of students enrolling in at least one honors or AP course. There was also an increase in students enrolling in at least one AP course in grade 11.

Evaluation Reports #3 and #4 will provide an analysis of two cohorts that have gone through the full restructured freshman year experience. These reports will provide more evidence of long-term outcomes and success of the restructured freshman year initiative.
Evanston Township High School’s (ETHS) goal is to ensure the greatest number of students take challenging classes and develop the academic skills and capital required to succeed in the competitive and rapidly changing 21st century. Before this initiative, students in 1 humanities-English, 1 humanities-history and biology course were not guaranteed access to a curriculum that was rigorous and challenging, and that prepared them for success in future honors and AP-level courses.

To address this, ETHS restructured its 1 humanities and biology courses. In the new courses, the curriculum is aligned with Advanced Placement, Common Core and ACT College Reading standards, high-level skills are taught by all teachers and common assessments are administered to students. In addition, new course placement criteria were established.

The District 202 Board of Education directed the school’s administrators to evaluate the initiative beginning with the 2012-13 cohort of students. A multi-year evaluation is underway and this is the second evaluation report. Like the first report, this is not a final, summative report. This report is formative and its purpose is to help adapt and improve the initiative.

A Problem Solving Approach to Designing and Implementing a Strategy to Improve Performance

School administrators are using the model developed by the Harvard Business School and the Harvard Graduate School of Education to help with the implementation of the Restructured Freshman Year Initiative. The model is outlined in “A Problem Solving Approach to Designing and Implementing a Strategy to Improve Performance” (Childress & Marietta, 2010) and illustrated in Figure 1. Childress and Marietta recommend using the eight-step approach illustrated below. This is a widely accepted problem solving model that has been used successfully in other school districts, including Montgomery County Public Schools (Childress, 2009).

Figure 1: Problem Solving Approach
Theory of Action

As Figure 1 illustrates, the problem solving model required administrators to develop a Theory of Action. When recommending the Restructured Freshman Year Initiative to the D202 Board of Education, Dr. Witherspoon’s summarized its Theory of Action as follows:

This recommendation to restructure the freshman experience is designed to benefit all students by creating a stronger learning environment—to assure that high achievers are challenged at the highest level and held to the highest standards; to assure that far more 9th graders are taking challenging classes; to create pathways for many more students to take honors and advanced classes at ETHS; and to raise expectations for all students. Those achieving at the top will benefit from increased academic standards and skills, and those capable of greatly improved achievement will be supported in meeting much higher expectations.

The Theory of Action is the foundation of the evaluation and its reports. Figure 2 illustrates each of the Theory of Action’s five major components which are described below.

**Investment** is the time, money, and personnel needed to develop the foundation of the initiative; it is required to plan, promote, and implement it. A lack of adequate investment is an obstacle to an effective program implementation. Investment includes revised curricula; earned honors credit models; placement criteria for incoming ninth grade students; and professional development for teachers.

**Implementation** describes how the initiative is enacted and the stakeholders it reaches. Implementation includes all students having a rigorous educational experience; all students having the opportunity to demonstrate the depth and breadth of their knowledge and earn honors credit; all teachers meeting the range of student needs; and students achieving academically. Implementation includes grade 9 students expending effort and being motivated to succeed in the courses and students feeling that academic success is within their reach.

**Outcomes** are the initiative’s goals and include student enrollment in honors and AP courses, academic achievement, ACT scores, AP exam scores, graduation rates, and college acceptance rates.
Figure 2: Restructured Freshman Year Initiative – THEORY OF ACTION

**Background**

- Lower than desired number of 10th-12th grade students are successful in Honors and AP-level courses
- Not all students have access to the best curriculum
- Not all students have the opportunity to earn honors credit
- Honors designation based on placement criteria that do not account for students’ performance in course

**Investment**

1 Humanities:
- Curriculum
- Earned Honors Credit Model
- Placement criteria for incoming 9th graders
- Professional development of teachers

1 Biology:
- Curriculum
- Earned Honors Credit Model
- Placement criteria for incoming 9th graders
- Professional development of teachers

**Implementation**

All 1 Humanities students receive instruction that:
- Aligns with AP, ACT College Readiness and Common Core Standards
- Includes reasoning, analysis, collaboration, writing, synthesizing and creating
- Includes significant amounts of reading and writing

All Biology students receive instruction that:
- Aligns with the AP Biology Curriculum Framework

1 Humanities and Biology:
- All teachers use strategies to differentiate instruction based on student need
- Students achieve academically as measured by course grades in 1 Humanities and/or Biology
- All students have the opportunity to demonstrate the depth and breadth of their skills and earn honors credit

**Outcomes**

Grades 11 and 12

- Increase in enrollment in honors and AP courses.
- Increase in academic achievement as measured by course grades (EN, HS, SC) and GPA.
- Increase in ACT scores.
- Increase in AP Exam scores.
- Increase in graduation rates.
- Increase in college acceptance rates.
Definitions and Evaluation

Report #2 - Contents and Structure
This report includes information about the initiative’s implementation, and preliminary information about its outcomes.

The 1 humanities sections and biology sections summarize findings by student cohort.

1 Humanities. Cohorts include the grade 9 students who completed both semesters of the 1 humanities English and history course in a given school year. Analyses include the comparison of the two full implementation cohorts (2012-13 and 2013-14) to the mean of the three comparison group cohorts (2008-09, 2009-10, 2010-11). This mean is called the Comparison cohort or group.

Biology. Cohorts include the grade 9 students who completed both semesters of the biology course in a given school year. Analysis includes comparing the one full implementation cohort (2013-14) to the mean of the three comparison group cohorts (2009-10, 2010-11 and 2011-12). This mean is called the Comparison cohort or group.

The cohorts by school year are summarized in Table 1. The numbers of students in cohorts and groups are summarized in the Appendix.

Some analyses report on the race/ethnicity of students. To save space they may be abbreviated as follows:
- African American/Black
- Hispanic/Latino
- White

African American/Black AA/B
Hispanic/Latino H/L
White W

Research Methods
This report’s findings are based on data collected through surveys of grade 9 students, and analysis of students’ courses and grades.

All grade 9 students enrolled in 1 humanities were surveyed each spring from 2008-09 through 2013-14. The constructs explored in the grade 9 survey included locus of control and effort.

Student survey data is analyzed using Pearson’s chi-square test. Differences reported are statistically significant and have a p value of less than .05.

Student outcomes are analyzed using a cohort comparison design that explores the relationship between students’ participation in the initiative and outcomes.

Student Cohorts
1 Humanities. In 2008-09 through 2010-11, grade 9 students were sorted into academically leveled tracks. These are the Comparison cohorts. 2011-12 was the first year grade 9 students participated in the restructured 1 humanities course. This cohort is the start-up cohort because it was the first year of the initiative and the courses were being developed and adjusted during this time. This cohort is excluded from the evaluation results. In 2012-13 and 2013-14, grade 9 students participated in the restructured 1 humanities course. These are the Full Implementation cohorts.

Biology. In 2009-10 through 2011-12, grade 9 students were sorted into academically leveled tracks. These are the Comparison cohorts. 2012-13 was the first year grade 9 students participated in the restructured biology course. This cohort is the start-up cohort because it was the first year of the initiative and the new course was being developed and adjusted. This cohort is excluded from the evaluation results. In 2013-14, grade 9 students participated in the restructured biology course. This is the Full Implementation cohort.
Beginning in 2012-13, grade 9 students earning an EXPLORE score of 50 or greater were placed in the same biology course.

**Common Grading Scale**

Prior to the initiative, there were two grading scales used in the 1 humanities and biology courses. Students assigned the course for regular credit were on the A(90) scale, and students assigned the course for honors credit were on the A(93) scale. As part of the initiative, all students are evaluated on the A(93) grading scale.

**Earning Honors Credit**

Earned honors credit models were implemented in 1 humanities and biology. To earn honors credit in a semester, a student must demonstrate the depth and breadth of their skills by successfully completing a series of assessments and by earning a course grade of C or better. A student who has earned honors credit has a command of the skills taught in the course.

**Effort**

The student survey includes items that assess students’ effort in 1 humanities and biology classes. A chi-square test of independence was performed on these items and statistically significant findings are reported.

**Locus of Control**

Locus of control is the extent to which individuals believe they can control events that affect them.

The student survey includes items designed to measure students’ locus of control in 1 humanities and biology classes. The items come from the national Educational Longitudinal Survey of 2002. Examples of items:

- I’m certain I can understand the most difficult material presented in my textbooks.
I’m confident I can do an excellent job on my assignments

Measures of locus of control were calculated for each student for 1 humanities-English, 1 humanities-history and biology. Students who score high on a measure exhibit an internal locus of control where they believe they have command over their learning. Students who score low exhibit an external locus of control and believe that external factors have command over their learning.

Students were sorted into three groups based on their score on each measure. A student was assigned to a group based upon their measure relative to the other respondents. Students in the Low group have measures from 1.00 through 2.40; those in the Medium group have measures from 2.50 through 3.40; and those in the High group have measures ranging from 3.40 through 4.00.
How is the new course different? How does this course compare to the previous courses?

Prior to revisions to the 1 humanities and biology courses, there was great variability in the curriculum experienced by students. This variability was independent of course level. Inconsistency of expectations, assessments, and semester exams resulted in a student experience that was teacher dependent.

The revised 1 humanities and Biology courses are designed to increase the depth in which students reason, analyze, collaborate, write, and synthesize. The courses emphasize deep understanding of content and ensure that both teachers and students recognize what is essential for students to know, understand and do. They focus on the process of moving students to deeper levels of understanding while focusing on their work. This is not about doing the 11th grade curriculum in the 9th grade.

Through revising these courses, ETHS is able to increase expectations and guarantee a curriculum. Common assessments support a guaranteed curriculum since they provide a set of expectations for students in a course. Common assessments include earned honors assessments, Advanced Placement aligned rubrics, and semester exams which are all both valid and reliable. Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate use similar mechanisms to guarantee the curriculum.

Table 4 displays the difference in curriculum, instruction, assessment and grading between the current restructured 1 humanities and biology courses and the course before the restructured initiative. Unlike the previous courses, the current restructured courses are now aligned to Common Core and ACT College Readiness standards, Advanced Placement Framework, and Next Generation Science Standards. The courses included more writing, literature analysis, research, and skills. There are common exams, earned honors assessments, and a common grading scale.
### Table 4: Rigor of Courses – Pre- and Post-Initiative Comparison of Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, and Grading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-Initiative</th>
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<td>Mixed Honors and Honors</td>
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<td>-Common Core (EN, HS)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ACT College Readiness (EN, HS)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Advanced Placement Framework (EN, HS, BIO)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Next Generation Science Standards (BIO)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Illinois Learning Standards (EN, HS, BIO)</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction: Guaranteed...</td>
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<tr>
<td>-Writing (EN, HS)</td>
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<td>-Literature Analysis (EN)</td>
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<tr>
<td>-Research (HS)</td>
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<tr>
<td>-Skill Application and Inquiry (BIO)</td>
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<td>-Conceptual Understanding and Reasoning (BIO)</td>
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<td>-Laboratory Skills (BIO)</td>
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<td>No</td>
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<td>-Final Exam (EN, HS, BIO)</td>
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<td>Yes (EN only)</td>
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<td>-Honors Assessment (EN, HS, BIO)</td>
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<tr>
<td>-Grading Scale (EN, HS, BIO)</td>
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<td>A(93)</td>
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1 Humanities English

Effort
67% of the 2013-14 cohort put forth effort in English class. White students are more likely than African American/Black or Hispanic/Latino students to put forth effort in English class.

Figure 3

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<td>30%</td>
<td>43%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B/AA</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H/L</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>46%</td>
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n=540

Locus of Control
White students are more likely than African American/Black and Hispanic/Latino students to have a high locus of control in their English class.

Figure 4

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>High</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Low</th>
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<td>45%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B/AA</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H/L</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=550

1 Humanities History

Effort
66% of the 2013-14 cohort put forth effort in history class. White students were more likely than African American/Black or Hispanic/Latino students to put forth effort in history class.

Figure 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A Lot</th>
<th>Some</th>
<th>Little or No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B/AA</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H/L</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>71%</td>
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n=537

Locus of Control
White students are more likely than African American/Black and Hispanic/Latino students to have a high locus of control in their history class.

Figure 6

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B/AA</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H/L</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>13%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

n=550
**Biology**

**Effort**
66% of the 2013-14 cohort put forth effort in their biology class. White students were more likely than African American/Black or Hispanic/Latino students to put forth effort in their biology class.

Figure 7

![Bar chart showing effort distribution by race](chart1.png)

n=478

**Locus of Control**
White students are more likely than African American/Black and Hispanic/Latino students to have a high locus of control in their biology class.

Figure 8

![Bar chart showing locus of control distribution by race](chart2.png)

n=503
All students now have access to a challenging, guaranteed curriculum. This includes students who, in the past, would have been placed in a regular or mixed-level regular course. The charts below summarize the percent of each historic placement group who earned honors credit. To earn honors credit is to meet the course’s high expectations and demonstrate command of the skills taught.

**English**

*Regular:* In 2013-14, 28% of the students (n=31) who would have historically been placed in a regular level course demonstrated mastery in at least one semester of their English course, which is slightly less than the 2012-13 cohort (32%, n=36).

*Mixed-Level Regular:* In 2013-14, 56% of the students (n=69) who would have historically been placed in a mixed-regular course demonstrated mastery in at least one semester. This is an increase over the 2012-13 cohort of 54% (n=78).

*Mixed-Level Honors:* In 2013-14, 87% of the students (n=238) who would have historically been placed in a mixed-honors course demonstrated mastery in at least one semester. This is an increase over the 2012-13 cohort of 82% (n=156).

*Honors:* 92% of students (n=79) who would have historically been placed in an honors level course demonstrated mastery in at least one semester in 2013-14; compared to 93% in 2012-13 (n=135).

The large difference across the cohorts in the number of students who would have been historically placed in an honors level course is partially a function of the difference in the nationally normed percentile for the EXPLORE test. The national norms and equivalent scale score in the EXPLORE test were not consistent from year-to-year.

Figure 9: English – Percent of Students Attaining Honors Credit by Historic Placement Group
History

Regular: In 2013-14, 21% of the students (n=23) who would have historically been placed in a regular level course demonstrated mastery in at least one semester of their history course, which is slightly less than the 2012-13 cohort (30%, n=34).

Mixed-Level Regular: In 2013-14, 47% of the students (n=58) who would have historically been placed in a mixed-regular course demonstrated mastery in at least one semester. This is a decrease over the 2012-13 cohort of 52% (n=75).

Mixed-Level Honors: In 2013-14, 89% of the students (n=244) who would have historically been placed in a mixed-honors course demonstrated mastery in at least one semester. This is an increase over the 2012-13 cohort of 85% (n=162).

Honors: 92% of students (n=79) who would have historically been placed in an honors level course demonstrated mastery in at least one semester in 2013-14; compared to 94% in 2012-13 (n=136).

Figure 10: History – Percent of Students Attaining Honors Credit by Historic Placement Group
**Biology**

*Regular:* In 2013-14, 35% of the students (n=59) who would have historically been placed in a regular level course demonstrated mastery in at least one semester of their biology course.

*Mixed-Level Regular:* In 2013-14, 69% of the students (n=22) who would have historically been placed in a mixed-regualr course demonstrated mastery in at least one semester.

*Mixed-Level Honors:* In 2013-14, 90% of the students (n=149) who would have historically been placed in a mixed-honors course demonstrated mastery in at least one semester.

*Honors:* 94% of students (n=144) who would have historically been placed in an honors level course demonstrated mastery in at least one semester in 2013-14.

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**Figure 11: Biology – Percent of Students Attaining Honors Credit by Historic Placement Group**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Both Semesters</th>
<th>One Semester</th>
<th>Neither Semester</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regular</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Regular</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Honors</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honors</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

0% 100%
A primary goal of the initiative is for more students to have access to and be successful in honors and AP courses as they progress through grades 11 and 12. Since the 1 humanities 2012-13 cohort has not yet completed grade 11, there are no outcomes to report. In lieu of that, 2014-15 semester 1 course level enrollment is summarized below.

The percent of grade 11 students enrolled in one or more honors course who would have historically been placed in a regular or mixed-level regular group has increased over the comparison cohort, with the greatest increase seen by the mixed-level regular group. The mixed-level honors and honors level cohorts have remained the same or slightly higher, with 97-99% enrolling in at least one honors level course in grade 11.

Across all of the historical placement groups there was an increase in the percent of students enrolling in at least one AP course in grade 11. The mixed-level regular group saw the greatest increase from 30% of the comparison cohort enrolled in at least one AP course to 53% of the 2012-13 cohort.
Summary

Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment
The restructured 1 humanities and biology courses provide students with a guaranteed curriculum that focuses on skill development and is aligned with national standards.

Unlike the previous courses, the current courses are aligned to Common Core and ACT College Readiness standards, Advanced Placement Framework, and Next Generation Science Standards. The courses included more writing, literature analysis, research, and skills. They have common exams, earned honors assessments, and a common grading scale. All of these changes have made the 1 humanities and biology courses more rigorous than any of the previous courses, including honors level courses.

Effort and Locus of Control
A majority of grade 9 students put forth effort in their English, history, and biology courses.

Students with a high locus of control believe they have command over their learning. Less than one-half of grade 9 students have a high locus of control in their English and history courses and under one-quarter have a high locus of control in their biology course. White students are more likely than African American/Black or Hispanic/Latino students to put forth effort and to have a high locus of control in their English, history, and biology class.

It is too early in the evaluation to make any generalizations about what these findings mean. Future evaluation reports will include grade 11 locus of control results. At that time a more complete analysis and interpretation will be possible.

Grade 9 Access and Success
All students now have access to a challenging, guaranteed curriculum. This includes students who, in the past, would have been placed in a regular or mixed-level regular course. Students who earned honors credit met the course’s high expectations and demonstrated a command of the skills taught.

There was an increase in the percent of students who would have historically been placed in a mixed-level regular course and not previously granted access to a guaranteed curriculum demonstrate mastery in the restructured English and history courses. There was also an increase in the percent of students who would have historically been placed in a mixed-level honors or honors course demonstrate mastery in the restructured English and history courses.

Students enrolled in these more rigorous courses are demonstrating they have a command of the skills taught in the courses.

Outcomes
A primary goal of the initiative is for more students to have access to and be successful in honors and AP courses as they progress through grades 11 and 12. Across all of the historical placement groups the percent of students enrolling in at least one honors or AP course in grade 11 increased. There was also an increase in students enrolling in at least one AP course in grade 11. Students who would have been historically placed in a mixed-level regular course saw the greatest increase in the percent enrolling in one or more honors or AP course. This group of students also saw the greatest increase in the percent enrolling in at least one AP course.

Evaluation Report #3
It is too early in the evaluation to report on any long-term outcomes that will be used to measure the success of the initiative. This report is formative and its purpose is to help adapt and improve the initiative.
Summary

The next report should be available in June, 2016. Current plans are to include the following analyses:

1 Humanities
   • 2012-13 cohort
     • Grade 11 Course Levels and Grades
     • Grade 11 AP Exam Scores
     • Grade 12 Course Enrollment
     • ACT Scores
     • ACT Survey – College Aspirations
     • Grade 11 Locus of Control
   • 2013-14 cohort
     • Grade 11 Course Enrollment
   • 2014-15 cohort
     • Grade 9 Course Levels and Grades
     • Grade 9 Effort and Locus of Control

Biology
   • 2014-15 cohort
     • Grade 9 Course Level and Grades
     • Grade 9 Effort and Locus of Control
## Appendix – 1 Humanities and Biology Cohorts – Number of Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Regular</th>
<th>Mixed-regular</th>
<th>Mixed-honors</th>
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<th>AA/ B</th>
<th>H/L</th>
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<td><strong>1 Humanities</strong></td>
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