

Purpose

Creating equitable learning environments is a primary goal for education in Kentucky. The vision of the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) is that “each and every student [is] empowered and equipped to pursue a successful future.”

This guidance serves as a resource to local schools and districts in broadening access to advanced coursework for middle school students. This document includes policies supporting these opportunities and guidance for implementation.

Local policy considerations

Access to more rigorous coursework supports individual student learning experiences, academic growth and workforce development as it relates to careers in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) and other fields. While the policies referenced in this guidance allow for individual learning plans (ILPs) and programmatic flexibility at the local level, many students still do not have access to advanced coursework options. For instance, in order to meet the application requirements for either of Kentucky’s high school STEM academies, one must successfully complete **Algebra I, Geometry and Algebra II by the end of grade 10** or by the end of the district’s academic year, excluding summer programs. If these courses are not available to students by the end of grade 10, it is a barrier for interested and/or identified students.

When implementing local policies, school and district leaders may consider the following questions:

- Is advanced coursework programming equitable across the district?
- Does advanced course enrollment data reflect the demographic makeup of the school and/or district population?
- How are the district and schools recruiting students into advanced coursework options?
- Is there an established process for regularly reviewing student access to advanced coursework?
- Are all students able to access the programming, including historically underrepresented students (students from all cultural backgrounds/races, students with disabilities, English Learners, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and anyone else who may be traditionally marginalized)?
- Is the opportunity to enroll in advanced coursework shared with students and familiar through multiple modes of communication?

Advanced coursework options for middle school

Advanced coursework in middle school may include the following: More rigorous substitutions per [704 KAR 3:305](#); high school equivalent courses per [KRS 158.622](#); Gifted and Talented programs; or Advanced Placement, Cambridge Advanced International, International Baccalaureate or Dual Credit coursework.

Per [KRS 158.622\(3\)\(b\)](#), “each school district **shall accept for credit toward graduation** and completion of high school course requirements an advanced placement [or] a high school equivalent...taken by a student in **grades 5, 6, 7, or 8** if that student attains performance levels expected of high school students in that district as determined by achieving **a score of "3" or higher** on a College Board Advanced Placement examination or **a grade of "B" or better** in a high school equivalent...” (emphasis added).

Therefore, should a middle school student meet the provisions set forth in KRS 158.622, the district must accept the more rigorous course and/or high school equivalent as credit toward high school graduation.

Individual Learning Plans and rigorous content

Schools and districts should utilize the **individual learning plan (ILP) for each student** as a method for exploring advanced coursework at the middle school level. School counselors also are encouraged to review the ILP to identify students who may be interested or eligible for the Early Graduation Program (EGP).

[704 KAR 3:305](#) establishes the minimum requirements for high school graduation. Section 2(1), states that “[a] district shall implement an advising and guidance process throughout the middle and high schools to provide support for the development and implementation of an **individual learning plan for each student (ILP)**,” (emphasis added).

Additionally, per Section 2(4) “A school shall maintain each student's individual learning plan. The individual learning plan shall be readily available to the student and parent and reviewed and approved **at least annually** by the student, parents, and school officials,” (emphasis added). Subsection (6) further provides that the “development of the individual learning plan for each student shall be established within the **first ninety (90) days of the sixth grade year** and **shall be focused on career exploration and related postsecondary education and training needs**,” (emphasis added).

704 KAR 3:305, Section 6, further provides that “(1) A local board of education may substitute an integrated, applied, interdisciplinary, occupational, technical, or higher level course for a required course **if the alternative course provides rigorous content**. (2) For students with disabilities, a local board of education may substitute a functional, integrated, applied, interdisciplinary, occupational, technical, or higher level course for a required course **if the alternative course provides rigorous content**. These shall be based on grade-level content standards and may be modified to allow for a narrower breadth, depth, or complexity of the general grade-level content standards,” (emphasis added).

Thus, the local board may allow schools and districts to substitute a required course so long as the alternative provides more rigorous content as detailed above. Please see the [Kentucky Minimum High School Graduation Requirements FAQ](#) for additional information.

Recruitment of students

Per [704 KAR 3:510\(2\)](#), “each high school school-based decision-making council, or the principal if none exists, shall establish a policy on the recruitment and assignment of students to advanced placement courses.”

Per regulation, the policy shall:

1. Provide equitable access for participation in advanced placement courses for all students using either or both on-site instruction or electronic instruction...;
2. Utilize the ILP process, established under 704 KAR 3:305, as a method for ensuring all students receive information and guidance on the availability of advanced coursework, including advanced placement and dual credit courses for potential college credit;
3. Establish an equitable process for recruitment of underrepresented students in advanced placement courses including:
 - a. Racial minorities;
 - b. Students with limited English proficiency;
 - c. Students who qualify for free and reduced lunch;
 - d. Students with disabilities; and
 - e. Males or females.

Implementation Considerations

As local schools and districts continue to review policies and practices, the following may be considered:

- Offer foundational coursework, such as Algebra I, in middle school **for high school credit**, approved by the district for credit per KRS 158.622(3)(b).
- Allow students to “double up” with courses in any given year to ensure they are prepared for more rigorous personalized courses in grades 11-12 or to meet the criteria for higher-level programming and opportunities. Note, however, this option begins to eliminate students due to the increased rigor/demands of taking two advanced courses in one academic year.
- Approve online or dual credit options for a high school credit:
 - Provide an online learning platform like Apex Learning.
 - Allow students to earn dual credit by enrolling in and passing a more rigorous course with a postsecondary partner, if approved by the district.
- Arrange transportation to and from the local high school for middle school students and/or provide a virtual/live instructional setting on site to allow access to more rigorous courses, if possible.
- Hire a retired teacher to teach advanced coursework at their daily wage threshold to address teacher shortages in critical areas.
- Provide a stipend for teachers who would be willing to teach an additional section during the school day and take their planning period outside of regular school hours. This would have to be an additional duty beyond those required of the teacher as part of his/her employment

contract. Districts should already have a policy in place (03.121) regarding payment for extra services, special duty supplements, and supervision and establishing a schedule of compensation regarding this.

- Address the needs of high-performing students through the student ILP, beginning in grade 6, and ensure access to support services, such as extended school services (ESS), to supplement learning experiences, if needed.

Ultimately, scheduling rigorous courses for our next generation of STEM leaders and broadening access to all advanced coursework options for middle school students should be a priority for schools and districts. Proper guidance and coaching can provide students and families with more access, opportunity and learning options.

Implementation Resources

- [KYstandards.org](https://www.kystandards.org) - The KDE's home for Kentucky Academic Standards
- [OCTE Middle School Career Resources](#) - Middle school career studies should provide opportunities for career exploration, build self-awareness, engage students in learning about potential careers and planning for future goals.
- [Minimum High School Graduation Requirements - 704 KAR 3:305](#) establishes the minimum requirements for high school graduation for Kentucky public schools. The [Minimum High School Graduation Requirements FAQ](#) is the authoritative source of information regarding how the requirements go into effect. The document continues to evolve as new questions come in from districts.
- [Kentucky Uniform Academic Course Codes](#) - The new and improved [Searchable State Course Codes Database \(SSCCD\)](#) has been integrated into the Kentucky Educator Certification System (KECS).
- [Individual Learning Plan Resources](#) - The Individual Learning Plans or ILPs for Kentucky's 6th grade through 12th grade students are changing how students prepare themselves for their future. Find information here about implementing and utilizing the ILP system to best benefit students and schools.
- [KyMTSS.org](#) – The resource hub for Kentucky's multi-tiered system of supports framework. KyMTSS is a multi-level prevention system to support student achievement and social-emotional behavioral competencies through an integration of differentiated core instruction, assessment and intervention.
- [Dual Credit](#) – In dual credit, a student is enrolled in a course which allows him/her to earn high school credit and college credit simultaneously. This course may be taught on a college campus or on a high school campus, but it will be in conjunction with a college or university.
- [Advanced Coursework](#) – This webpage includes links to resources and information for Advanced Placement (AP), Cambridge Advanced International (CAI), and International Baccalaureate (IB).