

# Souhegan High School Honors Challenge Guidelines

## Purpose and Philosophy of Honors Challenge

Picture a student in a science classroom studying cell respiration who asks, “*Why is the cell so inefficient at capturing energy?*” Imagine a student who completes the reading of The Odyssey and wants to know more about the world of ancient Greece. Openings for deeper learning emerge from students’ interests and from teacher designed projects and opportunities.

Classroom teachers are led by the principle of teaching all students at their optimal level of instruction – what Vigotsky, an educational psychologist, calls their “zone of optimal development” (1978). Once teachers have determined students’ readiness levels they execute a myriad of differentiation strategies such as: curriculum compacting, flexible grouping, product choices, tiered assignments, multilevel learning stations and generally inspiring extraordinary achievement (Willard-Holt, 2003).

Souhegan High School is dedicated to embracing the philosophy of an inclusionary environment through differentiated instruction. In order to foster this goal in the midst of largely heterogeneous classes, we offer an Honors Challenge curriculum, a program for students who have a strong desire to strengthen their depth of knowledge and development of skills in a given subject. It is our belief that all students want to learn and respond to the opportunity for intellectual stimulation.

## Criteria for Honors Challenge

1. Honors Challenge is academically rigorous; it offers depth of content knowledge and skill development.
2. Honors Challenge is available to every student regardless of his/her grade in a course.
3. Students have the opportunity to complete honors challenge work within each unit of every year-long course, with the exception of Advanced Placement courses, as these classes are part of a national curriculum driven by the College Board.
4. Students who participate in Honors Challenge Programs have some coursework replaced with more challenging work. As such, this work is embedded in the curriculum. At the same time, students spend more time on their studies because deeper learning demands more; as a result, students produce work products that are at a high academic level.
5. Honors work may also be separate learning opportunities. For example, students may participate in a university lecture series or view a related documentary.
6. A minimum of **10** Honors Challenges are offered each year for all year-long courses. Some challenges are more expansive than others. A menu of options is available as appropriate. For grade-level/same course, a majority of the Honors Challenges hold similar curricular expectations in terms of skills and knowledge.
7. Students will meet expectations in at least **80%** of Honors Challenges offered and pass the course in order to earn Honors designation.

8. For communication purposes with post-secondary institutions, students who achieve college credit in a course offered at Souhegan also achieve the Honors designation for said course on their transcript.
9. Students' progress in Honors Challenge is assessed and monitored on an on-going basis with an emphasis on quality in addition to completion. Students are expected to revise/strengthen work that does not meet expectations. Teachers keep students and parents updated on honors in each trimester progress report.
10. 'Honors Pending' will appear on the semester grade reports for participating students. Designation of Honors on a student's transcript will appear with an "H" upon satisfactory completion of Honors Challenge expectations.
11. At a student's first engagement with honors the student receives the honors criteria and the student and parent sign it.