

My name is Lisa Jacobs and I am the parent of a TC Williams 10th grader. I am here to advocate for adding Honors History 11 and 12 and Honors English 12 as course options for next year. Right now, students must choose between standard and either AP or DE. Last winter, a group of parents asked Dr. Crawley to add these courses but he said that we did not want to rush into anything and that the issue would be considered this year by an Honors Review Committee. I sat on that committee, we met for months, there was incredibly strong support for adding these three honors classes, and the administration chose not to put them in the Program of Studies. I understand that the administration might want to take more time to study the matter, thinks that we still are acting too rashly, or might offer the classes online. I would argue that another cohort of students should not wait another year to have appropriate options.

You will be receiving a letter from the community detailing why we need honors options, but right now let me tell you about four TC students you should consider as you think about this issue.

The first student is a junior who has always taken honors classes and is currently taking two AP classes. He has an IEP and struggles with Executive Function. He writes:

“I worry about my ability to manage the organizational and writing demands of AP English next year. However, I think it would be a blow to my self-esteem to have to return to the general level of the class, as I am capable of higher level thinking and intellectual rigor. I feel that the current policy of not offering the honors option does not serve students with learning differences in any way.”

Let me add that many members of the Special Education Advisory Committee strongly support adding these honors options.

The second student is a very high achieving student who is taking 5 AP classes right now because she does not want to take standard level classes and she has no other choice. She has been having breakdowns this fall and she has told her mother that she does not want to think or talk about college at all. She wants a gap year because she is so tired.

The third student strongly supports adding an 11th grade honors history class because she is taking 11th grade AP history and it is very hard. She would rather be in honors. This is her first and only AP class. When I asked her if she was going to go to college, she broke into a magnificent smile and said yes.

Student #4 is another high achieving student who told me, “When I got to high school I didn’t even consider taking honors classes if I had another option.” Her middle school and high school honors classes were that bad.

I absolutely understand that ACPS wants to make sure that student #3 is encouraged to take that AP class and to work her hardest. I agree -- I told her that it was GREAT that she was taking AP and that she should stay there. But we need to consider all four of these students. We need to offer high quality standard classes, a lot of AP/DE options, and also a lot of high quality honors options for students who want a challenge that’s somewhere in the middle. HIGH QUALITY is the key phrase here. And we need to make sure that each student receives excellent counseling, every year. This might mean a gentle push some years, or it might mean support for pulling back. But each child deserves to have appropriate options. I ask you to add English and History Honors classes to next year’s Program of Studies.