

EDUC-2011-002: RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF RESTORATION OF —HONORS CLASSES IN FCPS

(1) WHEREAS Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) in its high schools and secondary schools offers a wide range of —honors and —pre-International Baccalaureate (IB) classes providing primarily 9th and 10th grade students seeking a greater challenge and more rigorous college preparatory instruction with an appropriate alternative to Standard level course offerings (collectively Honors Tier); and

(2) WHEREAS FCPS has discontinued the Honors Tier for any course which has an Advanced Placement (AP) or IB alternative, primarily affecting 11th and 12th grade students enrolled in English 11 and 12, and Social Studies 10 (World History 2), 11 (US History) and 12 (US Government); and

(3) WHEREAS FCPS Standard level courses are intended to prepare students for college and post-secondary pursuits, but the wide range of abilities, preparation and expectations of students, and high class sizes, make it unlikely that, even with differentiated instruction, the divergent needs of all students, but particularly those needing greater challenge and rigor, can be met in a single Standard level course; and

(4) WHEREAS the only current alternatives for upperclassmen, AP and IB, are very rigorous programs intended to provide college level instruction leading to college credit, but many middle-to-high achieving college-bound students who have successfully performed in Honors Tier classes in 9th and 10th grade are not academically or developmentally prepared to do college-level work in high school, particularly when multiple courses are involved; and

(5) WHEREAS FCPS' otherwise laudable goal of encouraging students to challenge themselves to —step up to AP/IB by eliminating the Honors Tier may not be well served when: (1) performance on AP/IB end of course exams shows many students (30% or more) did not in fact master the material; (2) there is little evidence that unsuccessful completion of AP/IB promotes college preparation and performance; (3) there is ample evidence that students who stretch too far suffer depression and anxiety, erosion of self-confidence, and lowered performance in other course work; and

(6) WHEREAS FCPS has recognized it is instructional —best practices to provide a continuum of instructional levels to meet the academic needs of all students, and FCPS School Board Regulation 3201.20 requires —a balanced curriculum so that students at various levels of achievement are able to select appropriate courses to meet individual learning needs; and

(7) WHEREAS the goals of continuum of instruction, a balanced curriculum, and encouragement to reach higher, would be advanced by providing a solid Standard level course while encouraging students to —step up to Honors Tier or beyond, and by continuing to provide a rigorous Honors Tier at upperclass levels, while also encouraging able students to accept the ultimate challenge of AP/IB and its potential award of college credit; and

(8) WHEREAS other high-achieving school districts, including Montgomery, Loudoun and Howard Counties, offer 3 or more levels of classes, including honors and AP/IB; and

(9) WHEREAS because —curriculum strength and —grades in college-prep courses such as honors, AP and IB, are the two most important factors in college admissions, all but the very top FCPS students are likely disadvantaged in both admissions and scholarship decisions by both the lack of Honors Tier

courses and the resultant lower Grade Point Average on students' resumes compared to students from other school systems; and

(10) WHEREAS students who are less academically prepared, economically disadvantaged, of limited English proficiency, or learning disabled, may be particularly disadvantaged by the lack of a college-prep Honors Tier to build skills and confidence, stretch academically and bridge the gulf between Standard and AP/IB; and

(11) WHEREAS Mount Vernon District schools, including Mount Vernon High School (IB), West Potomac High School (AP) and South County Secondary School (AP), are among the most diverse in FCPS, include the widest ranges of student achievement and expectation, and would benefit from restoration/expansion of available course variety and levels of challenge to meet the needs of all students,

(A) NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Mount Vernon Council of Citizens Associations respectfully requests the Fairfax County School Board to direct the Superintendent of Schools to: (1) Restore and/or establish honors level courses at all FCPS high and secondary schools for, at least, English 11 and 12, and Social Studies 10, 11 and 12, as an alternative to Standard and AP/IB level courses; (2) Develop curricula for these and all other honors courses which include specific benchmarks, expectations and assessment tools, demonstrate strong academic rigor and content, and develop critical thinking and communication skills to fully prepare students for college and beyond; (3) Implement the restoration/expansion no later than the 2012-13 school year and require the honors-level classes cited above to be available in every school.

END: MVCCA RESOLUTION EDUC-2011-002