



## Selecting High School and College Level Course Options For Gifted and Advanced Learners

There are several programs available for students to pursue advanced coursework and potentially earn college credit, such as Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), College Credit Plus (CP), and Career Center Pathways. We are often asked if one is better than the other. It depends on the purpose of taking the advanced courses and the goal of the individual student. Sometimes, the best option is along a single pathway, and other times it is a combination of opportunities. Below are some questions to guide planning as you develop the right path for your scholar.

**1. Does the scholar have a career goal in mind? If so, what is the area(s) of study being considered?**

*Implications* – A student with a more vague idea of what to study may want to consider educational settings that offer exposure to a range of content matter. Advanced coursework should aim to prepare for and/or complete freshman level pre-requisites that would apply to a variety of majors. A student with a very specific idea of future pursuits may want to try out courses that align to that field of study to ensure that is really what will satisfy him/her as a career field in the future.

**2. What type of high school experience does the scholar envision? Consider the academic, social, and extracurricular experiences desired.**

*Implications* – A student desiring a more traditional high school experience may want to focus on opportunities offered on site at the high school or online in order to remain at the school location and maximize involvement in school activities. A student with a strong desire to make the most of multiple athletics or other extracurricular options will want to consider those things when scheduling advanced course options. If the student is focused primarily on the academic and nurtures friendships primarily outside of the school setting, off-site options may be more reasonable.

**3. Is your scholar enrolled in or planning to enroll in a specialty program at his/her school?**

*Implications* – Some specialty programs have schedules, curriculum arrangements, and other opportunities that are unique to that school. Some of these programs already embed advanced coursework options, while others may not. Consider how participation in an advanced course option that is not already within that program, such as CCP or Career Center Pathways, may impact your student's ability to fully participate in that specialty program.

**4. How does each option align to the scholar's academic skills and need for challenge?**

*Implications* – Students who are gifted do not possess a universal readiness for all advanced courses. Every student has their own profile of strengths and weaknesses. Additionally, not all advanced courses have the same level of rigor built in. Students who are particularly strong in a subject area may find the thinking skills embedded in AP or IB courses are more aligned to their readiness and learning needs than an entry level college course. Other students with passion in a very specific domain may find CCP courses or a career pathway offer the best options aligned to that knowledge and interest. Similarly, students may need advanced course options for some subjects in their area of strength and traditional high school courses for those subjects in which the student may not be as advanced.

**5. Does the scholar have a future college or other school in mind? If so, what are their policies for transfer credit?**

*Implications* – The state of Ohio requires publicly-funded state universities and colleges to accept credit earned with qualifying scores on AP and IB tests or earned through CCP. However, the same does not apply to private colleges or out of state schools. Be sure to check with admissions offices of schools of interest to see what types of credit they will accept for transfer and the ability of those credits to count toward degree requirements. (Some schools will accept the credits as electives but not count them toward a degree.)

**6. What is the scholar's level of maturity and independence?**

*Implications* – A student who needs more direction and guidance will likely benefit from options offered within the middle or high school as opposed to those offsite. Consider also the length of courses (semester versus year-long) in terms of timeframe for mastering content and gaining teacher support. Students who are very independent problem solvers and are able to manage their work and time efficiently may be more successful with programs that are not embedded within the school.

**7. What is the parent/guardian's desired level of involvement?**

*Implications* – Family members who want to be more involved in their child's academic pursuits and have interactions with instructors may be more comfortable in traditional educational settings than in off-site programs or programs managed by colleges and universities.

**8. Is the scholar expecting to participate in college athletics in the future?**

*Implications* – Students can earn college credit as high schoolers and still engage in collegiate sports, but the number of credits may impact eligibility throughout the college years. Families will need to weight the need for advanced coursework against the likelihood and importance of collegiate athletics.

**9. If the goal is to earn college credit early, what is the plan for the "bought time" during the college years?**

*Implications* – Utilizing college credit bearing options should have a purpose for the future, as well as meet a present need. Maybe the goal is to get pre-requisites out of the way to allow time for a student with many interests to explore different majors within the traditional 4 year time span. Maybe the goal is to finish an undergraduate degree early to move on to graduate school. If there is no plan, consider what options may be realistic following an early college graduations given the student's age and maturity.

Things to keep in mind:

- What is right for one student may not be the right thing for another. This applies to siblings, friends, neighbors, and the "I heard about someone who..."
- Just because something IS an option doesn't mean it is the right option. Some scholars will benefit more from utilizing one as opposed to trying to use it all.
- There are always tradeoffs to any choice made, as it is not possible to choose everything and have it all work together perfectly. Consider the non-negotiables and determine what you and your scholar are willing to give up in order to gain the benefits of a different option.