

AP/Honors Healthy Limit FAQ

Parents of Beckman High School Students,

Over the course of the last few years, we here at Beckman have been working on ways to address the stress levels that often accompany our students' high school experience. As part of that effort, we have removed summer/winter break assignments and we have introduced counseling programs that focus on improving student wellness, such as Wellness Wednesdays and Lunch-and-Learns. We also recently took a team of parents, students, teachers, a counselor, and an administrator to the Challenge Success conference at Stanford University (more info on Challenge Success [here](#)). One of the potential ideas that came out of our discussions at the conference was the idea of limiting the number of AP/Honors courses a student can take by year in school. As the idea evolved and discussions with various stakeholder groups were held, the idea gained momentum and quickly became a very viable and real option for us here at Beckman. In order to gain more perspective and insight, we made calls to various admissions officers at both private and public colleges and met with Orange County Department of Education reps. What we've found is that we have a system that inadvertently pressures students to take an extremely heavy academic load. Survey Data from a recent survey tells us that our students are lacking adequate sleep, reporting elevated levels of stress, reporting a higher rate of absences due to health issues. As such, we are moving forward with placing limits on the number of weighted (AP and H) classes that students can take per year and instituting a "Healthy Limit" waiver process. In order to assist parents with understanding the new norm here at Beckman, below is a series of questions and their associated answers.

Q: Why are you doing this?

A: There are several factors that have gone into this decision. None of the factors have been weighed as heavily as the health and well-being of our students. In talking with our students and parents, what we've come to discover is that a large number of students are making course decisions to "keep up" with their peers. What we are seeing is a game of "one-upmanship" that is generating a high level of unhealthy competition that needs to be addressed.

Q: What are you hoping to accomplish by doing this?

A: We have discussed the idea of limiting AP/H courses for several months and have vetted it through various stakeholder groups and there are several positive outcomes we are expecting:

- 1) Fewer students feeling overloaded.
- 2) Fewer students feeling pressure to take a heavier course load than they are ready for.
- 3) Students with more time to participate in activities that they enjoy.
- 4) Students will have more time to attend events on campus which will contribute to the overall school culture.

Q: How does this impact college admissions?

A: We've spoken to several admissions officers and all have indicated that this WILL NOT negatively affect college admissions. What colleges look at is a student's course load and achievement relative to what is available to them. If all kids are limited in the same manner, they will all be weighed accordingly. Our school profile will be changed to identify the manner in which courses are limited and colleges will be made aware of that when reviewing applications. Also, as colleges change and adapt their admissions requirements from year to year, they are looking more at students with a depth of knowledge of experience in one or two areas as opposed to a breadth of experience in many areas. They are looking for students with passion and joy that have begun to develop their "legacy." The limit we are establishing will hopefully give students additional time to develop or find their passion.

Q: But what about other schools who do not limit? Aren't our kids competing with those students as well?

A: Many high schools in Orange County offer fewer AP/H courses than Beckman and are "limiting" in a different manner. The students from those schools are not looked at as inferior or determined to be less qualified due to the offerings their school has for them. It would be unfair for colleges to essentially "punish" a student for attending a school that has fewer AP/H offerings than another. We have been assured by college admissions officers from the UC and State University systems as well as a number of private schools that students are reviewed relative to their own school environment.

Q: Why are Honors courses being limited along with the AP courses?

A: Our honors courses require as much (and sometimes more) of a time commitment than a majority of our AP courses. We have also considered how colleges apply weight to various Honors and AP courses and determined that, in most cases, colleges weigh Honors and AP classes in the same manner and give them equal weight when calculating the GPA so we felt it best to align our system with what the majority of colleges do.

Q: How did you determine the number of courses to set the limit at for each grade level?

A: For incoming freshmen the maximum number of weighted classes will be set at 2. Once students have a year under their belt and have acclimated to high school, they will be allowed to take additional weighted classes. In speaking with UC admissions officials, it was confirmed that the UCs utilize a total of 8 weighted courses during the student's 10th and 11th grade years to calculate the UC GPA used in the admission process. We felt that our limit should afford the students the opportunity to maximize that GPA within the guidelines set forth by the UCs. Senior year, many students take an Economics/Government AP classes that is listed as two classes, but is really a combination of two semester classes.

Q: How does this impact eligibility for AP Scholar Awards?

A: We have reviewed the College Board requirements for the various recognition levels and verified that our students will not be impacted and will still be eligible for the same awards they have always been eligible for.

Q: How will the limit work?

A: Students will be allowed to take no more than a set number of weighted courses based on their year in school. 9th graders will be allowed no more than 2 weighted courses, 10th and 11th graders will be allowed 3 weighted courses, and seniors will be allowed 4 (AP Gov and Econ will be counted as 1 because they are both technically semester courses).

Q: What about Early College? How will those classes be counted?

A: Early College students take two IVC classes each semester. These take up 2 periods of their schedule. Those classes will count as 1 weighted class in the overall count.

Q: What about Dual Enrollment or other Community College classes? How will those classes be counted?

A: Each Dual Enrollment or Community College class will count as 1 weighted class in the overall count.

Q: What if my student wants to take more than the established Healthy Limit?

A: What we have found is that very few students thrive in a load that exceeds what we have allocated. Yes, there are students that can “handle” it, but their stress load is high and they are not enjoying the high school experience. In most cases, they sleep very little and are unable to fully engage in the activities or the courses that they enjoy. Students who wish to exceed the established Healthy Limit will be required complete a waiver. Both the parent and student will be required to sign off on the waiver and parents will be required to complete a brief online activity prior to registering for the additional courses.

Current students will be allowed to exceed the limit as long as a waiver is on file. The waiver will allow current 9th and 10th graders to exceed the recommended level by one weighted class in their 10th and 11th grade year. Current 11th graders will be permitted to register for their desired number of AP/H classes as long as they fit within their normal school day.

Healthy Limits Waiver (Current Students)

	9th	10th	11th	12th
AP/H Classes Desired	2	3	3	4
	↓ Waiver Required ↓			
AP/H Classes Desired	3	4	4	≥5

Beginning with the class of 2023, the waiver will allow for one additional weighted class above the Healthy Limit we've established.

Healthy Limits Waiver <small>(Class of 2023 and Beyond)</small>				
	9th	10th	11th	12th
AP/H Classes Desired	2	3	3	4
	↓ Waiver Required ↓			
AP/H Classes Desired	3	4	4	5