

External Courses: Transcripts & Acceleration

Santa Clara Unified Board of Education

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The purpose of this report is to provide the Board of Trustees with answers to the following questions:

1. When does SCUSD grant approval to students to take out-of-district courses?
2. Which outside courses are included on SCUSD transcripts?
3. For both of these questions, what are the practices of other districts?

1) When does SCUSD approve students to take out-of-district courses?

SCUSD students *in good standing* may take external courses for the purposes of acceleration beginning in 9th grade and they must obtain pre-approval from the school principal. SCUSD's mission is to prepare all students for success in an ever-changing world. To prepare students for college and career success, it is important that students acquire skill and conceptual knowledge that prepares them for next-level courses. High school students must demonstrate a record of excellence and readiness to accelerate through taking external summer courses that meet district criteria.

SCUSD does not approve middle school students to take summer courses for the purposes of acceleration. There are several points of rationale for this long-standing district practice:

- SCUSD already provides rising 6th graders an opportunity to accelerate into Common Core (CC) Math 7. SCUSD also offers rising 7th and 8th graders the opportunity to accelerate into Algebra. The placement measures used to identify students for acceleration are commonly used in nearby districts, and are continually analyzed for reliability. In addition, 8th graders have the opportunity to "waive" into Algebra if they do not meet placement criteria (though they are advised not to do so if placement assessments determine such acceleration would not be in the best interest of the child).
- Evidence (including longitudinal data analysis of accelerated SCUSD students) indicates that some middle school students who accelerate too quickly struggle with math concept and skill, particularly in and beyond Algebra 2. In addition, some students who accelerate too quickly lose interest/engagement in

mathematics during their junior or senior year. SCUSD math teachers have continually expressed concerns about lack of preparation in both skill and conceptual knowledge of some accelerated students.

- The Common Core (CC) Framework emphasizes the increased rigor of the new standards, and importance of students acquiring conceptual knowledge and skill in all CC courses. The framework advocates compacting middle courses (as opposed to students skipping full courses) to ensure that students acquire mathematical foundations that will prove critical as they advance to higher math courses in high school. The framework does suggest summer courses for acceleration for high school students, but not for middle school students. (See CCSS-Math-Appendix D, attached).
- SCUSD offers summer enrichment courses in a variety of STEM areas (e.g., Robotics, Computer Science and STEM Engineering). These courses build students conceptual knowledge and ability to apply mathematical concepts.
- SCUSD is committed to balancing wellness with academic rigor. With existing opportunities for rising 6th, 7th and 8th graders to accelerate, the district seeks to ensure a balance of wellness and academic rigor for our middle school students.

What are the practices of other districts?

During the 2017-18 school year, our Math Pathways Committee (MPC) conducted extensive research into the “acceleration practices” of surrounding districts. We learned that all surrounding districts have at least one acceleration point for middle school students.

We attempted to contact administrators in surrounding districts to learn whether they allow rising 7th, 8th and 9th graders to take summer courses for the purposes of acceleration. Four of the K-8 districts that responded (Sunnyvale, Moreland, Evergreen and Franklin-McKinney) do not allow students to take accelerated summer courses. Their rationale includes:

- Acceleration points based on valid assessment measures already exist.
- There were noticeable significant gaps in students’ knowledge/skill development when summer acceleration classes had previously been tried.
- A condensed summer course would not be an appropriate substitute for a yearlong course.

Another K-8 district (Union) has not received a parental or student request for summer acceleration, however if a student took a summer class they would “assess for content mastery” prior to accelerated placement - similar to Mt. View-Whisman SD.

San Jose Unified, a K-12 district, does allow rising 9th graders to take summer math

courses for acceleration if they show proof of having successfully completed the course. Fremont Union HSD also allows rising 9th graders to take summer courses for acceleration.

A review of BP 6146.11 and AR 6146.11 for SJUSD, FUHSD, Palo Alto USD and Los-Gatos UHSD indicates that these BPs/ARs pertain to high school students; none mention middle school students.

2) Which outside courses are included on SCUSD transcripts?

During the 2017-18 school year, a committee of counselors & administrators met several times to address this question. The question arose because counselors and administrators were becoming increasingly concerned about the intense and stressful competition among students to take community college courses for grade bumps, particularly towards becoming valedictorian. Moreover, the stressful aspects of an overly-competitive student culture was felt to undermine parts of the wellness work being performed in SCUSD.

To address this concern, the committee met several times to research and discuss the question, “Which outside courses should be included on SCUSD transcripts?” Should transcripts contain courses only taken in SCUSD, or should they reflect a student’s entire academic history?

As a foundation to addressing this question, the committee first re-examined existing Board Policy and Administration Regulations. The committee then held several discussions, especially considering issues of:

- equity
- graduation & a-g requirements
- grade inflation for college courses
- what a SCUSD transcript should mean/signify
- what’s best for students
- courses not offered in SCUSD.

After research into the practices of other districts and discussion of the above key considerations, the committee unanimously determined that a transcript from a SCUSD high school should reflect a student’s academic career in our district’s school(s). Courses taken outside of SCUSD should be included on a SCUSD transcript for two purposes:

1. **Graduation Requirement:** The course is needed for graduation and unavailable at the student’s high school due to scheduling conflicts, OR the

course is needed to remediate (make up) a course in which the student initially earned a F.

2. **College Eligibility:** The course is needed to remediate (make up) a UC/CSU approved course in which the student initially earned a D or F, and the course is unavailable at the student's high school due to scheduling conflicts.

The committee further determined that students must continue current district practice of obtaining prior approval from the school principal before taking an external course that will be included on the high school transcript. Students will continue to be encouraged to include external course transcripts in their college applications.

What are the practices of other districts?

SCUSD's lead counselor researched the practices of several surrounding districts and found that: four high schools/districts include courses from accredited outside institutions on their transcripts; two schools/districts do not include external courses on their transcripts; and, like SCUSD, another high school only includes external courses on school transcripts for the purposes of meeting graduation requirements or college eligibility. See the table below.

School/ District	Are outside courses placed on your district's transcript?	Require Pre- approval?
SCUSD	External courses will be placed on SCUSD transcripts and included in students' GPA if the course is needed for graduation or college eligibility AND the course is unavailable at the student's high school due to scheduling conflicts, OR the course is needed to remediate (make up) a course in which the student initially earned a D or F.	YES
FUHSD	If a-g accredited	YES
Los Gatos HS	If the class is needed for graduation or college eligibility	YES
Saratoga HS	Must be from an accredited school	YES
Bellarmine	None	n/a
SJUSD	Must be from an accredited school	YES
MV/LAUHSD	Must be from an accredited school	YES
Campbell Union	Will note on the transcript that the student took the external class, but does not award credits	