Livermore Valley Joint Unified School District (LVJUSD)
Middle School *College Prep and Honors Core* Program:
A Guide for Parents and Students

Each LVJUSD teacher wants every student to achieve his or her personal best, and this is more likely to happen if the student is placed into classes appropriate to the student's current needs and interests.

We offer two levels of Core classes at both the seventh and eighth grade levels:

1) ***College Prep (CP)*** classes provide a ***rigorous*** curriculum that meets the needs of the majority of students.
2) ***Honors classes*** are designed for students who excel in English Language Arts and Social Studies and require a ***faster-paced***, more ***in-depth***, and ***challenging*** course of study.

Both CP and Honors Core classes have the following attributes:

- Follow a rigorous curriculum.
- Require students to work toward mastery of the California Common Core State Standards (CCSS).
- Prepare students for high school English.
- Develop critical thinking skills.
- Require students to write argumentative essays, narratives, responses to literature, and summaries.
- Provide opportunities for students to improve listening and speaking skills through Socratic Seminar or debate and speech delivery.
- Select class novels from the same board-approved list of titles.
- Use the same textbook.
- Utilize technology to help improve reading and writing skills.

Honors Core classes differ from CP Core classes in the following ways:

- Greater depth and complexity of study, in accordance with grade-level standards.
- Students work independently of teacher assistance more often.
- Pacing is quicker.
- Required course reading is more often done as homework, rather than during class.
- Writing is expected to be more sophisticated (stronger vocabulary, more complex and varied sentence structure, greater depth of thought and analysis) and more extensively researched.
- Assigned readings may be at a higher level of difficulty.
- Students are exposed to critical reading strategies and are challenged to develop organizational skills as well as foundational academic habits.
- Homework typically requires students to think critically and **synthesize** the material that they learned in class. As a result, homework generally takes longer.
- Grammar techniques are more sophisticated and complex.
- Honors Core students conduct extensive independent research.

When making your choice, please consider:

- **Within the first two weeks** of the school year, an Honors student may move to a CP course or visa versa as space allows. After the first two weeks, moves will be made only at the administrator's discretion.
- We have open access. Students **may** take CP Core in 7th grade and move to Honors in 8th grade, and it is not uncommon for students to take CP courses throughout middle school and move to Honors in high school.
- The ultimate goal is for your student to be happy, healthy, and **appropriately** challenged.

Checklist of General Expectations for Students ENTERING LVJUSD Middle School Honors Core Classes

Please use the following charts to determine which level of Core is most suitable for your student.

Skills and Knowledge: When students **enter** an Honors Core class, they are expected to be able to demonstrate **3 or more** of the following. **Please note:** This is where students currently are, **not** where they hope to be.

Entering 7th Grade	*Entering 8th Grade*
❑ Write well-developed, insightful paragraphs using a variety of sentence structures and above grade level vocabulary. ❑ Understand and identify the 8 parts of speech ❑ Go beyond the surface of the text to discover a deeper meaning rather than to simply summarize ❑ Discover theme in a passage ❑ Identify figurative language in a passage ❑ Articulate an argument in response to a text ❑ Actively read over their writing to enhance and improve it, as well as proofread. ❑ Meets or exceeds standards on CAASPP.	❑ Synthesize multiple texts in a multi-paragraph, thesis-based essay. ❑ Identify and state the function of the 8 parts of speech in sentences. ❑ Identify and state the function of a subject and predicate in a sentence. ❑ Describe the impact literary devices have in a work of literature. ❑ Advance beyond summary and analyze the deeper meaning of a passage by making connections between a passage and historical events, current events, and personal experiences. ❑ Discover common and recurring themes across texts. ❑ Recognize the elements that contribute to an author's purpose. ❑ Actively read over their writing to enhance and improve it, as well as proofread. ❑ Meets or exceeds standards on CAASPP.

Academic Attributes: In addition to demonstrating many of the skills listed above, an Honors Core student will be most successful if s/he also demonstrates at least 5 or more of the "Honors Core Student" academic attributes below.

A CP Core Student:	**An Honors Core Student:**
❑ Is strong academically in English and social studies. ❑ Is hard-working and self-motivated. ❑ Learns best with thorough instruction and practice of new concepts. ❑ Appreciates challenges, but also benefits from assistance and practice with complex, critical-thinking and non-routine strategies. ❑ Thrives with structured guidance when learning applying, and extending new concepts. ❑ Actively participates in the learning process. ❑ Independently reads various genres. **NOTE**: The goal of the CP Core class is to get all students to these levels.	❑ Considers Core (ELA and Social Studies) as one of his/her gifts or passions. ❑ Masters concepts quickly without the need for much repetition; requires faster-paced, rigorous curriculum. ❑ Values and is not discouraged by the challenges of complex, critical-thinking opportunities; can achieve this with minimal assistance and often takes ideas to a higher level. ❑ Seeks out and actively contributes to classroom discussions. ❑ Enjoys reading higher level, complex texts in a variety of genres. ❑ Enjoys the writing process and understands the need for multiple revisions. ❑ Is inquiry-driven, which is demonstrated by thinking critically about world issues related to the assigned reading and writings (goes beyond surface meanings, makes connections and inferences). ❑ Has exceptional work ethic, is a self starter, is highly self-motivated, and works well independently. ❑ Manages time well (able to juggle school work, family obligations, and extracurricular activities). ❑ Is organized (students will typically work on multiple assignments over several days, and will need to keep track of different due dates).

Frequently Asked Questions

1. My student is struggling with the Honors Core assignments and exams. She has always been an A student, and she is seeing grades she has never seen before. Is this the right class for her?

It is very common for the transition to Honors Core to be difficult. Our Honors curriculum has been designed to challenge Honors students, so it moves at a quicker pace and goes into greater depth. Some struggle is normal as students adjust, but if your student is overwhelmed and seems unable to adapt to the more demanding curriculum, it may not be an appropriate placement.

2. My student is struggling in Honors Core, but I don't want to pull him out because then he won't be ready for Honors in high school. What should we do?

Even if a student fits the Honors profile, sometimes he/she may not be ready for Honors in middle school. The transition to middle school alone can be stressful and overwhelming, and the well-being of the student is always paramount. Sometimes, a student requires more time and maturity to gain organizational skills or to develop critical thinking skills to the level that will make Honors manageable.

3. What if I think my student can do well in Honors Core, but she doesn't want to take it?

We get this question a lot. A general rule of thumb is that if the parent wants it more than the student, usually the student ends up miserable, and nobody wins. To do well in Honors Core, the student must be passionate about English and Social Studies and demonstrate a desire to push him/herself in ways never before experienced. Putting a student in this course against his or her will is not advisable for young adolescents. The best advice we can give is to give your student time to adjust to middle school, and bring up the topic again as the student is about to enter the next grade.

4. If we realize that my student is not in the right class, can we make a change?

Absolutely. While it's best to try to get students accurately placed as soon as possible, sometimes students just need a chance to see for themselves where they would best fit. Students are free to move from CP to Honors or from Honors to CP within the first two weeks of the school year, if room allows. After that, moves are made only at the administrator's discretion.

Honors Core Expectations

- ❏ I understand that the student will be expected to possess the interest, ability, and motivation to meet the challenges of an honors level course, be willing to take greater responsibility for his or her learning, and aspire to an advanced level of learning through high quality work.

- ❏ I understand that Honors students will complete a more rigorous research project. In 7th grade core, honors students will complete the Genius Hour project, while traditional core classes will conduct smaller research projects. In 8th grade core, honors students will participate in National History Day, and traditional core classes will conduct smaller research projects.

- ❏ I understand that my student's current reading range is ____ year ____ month to ____ year ____ month.

- ❏ I understand that 7th Grade Honors students are expected to reach a minimum of 70 points in AR each trimester. I also understand that 8th Grade Honors students will have a goal of 80 points (with additional research-related reading expected) and a Book Level average reading goal of 6.5 or above. In both 7th and 8th grades, AR will count for no more than 20% of the ELA grade.

- ❏ I understand that the student will be expected to independently read a grade-level textbook and take structured notes.

- ❏ I understand that writing in an honors course will be more analytical, in-depth, and rigorous than in traditional core classes.

- ❏ I understand that the student will be expected to participate in Socratic Seminars and/or debates in which students will conduct a discussion for at least 10 minutes without teacher input.

- ❏ Homework will follow school board policy, which states that "Reading is an integral part of learning and is in addition to the suggested homework times of 60 minutes/day, Monday-Thursday. Suggested reading time for 6th-12th grade is 30 minutes/day, Monday-Thursday."

- ❏ In addition,"Exceptions to these guidelines may occur for special projects such as independent research, term reports, and special reading and problem-solving activities especially at the middle and high school levels. **Students in…honors courses can expect homework that is different from regular classes and may require additional study time due to advanced curriculum**."

- ❏ Finally, I understand that the student will be expected to come in before or after school for help.