

COURSE CODES, COURSE TITLES, & COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

Typically high school course codes are determined at the District level; however, increasingly course codes are determined at the State Department of Education level. For example, the Kentucky Department of Education uses Kentucky Uniform Academic Course Codes in order to facilitate federal and state reporting requirements.

The course codes are basically a State Department of Education's, a District's and/or school's "shorthand" for course titles. However course codes are determined, they need to reflect a logical system of coding.

For example, the Course Code Directory for Flushing High School in New York describes how "course coding relies on standardized representation of course attributes based on each character in the code's position and value. Each character in a course code is intended to capture a discrete property of the course." In the case of Flushing High School, there is clear intention to create consistency across courses and alignment with both New York City Department of Education reporting requirements and New York State Education Department reporting agreements

The length of a course code will depend on the amount of information you wish to embed, the size of your school, and the extent of your course offerings. In schools implementing Linked Learning pathways, college and career academies, and other small learning communities, the course code usually includes a "tag" or "flag" for the specific academy/pathway/SLC for which the course is included in the program of study. For example, a Health Academy course might include HA at the end of the course code, whereas, an Engineering Academy course might include EA at the end of a course code. Alternatively, a number at the end of a course code might indicate that the course is only offered in a specific pathway.

Typically, a course code includes a letter or number for each specific department; a letter or number for each specific subject (i.e., American history in the history/social studies department OR biology in the science department.)

Depending on the extent to which courses are grade level specific, there might be a letter or number for each grade level.

There may be different letters or numbers in a particular position in the code that indicate whether a course section is offered during the first or second (or even third) term or as a two- or three-term sequence.

If a course is a college preparatory course, or an English Language Learner course, or an ELL/ESL course or a special education course, etc., this information may be indicated in the course code.

At Flushing High School, for example, the following are the general rules about course codes:

- “All course codes must have at least five (5) characters and may have up to eight (8) characters
- Course attributes must adhere to their positional value. In other words, the integrity of each position within a course code must be maintained as each character is intended to represent a particular description (e.g. the third character should always mean “course duration
 - If there is an applicable value for position 7 but not position 6, position 6 will have a value of “Q” indicating none of the other 6th position values are applicable.
- The letter O, the number zero (0), spaces, underscores, and symbols such as *, &, #, \$ will not be used as character values in any course code.
- The course name that corresponds to the course code should provide an accurate, clear reflection of the course’s content, such that individuals looking at the transcript who may not be familiar with the specifics of the school’s instructional program can gain a basic understanding of the standards addressed in the course.”

Flushing High School also uses a chart to clarify the use and meaning of character “position” in a course code:

Position	
1	Department
2	Subject area within the department
3	Course duration/Transfer credit course
4	Total number of courses within the sequence
5	Position within the sequence of study
6	Course type indicator (AP, IB, College level courses for college credit, etc.)
7	Delivery indicator (e.g. independent study, extended day; internship)
8	School use (<i>CCASN adapted example: i.e., the same Global Studies course offered in one of two different pathways might be coded as HGS11QXB</i>)

Please see the Flushing High School Course Code Directory – High School for more detailed descriptions on how to develop and use course codes.

<http://www.flushinghighschool.org/ourpages/auto/2009/9/25/44815337/Standardized%20STARS%20Course%20Code%20Manual.pdf>

Typically, course codes are included with course titles and course descriptions in each school’s or each District’s course catalog. Course codes are used on report cards, transcripts, student schedules, teacher schedules, course attendance records, and when making a student course change. In California, you include the course code when you submit a course description for a “g” (college preparatory) course approval. And, of course, course codes are used extensively in the master schedule building process.

COURSE TITLES

Course titles, too, will appear in the course catalog, on student and teacher schedules, on transcripts, on official “a-g” course lists (California only), and eventually on each student’s permanent academic record/official transcript.

Advice from the field is to keep course titles simple and clearly descriptive of the course content. Advice is also to remember your audience --- college admission officers, NCAA (for college sports eligibility), and employers. One colleague shared that the NCAA once questioned the validity of an 11th and 12th grade course entitled, “Mickey Mouse Math.” A college admissions officer or employer may not know that a course entitled “Shake and Bake” is actually a geology or earth science course or that “Green Up and Go” is actually a standards-based, laboratory science course.

COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

Typically, the course description includes the course title; the course code; a brief narrative description (several sentences describing the nature and content of the course – lab course, design course, etc. with a focus on the following content/topics); any specifics on when the course is offered – i.e., offered second semester only, offered every other year; and any course requirements.

Course requirements may include any pre-requisite or co-requisite course/s, may include the fact that the course involves 40 hours of fieldwork or participation in a certain number of performances. For an AP course, a school might require students to take the AP exam. (NOTE: The requirement of taking the AP test should include the availability of funding for AP test fees for students with financial need.)

The course description should describe the type of course credit available – i.e., laboratory science course credit, elective credit only, etc.

The course description might include an eligibility requirement, but it is important to note that more high schools have moved to open admissions policies with regard to Advanced Placement courses, etc. and that more schools are evolving to using embedded honors or honors by exhibition (see related Master Schedule Guide resource) rather than offering separate honors sections.

Advice from the field:

Build in enough time to review, edit, and align course descriptions.

Provide guidelines for new course descriptions and Involve department chairs and pathway/academy leads in developing the actual descriptions.