Question: We are looking to remove Honors Bio and Chem and instead encourage honors track students to take AP Bio as Freshmen and AP Chem as sophomores. Has anyone else done this and has it been successful (performance in the class and on the AP exam)?

In short: The overall consensus is to hold off on offering AP Bio and Chem for the following reasons:

* There is not enough time to cover the content/foundational lessons
* AP best practices advises against AP coursework offered in 9th grade
* Students are not mature enough to handle the work
* May schools have a prereq of Bio and Chem before AP
* These AP courses are too rigorous
* Some schools offer AP chem to sophomores only if Chem Honors is taken in grade 9

The long answer:

I was forwarded your email by my students services department and wanted to give you my feedback about your proposal. In my 18 years of teaching (10 of which have included AP Biology and multiple years of both Honors & Regular Biology) I have only encountered 1-2 students that would have been successful in AP Biology as a freshman. Most students need the background information covered in freshman Biology in order to be successful in the AP class because there is no time to cover all the topics from beginning to end. I am not an expert in AP Chemistry, but I am sure it would be very similar. The only AP science class that I have heard there has been success in as a freshman or sophomore is AP Enviornmental Science, but they have taken Biology previously and are enrolled in Chemistry along with the course. Many of the AP classes require the information from Biology & Chemistry to be successful. Let me know if you have any questions and I would be happy to help.

We do honors and then AP later.  Our teachers would say that there is barely enough time to cover the content with one year, let alone trying to teach Bio and AP Bio or Chem and AP Chem in 1 year.

AP best practice advises against AP coursework for grade 9 students.  Our experience would be that the Honors Biology I and Honors Chemistry I be pre-recs for the AP Science courses.

I would be very concerned about doing that. We offer hon bio for freshmen and honors chem for sophomores. Then they are ready for AP chem grades 11-12. We have anatomy/physiology that we recommend they take before AP biology so that is mostly seniors but juniors can take it. Our kids score very well on the AP exams. I don’t see any reason to push AP courses to earlier in high school.

I worry you could be setting your students up for failure.  AP BIO is a massive course.   I can’t even imagine that freshman are mature enough to handle the work.   We only allow juniors and seniors to take AP Biology and then students must have completed the following prerequisite courses to do so: Biology Honors and Chemistry.

Our AP Chemistry class may be taken by students in grades 10-12, but again only after completing Chemistry Honors with a grade of B or higher.

Sophomores can take AP Chem only if they took Biology as a Freshman and are taking Algebra 2 (at least) at the same time.

They do as well as any other student on the AP exam. I am curious to see how they do this year with the new resources.

These classes are HARD, especially AP Chem. Many students who completes Chem Honors still really struggle in AP Chem. There is no way I would ever have a student take AP Chem as a sophomore if they didn't already have Chem.

AP Bio is really tough too, but not as much as AP Chem. I have the same concerns though. There's so much content in AP Bio that is brand new and with the nature of the course, I don't think freshmen who have never been exposed to Bio would be successful.

I would recommend having your science teachers compare the curriculum and exams for the classes and explain it that way. From my experience, they will not be successful without the intro classes. Those AP exams also have pretty low pass rates and I don't think you're giving kids a fair shot of passing if that's their only experience with the material.

I don't know this with 100% certainty, but I think that students need to have Biology and Chem before taking AP Biology or AP Chem, respectively.

We have some 10th graders take AP Chem because they took Bio in 8th grade and Chem in 9th grade, but our AP Chem teacher feels that most students would benefit from taking it as juniors or seniors because of the rigor. AP Bio is an 11th/12th grade class here.

We allow AP Chem as early as sophomore year, and students take Chemistry I Honors freshman year to prep for it.

AP Bio we allow for juniors and seniors.

I don't know a lot about the specific rigor of those two exams, but freshman year sounds early for AP Bio!

I would worry about that change.  Our students take Honors Bio and then are eligible to take AP Bio and they take Honors Chem before they can take Chem II AP.  Those are both such challenging courses that need the foundational lessons learned in the honors level first year courses