

Open Letter on the Academies of Shakopee  
By Shakopee School Board Shawn Hallett  
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A friend of Jake's (my 14-year-old) asked me about the academies the other day. I thought maybe I could share what I told him in case you have any questions or would like to know a bit more about them.

"In simple terms, I think of the academies as having your locker in one area of the building for 3 years (10th-12th grade). You'll be with a similar group of kids, who hopefully enjoy exploring similar interests. With a high school built for 3200 students, we want you to have a place to call "home", a place you will feel both comfortable and known.

How much time you spend in your "home" academy will be determined by you. Do you want to take required classes (Math, Science, English and Social Studies) in the regular sequence, or in AP and/or CIS courses, or a combination of both? Are you most interested in elective courses offered in your academy or are you wanting to take a wider range of electives from a variety of academy options? If you prefer the regular sequence for your required classes then you will have a core group of Math, English, Science and Social Studies teachers. These core teachers will have the opportunity to get to know you, as they will stay the same for all three years (10th-12th grade). They will also work together to learn your strengths and your challenges; they will ALL have a vested interest in your success.

You will also have the same principal and counselor throughout your three years in the Academy. We call this "wrap-around" services, meaning there will be staff members besides teachers who are responsible for your success, who know you, and who are familiar to you. Your counselor will specialize in guiding your career exploration and post-secondary options. Our goal is for you to have a plan in place for what you will do after graduation to meet your future goals. If you find that your "home academy" isn't fitting your needs, you will have the option to change your academy. Finding out what you DON'T like is as important as learning what you DO like.

Another key part of the academies is helping you see the relevance in what you are learning (something I lacked when I was in school). Therefore, your math class within your academy will add the "flavor" of the academy. For example, if you are in the Academy of Health Science, your math class might ask you to figure out how many cc's of insulin you need for a 150-pound patient. The hope is that you will learn the required math standards in a way that interests YOU, rather than in a problem that might seem irrelevant to you. Side note: if you prefer to take AP or CIS courses, which have required prescribed curriculum, those types of classes will not be as closely aligned to each academy.

Throughout your 4 years in Shakopee High School, you will have the ability to choose between 19-26 semester elective courses. Our new graduation requirements (graduating class of 2021 and beyond) only require that you complete 3 elective courses actually IN your "home" academy. You also have to take one Financial Literacy course and one Freshman Academy course.

This means you have plenty of options for a variety of elective courses in any academy. If you are in the Academy of Science and Technology, but you want to take a photography class, and an engineering class, and a music class, GO FOR IT. We are excited about all the opportunities you will have to explore your interests!

One of the coolest parts of the academies is that each one has its own Industry Council. An Industry Council is a group of 15-20 local experts who help write the curriculum with your teachers for your academy elective courses. This helps ensure that what we are teaching is actually relevant to the world today. We "win" by keeping your interest and engagement high, the business leaders "win" by helping us teach the skills they will need when they hire you after you complete your post-graduation goals.

We still have a few logistics to work out (like how many times you can change your academy, and where we will locate the AP and CIS courses), but we are excited to put the final pieces together. We will continue to work together to figure out how it will work best here in Shakopee, and we'll also work to keep everyone as informed as possible. Please feel free to reach out if you have any more questions. I'd be happy to answer anything I can!"