

# Secondary Grading Guidelines

## **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this handbook is to assist educators in making quality decisions about communicating student progress, based on district policy that is supported by current research and best practices. The guideline commits to teacher ownership of the gradebook, but this document will provide schools and staff with a framework for decision-making, strategies for establishing criteria, and guidelines for communicating successfully with parent/guardians across Polk County Public Schools. All decisions regarding establishing grading criteria and communicating student progress should reflect Polk County Public Schools' vision that every Polk student will be college and career ready after graduation.

## **What are the Polk County Public Schools' policies related to grading and reporting student progress?**

Polk County Schools believe that the cooperation of school and home is an essential ingredient to the growth and education of the whole child. We recognize the responsibility to keep parent/guardians informed of a student's well-being and progress in school. We believe that grades must provide clear, useful, and relevant information to students, parent/guardians and the community. Polk County Schools recognize the responsibility for providing a system of grading student achievement that can assist the students, teachers, and parent/guardians appropriately to determine how well the student is achieving the goals of the Florida Standards and Next Generation Sunshine State Standards and District standards.

Polk County Schools believe that the District's grading system should be reliable and one that ensures each student's grades signify accurately his/her degree of accomplishment of those expected learning outcomes that are to be stated for each program at every grade level, kindergarten through 12th grade [F.S. 1003.33]. Polk County Schools directs the establishment of a system to notify parent/guardians of student progress that shall include written reports, parent/guardian conferences with teachers, and shall require all appropriate staff members to comply with such a system as part of their professional responsibility.

## **What is the importance of assessment and grading?**

Teachers engage in continuous assessment of students' understanding and use this information as the basis for planning future instruction. The ultimate purpose of assessment is to determine students' needs and to plan instruction to support students in achieving identified instructional targets. Students who have not been successful on a graded assessment must have the opportunity for additional instruction and reassessment.

Evaluation is the attachment of grades to independently completed student work that is representative of academic performance. Grades are assigned once the instructional material (reflective of grade-level instructional targets) has been taught and sufficiently practiced. Criteria used for grading are clearly articulated to students and high-quality samples are offered as models. The grading system recognizes progress toward achievement of the established Florida Standards, even if additional instruction is required to demonstrate mastery of the standards.

**Note that student work is compared to standards, not to the work of other students.**

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Grading should be fair, consistent, reliable, and comprehensive. All grades should be supported by appropriate documentation (e.g., anecdotal notes, work samples, checklists, portfolios, rubrics).

## What are the underlying principles of the grading system?

### 1. Grades should reflect learning

When a student receives just a few zeros it can prevent that student from achieving academic success. **Based on this rationale, we highly discourage zero as an acceptable score as it most likely does not reflect a student's knowledge of the content.** Deviation of this best practice should be addressed on a case by case basis with your administration with evidence of why the student should receive a 0%. Grades should only reflect academic performance on a standard while behavior should be reflected in the comment section on the report card. The main purpose of grading is to reflect achievement only. **Penalizing behavioral actions should not be reflected in the assigned grade** (Brookhart (2011)). **At the end of the 9 weeks the lowest grade a student should receive is 50%.** The student will have a posted grade of F. Posting a 50% as the lowest possible score at the end of the 9 weeks will state that the student did not meet the learning standards acceptable for the 9 weeks but will still allow a student to pass the course for the semester if their learning demonstrates proficiency in the subsequent 9 weeks.

### 2. Align assessment methods while planning instruction

It is important to establish a match between the means of assessment and grade level appropriate learning experiences once the criteria and targets have been identified. Students are in a better position to respond when the assessment criteria and the means of assessment are shared with them early in the instructional cycle (e.g., utilization of learning targets and success criteria, as well as strongly encouraging the use of rubrics to communicate the levels of performance).

### 3. Provide grade level appropriate instruction and assessment for students

If the grades students receive are to be fair and meaningful, then we must provide high quality instruction and interventions matched to student needs. Learning experiences must be appropriate in content, process, intensity and complexity. Students will occasionally miss deadlines. Students' days are very rigid and are often not set by the student but by parents, coaches and educators. When work is not completed on the due date, lowering the grade each day the work is late is an inappropriate practice due to those conditions (Wormeli 2007). The goal of the task is to reflect mastery of the learning target.

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## **4. Provide each student with ample opportunities to acquire concepts and skill**

Students must have the opportunity to reflect on their own practice with feedback and apply concepts and skills within a supportive context. Students should have multiple opportunities to demonstrate their acquisition of learning targets.

## **How is student progress communicated to the parent/guardian?**

### **1. Conferences**

Conferences between parent/guardians and teachers are encouraged. This one-on-one interaction promotes involvement of both the home and the school, promotes mutual understanding of the student's progress, clarifies the student's strengths and needs, and allows for the exchange of information and ideas needed to strengthen and reinforce student performance. Conferences may be requested by parent/guardians or by teachers.

Please be reminded through federal programs (ESE, ESOL, Title I) and state statutory requirements mandate consistent and frequent communication with the family regarding progress monitoring.

### **2. Interim Reports**

Interim Reports are issued at the midpoint of each grading period for students, grades K-12. A paper or an electronic copy will be provided to parent/guardians.

Effective communication between school and home is a contributing factor to academic success. A positive, productive teacher-parent/guardian relationship contributes to collaborative efforts toward a student's academic achievement.

### **3. Report Cards**

Shall be issued in accordance with the school calendar following the end of each grading period approximately every nine weeks. The dates of distribution are established each year and published on the school calendar.

The purpose of the student Report Card is to formally communicate to parent/guardians their student's performance on the grade-level standards taught during each of the four nine-week grading periods. Parents/guardians should be made aware prior to report cards being distributed if there are concerns.

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## 4. Student/Parent Portal

Secondary students are to receive at least two standards-based grades per course, per week reflecting the proficiency of Florida Standards for that course; each 9 weeks grade should include at least 18 standards-based grades. Grade books are to be updated weekly ensuring timely grade and attendance data is available to students and parents. Deviation of this best practice should be addressed on a case by case basis with your administration. Keeping grades current allows parent/guardian to use the information to assist their children. Grades are intended to inform parent/guardians of students' progress and performance on the Florida Standards and be reflective of multiple opportunities to demonstrate mastery of the standards.

## Grading Scale

- A – Excellent progress of standards 90 – 100
- B – Good progress of standards 80 – 89
- C – Satisfactory progress of standards 70 – 79
- D – Unsatisfactory progress of standards 60 – 69
- F – Failing to meet standards 0\* – 59

\*Please refer back to the best practice regarding zeros above.

## What is Polk County Public Schools' policy regarding homework?

Homework, when carefully designed, implemented and evaluated, is an effective tool for improving understanding, enriching learning, encouraging personal connections, elaborating on information that has been addressed in class to deepen students' knowledge and providing opportunities to pursue special interests (Hattie, 2011).

If the teacher chooses to incorporate homework the activity should be an extension of daily instruction and provide additional independent practice. Homework is not for academic grading purposes. Homework should be designed to maximize the chances that students will complete it. For example, ensure that homework is at the appropriate level of difficulty. Students should be able to complete homework assignments independently with relatively high success rates, but they should still find the assignments challenging enough to be interesting (Marzano and Pickering, 2007). Completion could be reflected in the comment section of the report card.

Homework should help students learn by providing practice in the mastery of skills, experience in data gathering, and integration of knowledge, and an opportunity to remediate learning problems.

Homework should always serve a valid learning purpose and should be used to guide instructional planning; it should never be used as a punitive measure.

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## **Extra Credit and Participation Grades**

Extra Credit and Participation points are not recommended to be entered as a part of a student's academic classroom grade. Extra Credit and Participation grades artificially inflate grades, and in doing so, does not accurately measure what a student knows compared to the standards.

## **How often should grades be entered into the FOCUS Gradebook?**

In accordance with FS 1002.20, each student and his or her parent/guardian must be informed of their child's academic progress. Grades for each subject area should be entered in a timely manner. Two standard based grades a week should be entered to provide an up-to-date account of the student's progress. Deviation of this best practice should be addressed on a case by case basis with your administration. Keeping grades current allows parent/guardian to use the information to assist their children. Grades are intended to inform parent/guardians of students' progress and performance on the Florida Standards and be reflective of multiple opportunities to demonstrate mastery of the standards.

## **What options are provided for students receiving failing grades within the grading period or at the end of the grading period?**

Students who require remediation and reassessment should go through the following process:

The teacher will provide time to re-teach the material in small groups or individually using research-based strategies and then re-assess the student after an appropriate amount of time has been given to practice and learn the skills. Teachers may use formative or summative assessments which may include but are not limited to fewer item assessments, a new task or assignment, and projects or other performance items in order for the student to demonstrate progress towards mastery of the standards. Providing students with the opportunity to complete error analysis to reflect on their learning and improve their understanding towards mastery of the standard and is a powerful tool to improving failing grades within a grading period.

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## **Reteach and Reassess**

1. A teacher shall reteach and retest a class when 40% or more of that class has failed a summative assessment. The teacher shall record the higher of the two grades earned for each student. Reassessment must occur within 10 days of the original assessment.
2. When less than 40% of a class has failed any summative assessment, individual students must be provided the opportunity to make-up or redo the assessment for which the student received a failing grade. As a result of varied student needs this opportunity should be given during the course of the school day. Additional support in this area could be offered after school hours as well but does not replace the school day instructional opportunity. The teacher shall record the higher of the two grades. Before any reassessment occurs, a student shall receive appropriate remediation.
  - a. Re-teaching should employ instructional strategies different from the original instruction.
  - b. Re-testing or re-assessment must include a more rigorous re-teaching exercise; these can include but are not limited to oral examination, additional practice activities, an essay or paper, a report or presentation, revision of a paper, or a formal test.
  - c. Simply making test corrections cannot be a substitute for re-teaching or re-testing.

## **Procedures for grade updates beyond the nine-week period:**

Grade Change occurs when extenuating circumstances necessitate a grade change. Examples may include, among other reasons, students that may have been ill and missed several assignments towards the end of a grading period, students that were absent for several days due to school business, students that are still working on makeup work beyond grade deadlines, teachers with multi-day absences or emergencies at the end of a 9-week grading period. After the student returns to school and/or submits make up work, the subsequent grade would be the grade earned by the student and a Grade Change Form utilized.

Grade Recovery should be offered to students that have not demonstrated satisfactory performance in the class. Unsatisfactory progress may be the result of missing assignments, incomplete assignments, and unsatisfactory progress on assessments, assignments or projects. Upon a student's successful participation in the Grade Recovery Program as demonstrated by 70%-100% on Grade Recovery assignments/assessments, the student's grade should be changed to a 75% C.

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## **How do grading policies relate to ELL students?**

English Language Learners (ELL) are held to the same standards as native English speakers. Nevertheless, no grading policy shall adversely affect an ELL student solely based on English language proficiency. The Florida Consent Decree states that English language instruction and basic subject matter instruction must be (1) understandable to the ELL student given his or her level of English language proficiency, and (2) equal and comparable in amount, scope, sequence and quality to that provided to English proficient students.

## **Considerations when grading ELLs:**

For students earning less than a 70%, teachers must provide evidence of the use of differentiated instruction based on the student's English language proficiency level. Differentiation strategies are to be documented in the teacher lesson plans.

## **Level of English language proficiency**

Grades should reflect the ELL's performance based on a variety of assessment tools including, but not limited to, oral explanations, portfolios and projects.

The grading system for ELL students is the same as for non-ELLs. A variety of appropriate assessments should be used to assign grades.

Grades cannot be negatively impacted based on the lack of English language proficiency nor the use of one single assessment to measure mastery of content.

## **How do grading policies relate to ESE students?**

### **Special Provisions for Students with Disabilities**

Decisions about grading practices for a student with disabilities should mirror the IEP team's decision about whether the student's needs can be accommodated within the general curriculum or whether the student requires a modified curriculum. Grading students with disabilities is no different than grading students in general education. All students should be provided with multiple attempts at mastery.

The Florida Standards are appropriate for all students with disabilities except those students who meet the criteria for an alternate assessment. Effective accommodations must be in place to support involvement of students with disabilities in the general education curriculum.

Accommodations are changes in how the student is taught and tested; they do not change the learning standards for the student but the method for demonstrating mastery of the standard may be adjusted. Accommodations allow the student to participate in and demonstrate mastery of the content of the general curriculum.

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Students with significant cognitive disabilities will use Access Points to enable them to access the general education curriculum at the appropriate levels. Embedded into the Florida Standards, Access Points reflect the core intent of the standards with reduced levels of complexity. The curriculum is modified. Modifications are changes in what the student is taught and tested on and means that the student with a disability is participating in less complex learning standards than those of the general curriculum.

Mastery of the Access Points is measured through the Florida Alternate Assessment.

## **Example:**

- In Florida, the standards options are: Florida Standards or Access Points
- Grading decisions are made with reference to the standards the student is following:
- Students pursuing a standard diploma through 'Florida Standards + accommodations' should earn grades that reflect mastery of the coursework. Students working on Access Point standards will receive modified content and should earn grades that reflect mastery of the coursework, taking into consideration that the standards are being modified to the current achievement level of the student.

## **When and how are parents/guardians notified when their child is failing?**

As established in Section VII of the Polk County Public Schools Student Progression Plan, a failing grade is determined by a grade of F (0-59%). While parent/guardians are notified through the Interim Report and Report Card, additional notification is required when the student's grade falls below a D at any time during the nine-week grading period. Teachers must make every effort to notify parent/guardians of the failing grade and the interventions that will be implemented. This may be accomplished through a conference, a conversation, via email or phone, or a formal written exchange.

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## Grading Weights - Weighting of categories is strongly discouraged

Deviation of this best practice should be addressed on a case by case basis with your administration. Below is an example of how weighing a student's grade too heavily in one area can have on the overall percentage.

Grades Of Equal Point Value	Student A	Student B	Student C
Test	100	70	75
Quiz	90	65	80
Class work	85	90	60
HW	95	50	90
Final Average	93	69	76

Weighted Grades in (%)	Student A	Student B	Student C
Test (10%)	100	70	75
Quiz (10%)	90	65	80
Classwork (70%)	85	90	60
HW (10%)	95	50	90
Final Average	88	82	67

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## What types of learning tasks or assessments should be graded?

Grades are based on multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate achievement of standards. Teachers may derive grades from a variety of sources. A more accurate decision about a student's grade is made when multiple measures of the student's achievement are used. These include but are not limited to:

- *student work samples (e.g., journals, projects, portfolio entries, writing samples)*
- *oral questioning/interviewing/responding*
- *observations*
- *assessments, quizzes*

In selecting an assessment technique, teachers should consider the format which most appropriately measures the standard taught (rubrics, observations, traditional grading methods). Expectations for assignments and projects are clearly outlined for the student, communicated to parent/guardians and are based on the Florida Standards.

Progress monitoring/diagnostic/quarterly assessments such as STAR may not be used for grades. Accelerated Reader is a reading motivation tool and may not be used as an academic grade.

Assignments or activities that are not recommended for grading include:

- *Organization of notebook/log checks (this is more accurately evaluated in the Comments section of the report card).*
- *Homework is not for academic grading purposes.*

## Transfers within the same school

The receiving teacher processes the transfer grade in FOCUS.

1. If a student moves to a regular-level course from a higher weighted level of the same course, 5 points will be added to the student's grade average for Honors weighted course and 10 points for AP/IB weighted courses. For instance, if a student has a 72 in AP English, he/she will be assigned a grade of 82 in a regular-level course of English. If the student has a 72 in Pre-AP Algebra I, then the student will be assigned a 77 in a regular-level course of Algebra I.

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2. It is in the best interest of the student and the responsibility of the campus administration to fairly assess the student's need to be withdrawn, to counsel the student to remain in the course until semester, to seek out tutoring and support for academic success in their course, to promote college and career readiness and to provide an accurate and transparent record to any college. Notification of the student's request will be provided to the parent/guardian. Upon confirmation that the student will be required to stay in the class, the student may appeal the decision to the principal. The student may appeal with permission from the parent/guardian.

## **Transferring into a Pre-AP, Advanced Placement, or Dual Credit Course from a Regular Level Course**

1. If a student is moving into a Pre-Advanced or Advanced Placement course from the regular level of the same course, the transferring average from the regular course will transfer as is. Transfers into a Pre-AP or AP course must be done within the first three calendar weeks of school.

## References

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