



EXCELLENCE FOR ALL

Grading Guidelines

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District Grading Guidelines History

1. On September 20th 1994 the PEP steering committee agreed to 3 options for calculating semester grades:
 - Option 1: Using a point/percentage system
 - Option 2: Using a straight letter grade system (point system A=4, B=3, C=2, D=1, E=0)
 - Option 3: Using a weighted letter grade system (example: C+ 2.6, A+ = 4.0, B- = 2.8)

As a result, many teachers began using the 50% as the lowest recorded E.



District Grading Guidelines History

2. During the 2005-2006 school year, elementary literacy grading guidelines were collaboratively developed between PFT and district administrators. As part of those guidelines, it was established that,
 - “No E grade in Integrate will be lower than 50%.”
 - Failing grades will be recorded as a score between 50% and 59%.
 - Tests that go home to parents will contain the actual grade percentage.
 - Teachers can record “notes” within the Integrate system, making record of the actual student score.
3. Traditionally, teachers have used discretion when assigning failing grades based on individual student circumstances. This practice is highly subjective and inconsistent across the district.
4. On July 5, 1985, the district approved the homework policy stating that if a student fails to complete 80% of his/her homework the grade is lowered by one letter grade.



District Policies

- District Policy 212 and 213:
 - delegates the responsibility to the superintendent, in conjunction with appropriate teaching staff members, to develop procedures for reporting student progress to parents or guardians which...
 - the superintendent shall develop procedures for grading...



Problems inherent within our grading guidelines

- The three option system for calculating semester grades is unequal; the first option weights failing grades more heavily than options 2 and 3.
- As the elementary grading guidelines were revised, inconsistencies in grading K-12 arose.



District Response

- On 9/22/08, the district in collaboration with PFT leadership issued the following memo with rationale:
 - The following is the district requirements for issuing class grades for assignments, report card grades, and semester final grades for all K-12 students based on the below grading scale:
 - A 100%-90%
 - B 89%- 80%
 - C 79%-70%
 - D 69% - 60%
 - E 59%-50%**
 - The “E” is to be recorded no lower than a 50% regardless of the actual percent earned. For example, if the student earns a 20% on a class assignment, the grade is recorded as a 50%.



District Rationale

- **Equity Across Schools:**

- The Failing Percentage (59%-50%) creates consistency across all schools. Many teachers were already using the 50% as the lowest recorded "E".

- **Unequal Weight:**

- The 59 percentage point band from 0%-59% creates a skewing situation with failing grades carrying more weight than passing grades.

- **Not Grade Inflation:**

- Recording 50% as the lowest "E", even if actual percentage earned is less, is not grade inflation. The 50% is still a failing score. Furthermore, a high school student would have to earn 100% on the semester final in order to pass the semester if s/he had a recorded 50% for both the 1st and 2nd nine weeks.

- **Promise Ready:**

- Academically struggling students (who are at greatest risk of retention and/or dropping out) need to feel a possibility of grade recovery so that they are motivated to begin to engage in courses and recognize the potential for academic success when effort is applied.



100 Point Scale		District 4 Point Scale	
A = 90-100%		3.8 - 4.0	4.0 A
B = 80-89%		3.6 A/B option	
C = 70-79%		3.0 - 3.4	3.0 B
D = 60-69%		2.8 B/C option	
E = 0 - 59%		2.0 - 2.6	2.0 C
		1.8 C/D Option	
		1.0 - 1.6	1.0 D
		.8 D/E Option	
			0 E
<div> <div></div> <div>"E" Range</div> <div></div> </div>			
"On a 4 point scale, the percentage system E = 0% is equivalent to a -6."			
<i>Fair Isn't Always Equal: Assessing and Grading in the Differentiated Classroom</i> by Rick Wormeli.			
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Comparison of Two Scales

■ Point System 4-point Scale

Rationale system as each increment between each letter grade is proportionate to the increment between each numerical grade = 1 point

A= 4 points

B= 3 points

C= 2 points

D= 1 point

F= zero

The zero on a four point scale is not the mathematical travesty that it is when applied to the 100-point system.

■ Percentage System 100-point Scale

Use of zero (1) defies logic and mathematical accuracy when averaging scores for final grades because extreme scores skew the average (2) is seldom an accurate reflection of what a student has learned or is able to do (3) no studies support the use of zeros or low grades as effective punishments. Zeros and the low grades they yield more often than not cause students to withdraw from learning.

The interval between numerical and letter grades is typically 10 points 90, 80, 70, 60, 50.

When the zero is applied to a 100-point scale, the interval is not 10 points but 60 points. The use of the zero implies that the work not turned in deserves a penalty that is many times more severe than the assessed work. It is equivalent to a negative 6 on a 4-point scale.

When the interval is 10 points between grades and D is 60 then the mathematically accurate value of E should be 50 points.

Just two or three zeros are sufficient to cause failure for an entire nine week period.

Recording a 50% as the lowest failing grade is mathematically accurate when using the 100-point scale.

Supporting Research

- “Contrast these effective practices with three commonly used grading policies that are so ineffective they can be labeled as toxic. First, the use of zeros for missing work. Despite evidence that grading as punishment does not work (Guskey, 2000) and the mathematical flaw in the use of the zero on a 100-point scale (Reeves, 2004), many teachers routinely maintain this policy in the mistaken belief that it will lead to improved student performance. Defenders of the zero claim that students need to have the consequences for flouting the teacher’s authority and failing to turn in work on time” (Reeves, 2008 Educational Leadership Vol 65 #5)



Supporting Research Cont

- When we record 50% for student zeros in our grade books, we are not giving students something for nothing. We are adjusting the grade intervals so that any averaging we do is mathematically justified and more importantly, that any grade we determine from the pattern of grades is a valid indicator of mastery. A zero has an undeserved and devastating influence, so much so that no matter what the student does, the grade distorts the final grade as a true indicator of mastery. Mathematically and ethically this is unacceptable” (Rick Wormeli, 2006).

Supporting Research Cont.

- The Alliance for Excellent Education estimated that the annual cost of high school failure exceeds \$330 billion (“An Economic Case”, 2007).
- The stakes of grading practices are not limited to student failure. When grading procedures/policies improve, discipline and morale almost always follow (Reeves, 2008).
- Zeros are seldom an accurate description of a student’s achievement and skew the average grades dramatically (Guskey, 2004).
- Instead of promoting greater effort, zeros and the low grades they yield more often cause students to withdraw from learning (Guskey, 2004).



District Next Steps

- As a result of teacher concern voiced to district leadership and PFT leadership, a grading committee was convened on December 3rd to discuss positives of, and challenges to, the 50% E grading procedure.
- Second committee meeting is scheduled for 1/7/09 to discuss possible solutions that take advantage of the positives and minimize the challenges the 50% E grading procedure.
- Homework committee retreat on 1/16/09

Positives

- Possibility of Grade Recovery during the grading period
- Student Engagement, Power structure not punitive, Raise Graduation Rate – AYP
- Accurate picture of learning (referring to skewing of grades with a few low failing grades)
- Correlation of grading scale – PSSA progress
- Zeros are not a good idea for missing work, Consistency
- Validity and objectivity – sets the floor at 50% for failing within a subjective system
- Limited teacher discretion at lower ranges of determining passing and failing
- Compliance assignments decreased and final grade more accurate reflection of required knowledge verses compliance to complete assignments

Challenges

- Frequency of completion of assignments decreases with floor at 50%
- Students shutting down once grade is high enough (picking and choosing)
- Student negative perspective from students who comply and apply consistent effort Perception is that some students are getting something for nothing
- Skewing class rank within classes
- Student choice, game playing, student arrogance, refusal and defiance Increased; Student disruption with refusal to do work
- Teacher workload increased due to “Min” and note recording of actual score increased student defiance, increased parent calls (recording cumbersome)
- Variation in assignments number in determining grades
- Work ethic not increased by 50% “Do something for something”

References

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