

# Consistent Grading Practices FAQ for Parents

**The Pittsford Central School District Grading Philosophy** supports [practices](#) that result in grades that are meaningful, accurate, consistent, and supportive of learning. After several years of providing opportunities for teachers to learn more about the grading philosophy and associated practices, it is time to establish two practices that all teachers are expected to follow, effective September, 2018. These two practices represent a first step in a continuing journey to align grading practices, district-wide, with the Belief Statements in [our Grading Philosophy](#).

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**Here are answers to questions parents might have about the two established practices.**

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## ***What are the agreed upon grading practices to be followed by all middle and high school teachers?***

The two specific practices that have been agreed upon as expected common practice are:

- no grade representing anything lower than a 50% will be calculated into a student's quarterly average
- no extra-credit will be awarded.

## ***How were these decisions made? Who made them?***

The work to develop our Grading Philosophy began three years ago with a comprehensive review of best practices related to grading. Teachers, administrators, and parents engaged in a year-long study that involved reading articles and books, watching and discussing webinars, and bringing back information from conferences. That work led to the development of the Grading Philosophy in July, 2014.

After three full years of providing professional learning related to the PCSD Grading Philosophy, the district conducted a survey of all secondary teachers in the fall of 2017. The results of the survey were analyzed by committees comprised of teachers, administrators, and parents, and the decision was made to move forward with these recommendations. These recommended practices are not dissimilar to practices expected of teachers in similar school districts across the region.

## ***What were the survey findings that led to the decisions about these grading practices?***

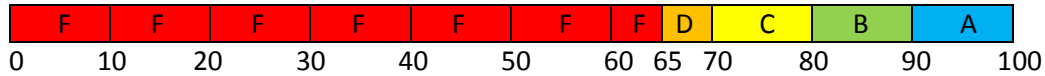
When asked about their level of commitment to the District Grading Philosophy as a whole, a vast majority reported being committed or fully committed to the Philosophy; less than 2% of our teachers expressed opposition to the philosophy.

When asked about specific grading practices, a majority of teachers surveyed agreed that it was no longer an appropriate practice to assign a zero for work not completed rather than requiring the work to be done; 75% agreed that it was time to eliminate the practice of awarding "extra credit" points.

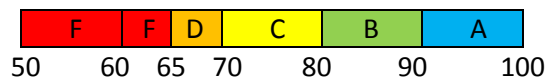
Given the opportunity to share changes they have already made to their own grading practices, many teachers talked about moves they had made to eliminate extra credit and grades below a 50 being calculated into a quarterly grade. When asked for ideas about next steps relative to this work, a significant number of respondents suggested that the district needed to make decisions about certain practices that all teachers would be expected to follow.

### **Why did we decide to not allow any grade below a 50 to be calculated into the quarterly average?**

We believe that [grading practices](#) should be set up to support student motivation to learn. Our intention is to avoid having any one grade on an assignment have a disproportionate impact on the student's grade, while we also acknowledge the need to communicate when a student has failed. Limiting "failing" grades to scores between 50%-64% strikes the balance between communicating a failure while still giving the student the opportunity to recover through continued efforts at learning. Consider the fact that in [the traditional 0 to 100 grading scale](#), there are 64 degrees of failure, compared with 36 degrees of passing:



Our goal is to come closer to a more proportionate grade distribution:



### **Does this mean that teachers are not allowed to enter a "0" into their grade books in Infinite Campus?**

No. A teacher may enter a "0-49%" into their Infinite Campus grade book, but at the end of the marking period, before grades are posted, any "0-49%" in the grade book must be converted to a "50%", excluded from the quarterly grade calculation, or converted to an INC. So, it is possible that you will still see grades between 0-49 in Infinite Campus during the course of a marking period, but these grades will either be adjusted up to a 50 when it is time to calculate the quarterly average, or they will not be included in the quarterly average calculation.

### **What if a student scores below 50% on a midterm or final exam?**

No grade lower than a 50% will be used as part of a student's grade calculation; this includes midterm and final exam scores used for grade calculations. If a student scores lower than a 50% on a midterm or final exam used for grade calculation(s), the score will be adjusted to a 50%. Additionally, a comment must be made that includes the actual score on the exam so that the student, and parents, are provided with that information.

### **If a student has a grade below a 50%, why should a teacher raise that grade to 50%? Isn't that just giving away points?**

Adjusting a failing grade up to 50% is still assigning it a failing grade, but it puts the student in a place where, mathematically, they can recover and therefore are more likely to continue to be motivated to learn and put forth the effort to meet the standards for the course.

### **Has the passing grade for courses changed?**

No, nothing has changed with regards to passing grades. Students need to achieve an overall average of 65% in order to pass a course and receive course credit.

### ***What is the problem with giving students a “0” when they have failed to complete an assignment?***

If a student fails to complete an assignment, our goal is for the student to complete that assignment. The consequence for not doing the work should be to do the work. On a 100- point scale, a 0 can have a devastating effect on a student’s average, serving to de-motivate students to the point where they won’t bother to do the work because failure is inevitable.

### ***What happens if my child simply refuses to do an assignment, or multiple assignments?***

There are many reasons why a student may fail to complete an assignment, or multiple assignments. Refusal to complete work may be a behavioral infraction that should be responded to with a behavioral consequence, not an academic consequence. It may also be appropriate to involve the student’s counselor, or the building Instructional Support Team, for assistance in addressing these issues.

If a student [refuses to do an assignment](#), teachers will use one of the “placeholders” (Missing, Incomplete) in Infinite Campus until the student satisfactorily completes the assignment. If a teacher deems an assignment to be important, it needs to be completed, therefore the consequences for not doing a graded assignment should include [doing](#) the assignment. Teachers will work with their building administrators, if needed, to put into place structures and supports that will facilitate student completion of work.

Students who fail to complete essential assignments for the course will receive an Incomplete (INC) for the quarter grade until they have satisfactorily completed those essential learning tasks. This may result in the student not receiving credit for the course until the Incompletes are taken care of. Teachers, parents, and building administrators should work together with the goal of the student completing the expected work.

### ***Why was the decision made to not allow extra-credit?***

We believe that grades should accurately communicate to students and parents the child’s [progress toward learning standards](#). Extra-credit not only inflates grades, but results in grades which are no longer exclusively reflective of progress toward learning standards.

### ***How are you defining extra-credit?***

Extra-credit would be defined as points awarded to a student for doing things that are either not directly related to the learning standards being assessed, or which reflect opportunities that not all students are expected, or are able, to complete. This would include things like being given extra points in the grade book for bringing in boxes of tissues, attending an after school club or activity, bringing in canned goods for a food drive, or doing an extra assignment for the purpose of raising their grade.

### ***Does this mean my child is not able to do additional work in an effort to get a better grade?***

Many teachers have a practice of allowing students to re-do part of an assessment or an assignment if, on the first attempt, the student struggled or was not able to demonstrate a solid grasp of the information. Typically, in these situations, the student is expected to demonstrate that they have done additional learning related to the objective of the task in order to qualify for the opportunity for a re-do. The goal is for students to learn more, and then have another opportunity to demonstrate that learning. This is different from a student who asks to do a separate and different task from what the rest of the class is doing for the purpose of raising their grade.

***How will teachers communicate learning behaviors to students, parents, and other stakeholders?***

As always, teachers are expected to communicate with students and parents about learning behaviors that may be positively contributing to, or interfering with, a student's academic success. Communication tools include, but are not limited to, phone calls, emails, conferences, and comments posted in Infinite Campus or on the report card.

***Who do I talk to if I have additional questions or need any clarification?***

For additional questions or clarification, please talk with your child's building principal.