

Subject: Secondary Grading Practices

To: School Board Directors
Dr. Aramaki, Superintendent

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From: Tom Duenwald, Director of Educational Technology & Assessment
Aaron Miller, Chief of Schools
William Jackson, Director of Teaching and Learning
Keith Onstot, Technology Integration Developer
Grading Practices Leadership Team

Revising Grading Practices in Bellevue Schools: A Comprehensive Overview

Summary of the 2025 Revision Process

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Introduction

In the 2024-25 school year, Bellevue School District launched a comprehensive revision of grading practices to ensure fairness, consistency, and alignment with modern educational principles. We developed practices that support our belief that grades should be equitable, transparent, and accurately reflect student learning. This summary outlines the core steps of the revision process.

Key Practices Guiding the Revision

The revision process has focused on the development of four key grading practices. These practices

align with the Danielson 2022 evaluation framework and provide guidance for educators to align common practices in service to students and families.

We plan to share and engage in professional learning on the first three practices starting with the 2025-26 school year. This will serve as an adoption and training year in tandem with adoption of the new Danielson framework, which contains shifts in the areas of assessment and grading. We recognize that this year will serve to additionally clarify our practices, work through challenges with implementation, and provide support to educators in the form of time and training. Collaborating with colleagues, educators will work towards thoughtful implementation of grading practices that serve students and are feasible for educators. The first three practices will be a living plan shaped by students, educators, and families as we enter the adoption and training process. Schools will be encouraged to make thoughtful implementation of grading practices a priority in professional learning and collaboration next year.

The fourth practice will be studied further as we gain additional stakeholder feedback for refinement prior to an implementation and training year. We do not plan to make any changes in the 2025-26 school year to grading scales available to staff. We encourage staff to consider experimenting with a rubric 0-4 system during 2025-26, especially as it mitigates the disproportionate impact of zeros.

These practices are:

1. **Standards-Aligned Assessments:** All assessments are tied to core knowledge and skills, ensuring grades reflect mastery of essential content.
2. **Grades Reflect Evidence of Learning:** Grades are based solely on demonstrated learning, excluding behaviors, attendance, and subjective factors.
3. **Multiple Modes and Opportunities to Demonstrate Learning:** Students are provided with varied ways to demonstrate proficiency, such as projects, presentations, and tests.
4. **Mathematically Sound Grading Scale:** A 0-4 grading scale is proposed for future implementation to reduce the disproportionate impact of low scores and better reflect student achievement.

Steps in the Revision of Previous Grading Guidance

During 2023-24, Aaron Miller led an effort to codify recommended grading practices that had been shared with all BSD educators starting in Fall 2020. Miller's effort involved gathering input from multiple student focus groups about current and proposed shifts, as well as reviewing the work of previous BSD grading teams from 2020-2022.

Building on Miller's work, at the start of the 2024-25 school year, a presentation and document regarding proposed grading shifts was shared with secondary schools. This generated a significant volume of questions and concerns from classroom educators. A grading team, including middle and high school principals, curriculum developers, ITCLs, and MLL and Special Education staff, was assembled to review the educator questions and determine appropriate next steps. In alignment with other districts who have made significant shifts to grading practices, such as Renton and Federal Way, the committee determined that a comprehensive grading practices handbook would be needed to address shared questions, boundaries, and expectations of these practices from various stakeholder groups.

Research and Stakeholder Engagement

Since 2016, revisions to BSD secondary grading practices have involved extensive research and consultation. Members of district teams, including secondary staff in a variety of roles, parents, and students, reviewed best practices from educational literature, including works by Guskey, Marzano, and Wormeli, as well as guidance from Washington’s Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and the work of nearby districts. Since 2020, grading committees comprised of district leaders, teachers, and community members have developed principles and identified best practices. Input was gathered through parent, student, and staff surveys and focus groups throughout this process.

Below is a timeline of major events in 2024-25:

1. August and September of 2024- Presentation shared with each secondary school on the six grading practices developed from earlier committee work.
2. Fall 2024 - Educators submitted numerous questions and concerns based on the guidance presented, asking for more clarity on these practices prior to implementation.
3. Fall of 2024 - A committee was formed to address these questions and develop more comprehensive guidance.
4. Winter/Spring 2024/25- Revisions to the grading practices based on educator questions and concerns centered around:
 - a. Boundaries around accepting late work
 - b. Boundaries around retakes and re-assessment opportunities
 - c. Concerns around the meaning of equal interval grading scales, including the implications of a “50% floor” for staff and students
 - d. Educator autonomy
 - e. Clarification of how the practices apply in specific content areas, including Performing Arts, CTE, and PE.
5. Spring 2025 - Committee members began sharing and gathering feedback on drafts of the grading practices handbook through Meet and Confer (BEA), Cabinet Leadership, Building Leaders (secondary school principals and assistant principals), Building Leadership Teams, Department Chairs, leadership classes at a few schools, and student focus groups. These meetings were instrumental in gathering additional feedback to continue revising the handbook.
6. Spring 2025- The grading practices team determined there is enough clarity around practices 1-3 to begin broader sharing and engagement. The language in the handbook around these practices provides substantial educator autonomy balanced with some consistency for students and families. The committee determined that the fourth practice (implementing a mathematically sound grading scale) needs additional stakeholder input and study prior to implementation.

When engaging with students on grading practices this year, we recognized that achieving equitable access in education means challenging the status quo, and that kind of shift takes time, reflection, and adjustment (not just for educators, but for students as well). Honoring all our students requires intentionally centering the voices of those who are most marginalized and underserved by our current system. In gathering initial feedback, we realized that voices of students already thriving academically, though important, often dominated the conversation. This prompted us to lean into the Equitable Decision-Making process, ensuring that the needs and perspectives of students historically

left behind were not only included, but prioritized.

We believe that by making our grading systems more consistent, clear, and inclusive, all students—not just some—will benefit. All students will see the benefit of continuing to strive to meet a high academic standard when we:

1. Do not punish early mistakes
2. Make the impact of missing work proportional, increasing motivation to persist
3. Provide clear incentives to keep learning
4. Provide enough consistency so students are not navigating seven highly distinct grading systems in their seven daily classes.

Major Changes in Grading Practices from Previous Years

At the start of the school year, six practices were shared with educators. After feedback from educators, these practices were consolidated into the current four. A major shift occurred in a practice outlining a mathematically sound grading scale. The original document presented two paths to addressing the disproportionate impact of the zero grade in a traditional 0-100 scale: implementing a “50% floor” (using a 50% minimum score) or adopting a 0-4 rubric scale where a zero is proportional to other scores. A substantial portion of stakeholders felt strongly that using a 50% minimum score is similar to awarding points for no evidence of learning, and thus communicates a negative message to students. As a result, the use of a 50% floor was removed from the grading practices in favor of proposing that all educators use a common 0-4 grade scale.

Notable Features of the Revised Grading Practices

Accommodations and Modifications

The new practices include clear guidance for grading students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and English Language Learners (ELLs). These include distinctions between students with accommodations (adjustments to how students access learning without altering standards), and modifications (which adjust the standards themselves to meet students’ needs). Examples include extended time for assessments, alternative formats, and differentiated rubrics.

Reassessments and Retakes

In practice three, students are given multiple opportunities to demonstrate proficiency through reassessments. Teachers can offer alternative formats for reassessments to target specific skills or standards, ensuring fairness and reducing the impact of initial low scores. Teachers can implement boundaries on when reassessment opportunities can be granted.

Late Work

Through practice two, late work policies are restructured to honor evidence of learning over deadlines. Teachers are encouraged to set reasonable deadlines while avoiding penalties for lateness. Strategies to promote punctuality that do not impact grades include asking students to complete in-class reflections on incomplete work and prioritizing the grading of on-time submissions (grading on-time work before grading late work).

Current Draft of Our Grading Practices Handbook

The 2025 Grading Practices Handbook for the Bellevue School District reflects a commitment to fairness, equity, and consistency, with a focus on student growth and achievement. By aligning grades to learning standards and emphasizing evidence over behavior, we are creating a system that supports all students in achieving their potential. Continued professional learning opportunities will support educators in deepening understanding of these grading practices. The ongoing collaboration between educators, families, and students ensures that these practices will continue to evolve and improve. Please see the current draft of our grading practices handbook here:

[BSD Secondary Grading Practices Handbook as of 5.30.25.pdf](#)