Background and Rationale

During the period of physical school closures and similar disruptions resulting from the COVID-19 Coronavirus Pandemic, Local Education Agencies (LEAs) will continue to provide educational opportunities for students through distance learning. The Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) provides this document as guidance regarding grading practices during this time. The information provided below is aligned with the recommendations established by the California Department of Education and the modifications to college admission criteria established by the California State University and University of California system in response to this global pandemic.

Grading Policies

Generally, grades are a calculation used to represent student achievement within a learning environment that manifests itself differently in different schools and districts. The current national crisis requires that we modify learning to its most essential objectives. We are in this unprecedented situation, we cannot expect that student learning can continue in the same exact way that it happens within the physical classroom space.

While the assignment of grades and credits is a local determination made in consultation with teachers, local educators will need to determine the way grades can, or will, be determined to illustrate overall performance during the time of physical school closures. The teacher of record maintains the authority to assign course grades; however, local district and board policies are used to define the grading parameters.

LEAs should seek to implement policies that: 1) act without negative consequences for students, including graduating seniors; 2) protect students' post-secondary aspirations; and (3) recognize there may not be equitable access to educational opportunities for all students.

The information provided below is in part based on the California Department of Education (CDE) mandate of “do no harm”, and is intended as both emergency and temporary.

How should Final Marks for the current term be determined?

- The information in the table below provides a variety of options and considerations for LEAs to review as they locally develop grading policies to be implemented during the period of emergency school closure.

- No matter the final policy determination, students at the secondary level should be provided the choice to request to take a course for a letter grade. This flexibility accounts for the variability of student preference as well as their post-secondary educational choices.
  - A process is to be developed and clearly communicated as to how students will be able to opt-in for a letter grade; including a cut-off date for selecting this option.
  - All opt-in selections are to be clearly documented in the student’s cumulative file and/or electronic student record.
Can Students Petition (Challenge) a Grade?

If a student believes that they have received incorrect marks, students can petition for a review of records. Procedures and timelines for petitioning grades should be clearly articulated to all students and families.

Transcript Footnotes

All high school transcripts for the 2019-20 school year should note that an emergency distance learning protocol was used for Winter-Spring-Summer 2020 semesters.

What about Grade Point Averaged (GPAs)?

Impact on GPA and admission to California Colleges: On April 2, 2020, the University of California (UC), California State University (CSU), the California Community College system, and the Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities announced they will accept Credit/No Credit (or Pass/No Pass) marks in lieu of letter grades for all courses. This includes A–G courses completed in winter/spring/summer terms 2020 for all students. Marks of Credit/No Credit (or Pass/No Pass) will not affect the UC or CSU calculations of GPA for future applicants. (https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/he/hn/gradegraduationfaq.asp).

Impact on internal awards and recognitions: Winter-Spring-Summer 2020 grades should not be included in the overall internal transcript calculations for internal awards and recognitions.
Appendix A: Final Grading Policy Considerations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Final Grading Options</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
<th>Additional Considerations</th>
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<td>Pass/No Pass Grading- High School</td>
<td>The Pass/No Pass grading system is an alternative to a letter grade. The system is not common in high schools and is more often used at the college level. Students who receive a &quot;C&quot; or higher grade typically will pass the course under this system, while those who receive a &quot;D&quot; or &quot;F&quot; will not pass. Pass / No Pass is usually not calculated into a student's grade point average. Some districts allow parents to elect for a Pass / No Pass grade for courses taken in the special education program and courses taken beyond a six period day that are not required for graduation. Courses for which Pass/No Pass grades are issued should be excluded from Grade Point Average (GPA) calculations.</td>
<td>Students will be more motivated to try engaging in remote learning without the added pressure of worrying about a letter grade. Proponents argue that students experience a less stressful learning environment. The same may be true for teachers transitioning to a new teaching system. Note: For the Winter, Spring and Summer 2020 terms, California colleges &amp; universities have agreed to accept a &quot;Pass&quot; grade in A-G courses as satisfying entrance requirements.</td>
<td>Critics of Pass/No Pass grades argue that it lowers expectations and does not fit into a grade point system. Opponents also believe does not provide students and parents with accurate feedback on learning. Letter grades are often used as a prerequisite for placement in certain courses; LEAs would need an alternative method for placement in future courses. Such general marks on a transcript might also be taken less seriously by college admission offices and employers. There are also GPA considerations that will impact students including local and university scholarships including a California Student Aid Commission (CSAC) GPA for Cal Grant consideration.</td>
<td>How will Pass / No Pass grades impact a student's grade point average? How will Pass / No Pass grades impact college acceptance in a competitive environment? How will colleges (outside California) make decisions on college admissions? How will financial aid be impacted in a competitive environment? It is important to design policies which allow secondary students the choice to opt-in to a traditional grading option. AP/Honors course grades often offer a &quot;bump&quot; in GPA, how will this be considered?</td>
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<td>Pass / No Pass Grading - Elementary and Middle School</td>
<td>Defined as above</td>
<td>Defined above</td>
<td>Letter grades are often used at the elementary and middle school levels for placement in honors courses. School staff would need an alternative method for advance placement.</td>
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<td>Credit / No Credit</td>
<td>Credit / No Credit mimics Pass / No Pass in a number of ways with one major exception. Credit can be earned for academic performance that would traditionally earn a &quot;D&quot; grade. A ‘Credit’ mark means that students have met a minimum threshold for demonstrating content acquisition.</td>
<td>See Pass/No Pass grading option above</td>
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<td>See Pass/No Pass grading option above</td>
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**Under what circumstances would a student get a "No Pass" or "No Credit" mark?** A "No Pass" or "No Credit" mark means that a student has not demonstrated content matter acquisition, and they meet the criteria listed below.

A student might receive a "No Credit" or "No Pass" mark if staff can make an evidence-based determination that a lack of effort is not the result of external, COVID-19 related circumstances outside of the student/family's control. The factors listed below should be utilized in each individual case where a student has been assigned a "No Credit" mark. A student must meet ALL of the criteria listed below with a "NO" in order to earn a "No Credit" mark.

- Was the student passing at the time of school dismissal?
- Has the student participated in learning sessions including synchronous, asynchronous and/or other alternative forms of instruction?
- Does the student have external circumstances compromising the student's ability to complete their course content?
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<td>Traditional Letter Grading - High School</td>
<td>Students earn A - F grades (or whatever aligns to the LEAs current grading scale) A = 100-90 - Mastery of Standards B = 80-89 - Proficient C = 70-79 - Meets Standard D = 60-69 - Below Basic Understanding F = 0-59 - Failed Course</td>
<td>Students, parents, and teachers are most familiar with letter grades which are universally understandable. Colleges and employers often use letter grades to assess student academic achievement. Letter grades are directly tied to UC/CSU completion*. Letter grades are used to calculate GPAs.</td>
<td>Letter grades group students into bands of performance not equally distributed across a 100 point scale. The scale is often subjective. Teachers’ requirements vary, so a student is performing well (demonstrating learning as standard), but not completing particular assignments, may earn a lower grade.</td>
<td>*See revised college admissions requirements: - <a href="https://www.cde.ca.gov/hs/hn/documents/ucadmissionsco">https://www.cde.ca.gov/hs/hn/documents/ucadmissionsco</a> vid19.pdf See CSU Information - <a href="https://www.cde.ca.gov/hs/hn/documents/csuadmissionco">https://www.cde.ca.gov/hs/hn/documents/csuadmissionco</a> vid18impact.pdf</td>
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<tr>
<td>Traditional Letter Grading - Elementary and Middle School</td>
<td>Same as above. Elementary grade reports may be a hybrid of traditional grades and rubric scores for more discrete academic skills such as reading, writing, comprehension, etc.</td>
<td>For middle school students, this strategy seems to be most consistent with high school letter grades so it adds a continuity factor. For elementary students it would seem that keeping the current letter/number grading system has the most validity because the teacher is with his/her entire class during the day and knows them best.</td>
<td>Letter grades can sometimes include non-academic information such as behavior, attendance, participation and this can skew the actual student performance if not used in conjunction with other measures such as benchmarks and tests.</td>
<td>Is there a feasible way to ensure grades are based on content mastery and skill attainment? To what extent are grade books congruent in what students’ letter grades are based on and how might we decrease the variance? (ex. a report is worth 25% of grade in one 7th grade teacher’s class and a report is worth 50% in another 7th grade teacher’s class in the same dept. same school)</td>
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<td>Issuing &quot;Incomplete&quot; marks at the end of a semester course.</td>
<td>An Incomplete is most often given only when a student does not finish the course due to illness or absence. District guidelines are found in BP/AR 5121. Students are often required to complete the course within the following semester. Courses not completed within the following semester result in an “F” for the course.</td>
<td>This strategy protects students not able to access distance learning or independent study offerings. Lack of access can be due to a number of issues including lack of access to a digital device, internet service, or other necessary resources.</td>
<td>This can be a costly and time intensive consideration for teachers, students, and families. It would require teachers to continue a new school year while continuing to provide support and resources to the previous school year students. Class of 2020 students planning to attend a post secondary will need their incomplete grades addressed before a final transcript is given which will require summer enrichment. Currently there are no additional funding allocated to LEA for summer enrichment/distance learning.</td>
<td>Districts must consider if school closures qualify as a situation to issue Incomplete grade marks. Districts also must consider how to issue a future grade if the student transfers to another school or the teacher issuing the grade is no longer at the school? Note on partial credit - Every school must issue/accept partial credits for Foster Youth. Once assigned an Incomplete, the student should be given a defined period of instruction (after the start of Fall 2020) to complete work. A No Credit will replace the “I” if work is not completed within the makeup time.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use Current Grades</td>
<td>Assign a final grades based on a student's third quarter grades or the grades when school closure took place.</td>
<td>Levels the playing field in a sense that it makes it uniform across the board that all students receive this. The challenges faced by students in the transition to a distance learning environment will not affect their grade.</td>
<td>Inaccurate because some students might currently have Fs or Ds with work pending such as a project or teacher uploading grades into gradebook. There is no evaluation of the content covered in the last term of the year. What will be the incentive for students to participate in the distance learning program?</td>
<td>Will teachers accept make up work through this closing school date? Will students that have a D/F grade be given an opportunity to raise their grade? How will content for semester sequential courses including math and world language be taught to student who will move on to the next course level? Districts will need to make a decision if the grade will be annotated as a partial semester grade if the curriculum for the course is not completed. For example, will an &quot;asterisk&quot; be added to the grade report or not? If students do not complete or partial complete their independent student plan what will be the final grade assigned (latest current grade, incomplete, etc.)?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hold Harmless Grading or Opt in Independent Study</td>
<td>Hold harmless grading is a concept whereby a student not participating in distance learning will maintain her/his current grade in the course at the time of the school closure. It allows students to complete the final quarter/term in an independent studies program. If the course is not continued in an independent study manner, the student will be issued the grade at the time of school closure.</td>
<td>This strategy protects students not able to access distance learning or independent study offerings. Lack of access can be due to a number of issues including lack of access to a digital device, internet service, or in the case of independent study, other necessary resources.</td>
<td>The need for adequate record keeping and communication to students is heightened. The LEA should consider adding a designation to the grade report indicating that the course was not completed. The school will need to determine how to provide the opportunity to complete the missed term of work/credits.</td>
<td>LEAs need to consider how &quot;current&quot; grades will be captured and work to ensure that all student work is accurately entered into teacher grade books. Develop processes to ensure students with failing grades at the time of closure are provided opportunities for make up/remediation. Policies should ensure 12th graders are provided any available flexibility in meeting graduation requirements.</td>
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</table>
Appendix B: Sources

California Department of Education:
- FAQs on Grading and Graduation: [https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/he/hn/gradegraduationfaq.asp](https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/he/hn/gradegraduationfaq.asp)
- Joint statement between the colleges, universities, State Board of Education and the Department of Education

University of California (UC) The University of California’s Response to COVID-19: Admissions and Financial Aid(PDF)

California State University (CSU) COVID-19 Interim Impacts on CSU Undergraduate Admissions Policies and Practices(PDF)

Community College letter Temporary Suspension of Various Specified Grade-Related Regulations to Address the Continuity of Education in Community Colleges During the COVID-19 Declared State of Emergency (PDF)

Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities (AICCU) AICCU Institution Activities to Serve High School Juniors and Seniors(PDF)


Riverside County Office of Education (RCOE): Thank you to our colleagues at RCOE; Appendix A is based in part on the document RCOE ILN Grading Practices Considerations 2020