

## **High School Grading Overview 2020-2021 School Year**

### **Overview**

For the past four years school and central office staff have deepened our work around Race and Equity. As part of these conversations, the practice of grading always surfaces at the secondary level. In some cases, our grading practices are entrenched in old beliefs and ways of working. We want our grading systems to reflect our values and beliefs about learning, reflecting a growth mindset and a school culture that is positive, motivating and rigorous. We want to be responsive to student needs and actually provide teaching and learning environments that support deeper learning. Many of our teachers already do this and have to work around our current system to provide high quality grading and feedback to students. We want our focus to be about student learning and not just about assigning grades.

Over this time, we have also been working to shift our approach to grading by developing a set of foundational guiding principles. Our initial learning was influenced by our work with the University of Chicago's Network for College Success on 9th Grade On-Track data. Info about this can be found at (<https://ncs.uchicago.edu/page/equity-stance>). We are not just working with teachers about how to evaluate student work, but we are also discussing how grades are calculated and how student performance in class is considered. This has occurred through professional development for staff and ongoing teacher collaboration. We will continue the learning and shifts this year, beginning with Welcome Back days. Our long term goal is to transition our high schools to full standards based grading and reporting.

### **Current Context**

As Joe Feldman notes in his 2017 article, “discussions about grading, like all conversations about equity, are hard, emotional, and confusing. But our grading practices exert enormous influence on how our students learn, especially those who have been historically underserved.” For over six years, our district has been in the process of critically examining our traditional grading system and how it thwarts effective and equitable teaching and learning. Our traditional grading practices are an antiquated artifact of the Industrial Revolution grounded in several beliefs that we now find outdated and problematic. Namely, that only a subset of students are capable of meeting academic standards, that the role of schools is to sort students, and that extrinsic motivation is the most effective means for influencing learning behaviors. This past year a team of staff and administrators representing each of our comprehensive high schools and central office have collaboratively developed an ambitious new vision for grading in MMSD's high schools. Our three-year plan acknowledges that meaningful change takes time, but also that the change must begin now. It is grounded in key shared beliefs about how grading for equity supports high quality teaching and learning.

### **Key Beliefs**

- Grades reflect daily teaching and learning
- Grades are a communication and feedback tool for students and families
- Grades must be consistent, accurate, and transparent reflections of our students' progress towards mastery of standards and skills
- Grading practices should support our district vision that learning is a process; effective grading includes providing multiple opportunities for our students to learn and demonstrate their knowledge while building growth mindset

### **Grading Shifts for the 2020-2021 School Year**

The high school grading team, which includes membership from CO and representatives from each of the 4 comprehensive high schools have come to consensus on three major grading shifts described below to be

implemented during the 2020-2021 school year. These shifts will be supported through technical changes to our grading system at the district level, as well as school-based training and support for teachers that address mindset shifts as well as the technical aspects of these changes. District and school teams will also be proactively planning for and piloting future innovations throughout this year.

### Semester Based Grading

Previously, a student's semester 1 grade was calculated as follows:

$$(\text{Quarter 1 Grade} \times 45\%) + (\text{Quarter 2 Grade} \times 45\%) + (\text{Final Exam Grade} \times 10\%) = \text{Semester 1 Grade}$$

This will no longer be the case. Semester grades will now be a rolling grade in which all assignments are attached to the semester, rather than a quarter. This shift aligns with our belief that learning is a process that takes a different amount of time for different students. It acknowledges that the learning that takes place during the first half of a semester is not necessarily of exactly equal value to that from the second half and gives teachers and students time to provide and take advantage of multiple opportunities to show mastery of the most important learning in the course.

Importantly, students and families will still get multiple reports on how the student is doing throughout the semester in the form of three progress grade reports that will be shared at approximately weeks 4, 9, and 13 of each semester.

### Consistent Gradebook Categories

The way that we grade student work should reflect our commitment to equity and excellence. Currently there are 100s of different gradebook setups in our student information system. This leads to major inconsistencies in how grades are calculated, makes it difficult for students and families to understand how grades are determined as they navigate many different gradebook setups, and we have found that there are numerous examples each year of gradebooks that are set up incorrectly so that grades were not calculating as the teacher intended. In order for grades to be calculated consistently and accurately, and to ensure transparency with students and families, we have decided to create consistent gradebook categories and weights for all courses. As we believe that grades should represent what students know and are able to do rather than the privileges available to them in their families and communities, we have decided to move to standard gradebooks that are set up with the following two categories that more heavily emphasize summative assessments:

1. The Summative Category will be weighted as 70% of the semester grade and house the results of assessment *of* learning. Summative assessment is best viewed as an evaluation of student mastery of standards and skills at the end of a specific instructional period.
2. The Formative Category will be weighted as 30% of the semester grade and house the results of assessment *for* learning. The primary purpose of formative assessment is to inform instruction and daily learning by providing feedback, updates on movement toward mastery of standards and skills, and the opportunity to improve upon learning by students.

There will be a consistent process in each building for a department or course team to petition for a different setup. These will be granted only if the team can demonstrate that the requested setup moves their grading further in our quest toward equitable grading to a degree that outweighs what will be lost in consistency.

### Equal Interval Grading

Our traditional high school grading scale uses a 100-point scale that is translated into letter grades (see below). While there are many problematic aspects of this scale, the mathematical problem, namely that it is disproportionately weighted toward failure, is of primary concern as it sends the message that failure is more likely than success. In fact, almost two-thirds of our current grading scale is dedicated to describing shades of

failure. This seems wrong, but its real harm occurs when the 100-point percentage scale is applied to assignments across a term. It can become nearly or literally impossible for a student to overcome low grades, decreasing motivation and engagement, as well as harming student teacher relationships. In order to correct the traditional grading scale's disproportionality toward failure, we are going to set a minimum F score of 50% to make the gradation of the letter scale more proportionate.

Traditional Grading Scale

Grade	Percent	Total possible points
A	90-100	11 pts
B	80-89	10 pts
C	70-79	10 pts
D	60-69	10 pts
F	0-59	<b>59 pts</b>

Equal Interval Grading Scale

Grade	Percent	Total possible points
A	90-100	11 pts
B	80-89	10 pts
C	70-79	10 pts
D	60-69	10 pts
F	50-59	<b>10 pts</b>