



## **RATIONALE FOR GRADING CHANGES DURING COVID-19**

### **Disruption of Calendar Year**

Our original 2019-2020 calendar had 85 student learning days in Semester II. However, only 33 of those 85 were normal learning days. When Governor Walz' Executive Order 20.02 closed all Minnesota public schools from March 18-27 to effectively prepare and make appropriate adaptations to deliver Distance Learning, 10 student learning days were removed. This left us with 41 Distance Learning days March 30 through May 29.

- Quarter 3 Regular Learning: 33 days
- Spring Break: 5 days
- COVID-19 Planning: 10 days
- Distance Learning: 41 days

Due to the calendar disruption and not being able to complete Quarter 3, we were not able to regularly calculate midterm grades.

### **Rationale for Pass/Not Proficient**

Along with disrupting our calendar and schedule, this pandemic has also disrupted our learning environment and our personal lives. Due to these circumstances, experts have concluded that letter grades may not accurately measure what a student has learned and achieved. Grading during a pandemic could actually be measuring:

- A student's response to stress.
- The level at which COVID-19 has impacted a student's life directly.
- Access to resources, time, and a learning schedule.
- Level of academic support provided by family
- Level of academic support provided by teacher

After examining educational research and consulting with expert practitioners, MDE, and other school districts, we have concluded that we cannot ensure that letter grades will accurately and solely reflect student learning. This pandemic has impacted students' social, emotional, and behavioral lives in addition to their academic lives. Therefore, we can't determine with certainty that a grade has not been impacted by the current pandemic.

MDE has provided additional input for districts to remember when making plans and decisions related to Distance Learning:

- Many educators are not trained in online instruction and assessment, and they will be

building entirely new systems as they make this transition. Educators will need guidance and time from district and institutional leaders.

- Many students will be facing new environment distractions, and many will not have access to the same tools as their peers. There are public and private programs that help students gain access to technology, but these will not completely solve the technology-divide during distance learning
- Both students and educators could potentially become ill, or they could become the primary caretaker for a loved one who contracts the virus.
- Academic dishonesty may show up in new ways in online learning, and educators need the tools to respond if this happens.

### **Choice and Equity**

This pandemic has impacted each of us differently. We are grateful that Governor Walz and MDE have focused on issues of equity and directed schools to *Ensure that every student in the state of Minnesota received an equitable education and has equal access to learning and instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic.* As it relates to grading, we believe that it is only equitable to provide each student with the option to choose what is best for them due to their own individual situation. Each student has the option to choose letter grades and GPA calculation instead of the default Pass/No Pass grading mark.

### **Pass/Not Proficient and Post-Secondary Admission**

Conversations with colleges and universities across the region and out-state have shared that the decision to receive Pass/Not Proficient grading marks will not have any negative effect on student admission status. Transcripts will include information so that it is documented that a student received a Pass (P) or Not Proficient (X) during this pandemic.

### **Skyward, Report Card, Transcript Documentation of Distance Learning Grading:**

Per MDE the following will be documented on report cards and transcripts:

*Grades that are documented during the time period of March 16 through June 30 of 2020 reflect the distance learning period resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Future use of these grades for academic placement, admission, acceleration, or remediation is discouraged and should only be used with caution after balancing the information against student performance in other grading periods.*

## MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (MDE) GUIDELINES

### **Addressing Retention:**

MDE strongly recommends that schools and districts not retain students in their current grade levels for next school year due to distance learning and interruptions in some students' education as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and distance learning. Instead, districts should develop systems for students who might have been retained to make up content at the conclusion of distance learning. At the conclusion of distance learning, one or more of the following strategies might be considered by districts to support students who were in danger of being retained:

- Provide students with counseling to re engage them and get them going in the right direction.
- Provide alternative or extended learning opportunities for students to attend and make improvements in the areas in which they struggle.
- Place students on individual plans of study that include objectives, actions the students must take, and supports. A plan of study provides a student with specific objectives that they must meet over the course of the plan. It also provides assistance and increased accountability for a student.

**Even though the Grading Considerations and Grading Options include a thorough list of considerations and options, it is our recommendation that a student should not be reported as a failure and retained or given an F during this unprecedented situation.** Districts and schools should consider reporting an "in progress" for students who have not demonstrated mastery, and give students additional time during and after distance learning to demonstrate mastery and complete content.

**New reporting and assessment models must provide choice for educators, students, and guardians while also realizing that all choices are not equal and all choices come with consequences.**

Guardians, students, and educators must be given choices in reporting and assessment. The system must set clear deadlines for making choices, and students and guardians must understand the consequences of each choice. In addition, a student may want to choose an A-F grading scheme but may be unable to make that choice because of situational factors. Systems must have the flexibility to adapt to future changes requested by students.

**New assessment models must consider the unique needs of special classes of students, for example students in special education, students on 504 plans, English language learners, and students in career and technical programs.**

Students on IEPs may have goals tied to achieving specific grades. The same can be true for other protected classes of students. In addition, students in career and technical programs that follow a strict linear course path may have unique grading needs. Again, an equity-mindset and flexibility will help decision-makers account for these realities in their new systems.

**All stakeholders must be part of the planning process.**

School districts and institutions must include all voices in the creation of any new assessment and grading system. This will help decision-makers design a more equitable system. Parents, community leaders, educators, students, and leadership should all have equal input in the creation of any new grading and assessment system.

**QUESTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS TO ENSURE EQUITY FOR ALL**

Who are the racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and other marginalized groups that are affected by the distance learning plan? What are the potential impacts of these groups?

Does the distance learning plan ignore or worsen existing disparities or produce other unintended consequences? Who does the distance learning plan benefit?

How have intentionally involved stakeholders who are also members of the communities affected by the distance learning plan? How have stakeholders and community members validated or invalidated our conclusions to questions 1 and 2?

List all the potential barriers (structural, human, financial, community, etc.) to more equitable outcomes related to the distance learning plan.

How will we mitigate the negative impacts and address barriers identified above?

Once the distance learning plan has been implemented, how will we gather and use the input from those impacted?

What qualitative and quantitative evidence will we gather and analyze to determine the effects of the distance learning plan?