

# Memo

To: Michael Green  
From: John Shoup  
CC: School Board members  
Date: 2/04/2013  
Re: Grading Policy

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You had asked me to prepare some materials for you in preparation of the school boards discussion regarding our high schools grading practices. I am hopeful you will find this information helpful as we discuss this very complicated issue.

First, I would like to give you an overview of our schools current grading policy which is found in our student handbook and is included at the end of this memo. Roughly 8 years ago, a small group of staff members worked in a professional learning team to develop our policy. The work we did was motivated by a study of the book authored by Ken O’Conner and Rick Stiggins called “Grading for Learning. As you review this policy, you will note that we did not specify a grading scale, but rather worked to define what should and should not be graded and that the grade accurately reflected a student’s performance, not effort, in a class. We spent hours discussing issues such as:

- \*Most recent evidence of student learning
- \*Weighting of categories (homework, assessments etc.)
- \*Multiple opportunities on assessments

As a result of our work, the committee agreed on the current policy, as well as setting up a school wide after school testing program to help create an atmosphere of allowing students multiple opportunities on assessments.

At about the same time that our committee was adopting this school wide policy, the math department also was realizing that students earning a “D” in their classes were not adequately prepared to progress to the next level of math, so they were not allowed to move up to the next class. Students were then repeating the same math course in order to gain more knowledge and skills in order to be successful at the next level.

As our staff continues to learn and address grading, several departments in our school have adopted the no “D” policy. Currently, our English and math departments as a group have the no “D” policy and Mr. Close in Social Studies uses this policy. Mr. Close attended a grading conference and came back convinced that he was doing a disservice to students by giving the “D” grade. I have included as a reference at the end of this memo some comments from our English department regarding their rationalization for no using a D in a standards based environment. I have also included data from our math department.

We also use the practice that a student can replace their grade of record on their transcript by repeating the course and improving their grade. Therefore, any student who receives a “F” in a class and repeats that course can replace that grade on their transcript with the improved grade. Our math department will also allow students to gain credit from 1<sup>st</sup> semester if they pass 2<sup>nd</sup> semester and then retake the 1<sup>st</sup> semester final and score better than 70%. This is another example of how we are trying to address the standards based movement and to match grades to actual knowledge and skills required of the class. Please keep in mind that students must have a passing grade at the end of 2<sup>nd</sup> semester in order to move to the next level of math class. Students receiving a failing grade at the end of 1<sup>st</sup> semester will continue on to 2<sup>nd</sup> semester in the same course and hopefully gain enough knowledge to retake the 1<sup>st</sup> semester final and demonstrate mastery of the standards.

To me, a logical question would be: Why can't all teachers use the same grading scale?" Below is my answer to this question.

Teachers are unique in their individual approaches to teaching and learning and for some, grading is really not the most important aspect of what they do. Stated another way, many of our teachers really believe it is the learning that goes on in the class that is the quintessential outcome of their class period, not the student grade. However, we realize that we as an educational system have trained kids and parents since 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> grade that grades matter. We know they are important, however, there is not a consistent way to measure a student's grade from class to class because of the uniqueness of every teachers instructional strategies. Some teacher have weighted assignments and grading categories, some use the most recent performance in class as the most important indicator, some use performance attendance (drama, band, choir, Creative Chef) as indicators. Some grade homework, some do not. How many assignments, quizzes, tests or projects that are given vary so greatly from class to class there is just no way to fairly establish a school wide grading standard. So to ask all of our staff to agree on one system, or one weighting system is not consistent with the instructional “freedom” we give individual teachers throughout the K-12 system.

Overall, I believe our staff does an excellent job of trying to ensure that the grade the student receives adequately reflects their learning.

For reference please consider the following documents:

1. Comments from our current English department
2. Data regarding last year's student in math classes and their performance on the end of year math exams.
3. WHS Grading policy from page #1 of our student handbook.

English Department's "No D" Comments

The English department considers a "D" to mean a student has not met standards. The department believes students need to be at standard, or in other words, be able to complete satisfactory work to earn English credit.

There has been no change in the number of F grades since the department removed D's. The no "D" policy has only affected low achieving students, but in a positive way. Since the bar was raised, students have risen to the challenge.

If grades are defined as:

- A = Excellent (well above standard)
- B = Good (above standard)
- C = Satisfactory (meets standard)
- D = Unsatisfactory (approaching standard)
- F = Fail

Then in a standards based grading system, a student should not earn credit for UNSATISFACTORY work. Unsatisfactory means they did not satisfy the requirements of a course. If a student does not satisfy the requirements, he/she should fail.

The English department has established benchmark assignments: a semester essay, semester presentation, and the semester final. Together all three of these assignments gauge a student being at grade level in reading, writing and communicating. If a student passes all three of these assignments, due to the weight of each, a student will pass the course with at least a C-. These assignments are aligned with both State and Common Core Standards. Students who meet standard will pass the course, those who do not will fail.

Since initiating the "No D" policy, there has been no increase in the number of F grades. Since the bar has been raised, students have risen to the challenge. Students who would have fallen within the D range of passing, have had a tendency to work towards raising their grade within the C range.

Here are percentages of two teacher's failing students for first semester this year to demonstrate this:

Teacher 1 (Total of 6 F grades)*	Teacher 2 (Total of 11 F Grades)*
41%	17%
58%	57%
26%	22%
47%	18%
48%	17%
46%	58%
<p style="color: red;">*Please note there is no student who failed English first semester who had a grade percentage between 60-69%.</p>	17%
	22%
	40%
	38%
	56%

The department has found that there are still those students who will just do what is required to pass benchmark assessments and just barely reach standard. It has been our finding that the lower C was right on the money in terms of expressing a student's achievement. The student had met standard, but the rest of their work did not demonstrate the quality of an A or a B. To reiterate, we aim to have all of our students complete satisfactory work and meet standard. To allow students to pass with a D and accept below average as passing is unacceptable, and – we feel – a disservice to our students.

# Math grades and EOC ...2012

Passed both	368	79.48%	(Meaning passed the class and the EOC)
Passed class...failed EOC	10	2.16%	
Failed class...passed EOC	21	4.54%	
Failed both	26	5.62%	
Classes and tests don't match	38	8.21%	
Total Tests evaluated	463		

## WHS GRADING POLICY

Definitions:

**Formative Assessments:** A risk free activity that is done in preparation for a summative graded assignment.

**Summative Assessment:** Any activity which shall be graded and recorded towards the students overall grade in the course.

Agreements/Policy:

1. Grading procedures shall be related directly to stated learning goals.
2. Learning and performance standards shall be used to distribute grades and marks. Rubrics or scoring guides, either formal or informal, should be shared with students prior to giving a summative assessment activity.
3. Students are expected to complete all required work and will be given opportunities to do so.
4. Absent students shall be given make up opportunities for all missed summative assessments without penalty. Teacher established deadlines could be imposed and if established, shall be understood by the student. Students are expected to initiate this conversation with their teachers.
5. Late work shall be handled as follows: Teachers may set due dates and deadlines for all marked work that will be part of a student grade.
6. Teachers shall mark and/or provide written or oral feedback on formative assessments and shall not be included in student's grade calculation.
7. Grades shall be determined to ensure that the grade each student receives is a fair reflection of his or her performance.
8. Grades shall be weighted carefully to ensure that intended importance is given to each learning goal and to each assessment.
9. Teachers shall properly record evidence of student achievement on an ongoing basis.
10. Teachers shall provide to students and parents a written general overview of assessments, including grading in clear easily understandable language during the first week of classes in each course they teach.
11. Marks from summative assessments only shall be included in determining the student's grade.
12. Teachers can take a student's most recent evidence of learning into consideration when making the final determination of a student's grade.