Grading for Remote Learning
School Building Closures, Spring 2020

Background
During the spring of the 2019/2020 school year, the Helena Public School experienced the physical closure of our school buildings as a result of the COVID-19 Coronavirus pandemic. Initially, closure decisions impacted the final two weeks of the third quarter. However, as closures were extended, it became clear that these closures would significantly impact the entire fourth quarter of the school year.

With a transition to remote learning, questions arose pertaining to grading. The sudden shift radically altered the nature of teaching and learning from our traditional, in-person environment to a completely remote, asynchronous environment. This complicated nearly every aspect associated with teaching and learning including how teachers are able to assess student learning in order to understand who has mastered specific concepts and which students require additional attention.

Under normal circumstances, educators must weigh a variety of formal and informal data points in generating what must be determined, a reliable and valid grade. The physical closure of school buildings has caused many of these data points to be, at best, complicated, and at worst, unavailable. Therefore, grace and understanding became an early priority for Helena educators as they worked remotely with their students.

After weeks of study and consideration, the below grading changes were finalized. Each change is structured to provide flexibility, ensuring that students are not penalized for encountering barriers to learning including access to technology, internet, resources, etc.

Our Commitment
As a district, we commit to ongoing understanding as we work with students and families throughout this crisis. We will continuously strive to assist our students both in obtaining the tools and resources they need for remote learning and in their efforts as they seek to learn in this new environment. Every effort, from teaching to grading, will emphasize the flexibility and understanding that we all need to transcend the physical, mental and emotional challenges of this COVID-19 Coronavirus pandemic.

High School Grading
Grading for high schools will remain consistent with past practices but will include an additional option for students to consider. Grading will adhere to the traditional letter grade scale. However, students will have the option of selecting a grade of “credit” instead of a traditional letter grade. A grade of “credit” will not factor into a student’s grade point average (GPA) and will simply show that the student passed the class. High School students will be required to inform their teacher of their grading intent for that class on or before Wednesday, June 10th.

This change provides students with needed flexibility and will ensure that any impacts associated with the sudden shift to remote learning will not negatively impact a student’s GPA or future, associated plans. Before making this decision, students, parents and guardians should consider the below:

- Students should check with colleges and universities that they may be interested in attending to understand how a grade of “credit” will be viewed during the admissions process.
- Students should consider whether their earned letter grade actually improves their GPA prior to making a decision. The grace period of time between the culmination of classes and the posting of final grades will provide students with the time needed to appropriately weigh all of their options.

Students who are behind academically simply need to respond to their teachers. In the spirit of flexibility, schools and teachers will work with students to provide a pathway forward for the remainder of this quarter.
Should extenuating circumstances exist, an incomplete grade can be applied. If an incomplete is given, it must be resolved as soon as possible. Please note that per state rules, any incomplete grades resolved after June 24th may negatively impact a student’s extracurricular eligibility for the fall semester. Incomplete grades resolved after Wednesday, June 24th will need to be appealed to the superintendent for activities/athletics purposes.

**Middle School Grading**

In consideration of grades at the middle school level, it was determined that our middle schools would align with high schools in adhering to the traditional letter grade scale. Many middle school students participate in high school level courses already which dictated a need for alignment. However, like our high schools, students will have the option of selecting a grade of “credit” instead of a letter grade. **Middle School students will be required to inform their teacher of their grading intent for that class on or before Wednesday, June 3rd.** Note: Middle school students taking a high school level course will be required to inform their teacher of their grading intent for that class on or before Wednesday, June 10th (Algebra I, Spanish, and Honors Math I)

Please see the above High School Grading section and the below Frequently Asked Questions section for additional information pertaining to the letter grade v. credit option.

**Elementary Grading**

Even under normal circumstances, grading at the elementary level is varied. It is very rare for a student at the elementary level to take a high school level class that may have future credit or grade point average implications. Therefore, grading at the elementary level this final fourth quarter will be purposefully shifted. Instead of a traditional fourth quarter report card, students and families will be provided with a progress report that provides additional information on the concepts that a child has mastered along with areas for growth.

In using this modified approach, teachers will focus more on feedback and less on traditional marks or grades. While a final format is still being finalized, students and parents can expect that this fourth quarter report will align directly with the content that their class has been learning this year including concepts covered during this closure. In utilizing this type of an approach, parents and future teachers will have a mutual understanding of their child’s progress including areas of strength and concepts in need to additional attention. In essence, this modified approach will give us a running start into the next school year.

For parents of fifth graders transitioning to middle school, please know that this modified approach will not negatively impact your child in any regard. Middle school counselors will continue to work with fifth grade teachers to ensure that students are being scheduled into appropriate classes for next fall. An absence of traditional grades will not impact or alter our scheduling efforts. Rather, this qualitative approach to grading may enhance our ability to hit the ground running with our sixth graders this coming fall. Additionally, for parents of a student with an active IEP and/or 504 plan, please look for information from your case manager/school counselor on forthcoming elementary-to-middle school transition meetings.

**Frequently Asked Questions**

**Q: How will a “credit” grade factor into my child’s Grade Point Average (GPA)?**

A: This type of grade is purposefully unweighted and will not positively or negatively impact a student’s GPA. Rather, a “credit” will show on the student transcript as a “P” indicating that the student successfully passed the class. This will be done without a grade/mark of “credit” being calculated into a student’s GPA.

**Q: My child has fallen behind in their assignments. Is it too late to catch-up this semester/quarter?**

A: No, it is not too late in any regard. Teachers, counselors and administrators have been working to remain connected to our students. As a first step towards achieving success this quarter/semester, students need to respond to their teachers. Together, schools and students can work together to develop plans for forward progress. It is not too late to reengage but as the quarter/semester draws to an end, options in this regard will become more challenging to structure. Now is a perfect time to develop a plan for success.
Q: Will a grade of “credit” instead of a traditional letter grade harm my child’s eligibility status for extracurricular activities/athletics?
A: No. A grade/mark of “credit” shows that a student successfully passed all of the requirements of a given class. While not calculated in their grade point average, the “credit” grade will show on their academic transcript as having successfully passed the class. This ensures that a student will not be negatively impacted from an eligibility standpoint.

Q: Can my child choose to change their grade after Wednesday, June 10th?
A: Possibly. To alter a grade after final grades have been posted, a student will need to appeal their grade in accordance with the process outlined in the student handbook.

Q: What other potential factors should students consider when deciding between a letter grade or a credit?
A: As possible, students should consider how this decision may impact future decisions and/or opportunities. For example, if a student knows that they are moving to a different state next year and plans on participating in fall extracurricular opportunities, they are advised to check as to how a “credit” is viewed by that state in terms of eligibility. This same encouragement applies to national organizations that may have their own criteria related to how grades are interpreted. Some organizations equate a “credit” to the letter grade of “D.” Therefore, as possible, students are encouraged to explore how this decision may impact their future decisions and/or opportunities.