

Grading Policy

OVERVIEW

Grades are evaluative and descriptive tools that help communicate what students have learned. Grades provide feedback to students on their individual understanding of and progression through a subject. Grades are seen and interpreted by families, teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders. When awarded in a consistent, equitable, and transparent fashion, grades serve the following purposes:

- Demonstrate students' level of understanding and skills in a subject, as of a specific point in time
- Reveal areas of improvement and subjects still in need of support
- Inform teachers' curricular, instructional, and organizational decisions
- Identify which students need more assistance or differentiated learning
- Indicate whether a student passed or failed a particular course or subject at the end of a term
- Contribute to decisions about students' programming choices and post-secondary options
- Influence promotion decisions and the middle school, high school, and college admissions process

All elementary, middle, and high schools must have documented grading policies that set clear expectations for learning. Strong grading policies support meaningful, timely feedback on student progress; they should be developed in a thoughtful manner and should align to a school's mission and goals. Schools must share their grading policy with parents and students at the beginning of the school year. Parents and students may request copies of their school's grading policy at any time; the NYCDOE [Student Bill of Rights](#) and the [Parent Bill of Rights](#) include the rights to know and be provided with written documentation of grading policies and to receive grades based on those policies.

At a minimum, grading policies must explain [how courses are graded](#), [the scale of marks awarded](#), and [the timeline of when students receive grades](#). Schools have discretion in deciding which specific measures are factored into students' grades. However, determinations of passing or failing must be based primarily on how well students master the subject matter, concepts, content, and skills addressed in a class or course. Students cannot pass or fail primarily based on [non-mastery measures](#).

Key Definitions

Term – The length of a course, with one teacher and one syllabus. The duration of a course may vary depending on the term model (annual, semester, trimester, cycle) employed at a school. A course ends at the conclusion of the term, and a final grade is given by the teacher of record attached to the course. The final grade represents the work the student completed throughout the course, and the student's level of mastery at the end of the course, as of that point in time.

Final mark – This grade is given at the end of the term, and, when a course is credit bearing, may also confer credit(s). The final mark is given at the end of the term, representing the work the student did over the course, and the level of mastery at the end of the course, as of that point in time. The teacher of record determines the final mark in accordance with the school's grading policies. Schools must award marks consistent with those specified in the NYCDOE Academic Policy Guides.

Marking period – At various intervals during a course, the teacher of record also awards interim marks, which provide status updates to students, families, and other stakeholders.

Report card grades – These are grades that do not appear on the transcript. They are indications of students' progress toward mastery of the courses learning standards. They are also often called marking period grades.

Schools determine the number of marking periods to include within a year, semester, trimester, or cycle, depending on the term model they use in STARS, the NYCDOE’s academic system of record. Schools must give at least two grades or marks per term, in order to ensure that student have the opportunity to receive at least one interim and one final mark in every course. The last marking period in the term (e.g. year, semester, trimester, or quarter, depending on the school’s term model) is when final course grades for that term are recorded. Schools determine these calculations according to their grading policies. See the STARS wiki for information on how to define terms and marking period in [elementary school](#) and in [middle and high school](#).

The following frequently asked questions (FAQs) provide guidance to elementary, middle, and high schools on how to develop and implement strong grading policies. Schools are encouraged to think creatively and practically about how to set equitable and transparent policies at the school, department, grade, and/or classroom level. For additional support, refer to the [Elementary](#), [Middle](#), and [High School](#) Academic Policy Guides or contact your [academic policy and systems lead](#).

QUICKLINKS

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs) 2

 GENERAL 2

 HOW COURSES ARE GRADED – **UPDATED JANUARY 2018** 3

 SCALE OF MARKS..... 9

 WHEN GRADES ARE AWARDED – **UPDATED JANUARY 2018** 10

 IMPLEMENTATION 11

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

General

1. What are grades?

Grades are a reflection of students’ understanding and command of content, their progression through a course or subject, and their mastery of skills at a given point in time. Grades are reported on student report cards at regular intervals throughout the school year to provide students and families with feedback about academic progress.¹ Ultimately, students receive final grades at the end of a term or course. At the high school level, passing grades may confer course credit(s) toward graduation.

2. What is a grading policy?

A grading policy outlines how and when students will receive feedback on their mastery of content and skills. The purpose of a grading policy is to allow students, families, and teachers to have a mutual understanding of what specific grades mean.

3. Does my school have to have a grading policy?

Every elementary, middle, and high school must have documented grading policies that are shared with parents and students at the beginning of each school year. Parents and students, may request a copy of their school’s grading policy at any time.

¹ Some schools choose not to give grades, and instead use narratives and/or student-specific comments as a means of providing feedback. Schools can also use these in addition to grades. The use of narratives should be described in the school’s grading documents. The policies in this document still apply to schools that use narratives in lieu of alpha-numeric grades.

Schools may establish grading policies at the school, department, grade, or course level. See [question 25](#) for examples of schools having grading policies at each of these levels, and in some cases, employing multiple grading policies.

4. What must a grading policy include?—Updated January 2018

While grading policies should be tailored to a school’s community, mission, and goals, all grading policies must explain, at a minimum, [how courses are graded](#), [the scale of marks awarded](#), and the [timeline of when students receive grades](#). In addition, schools that perform grade changes due to annualization must clearly outline the policies and procedures that apply in their grading policies²; see [questions 13–17](#) for more information. These elements can be addressed in one or more document(s); schools are not required to use a specific format when drafting their grading policies. Schools may consult the [grading policy checklist](#) when revising or drafting their grading policies.

How Courses are Graded – Updated January 2018

5. How should schools calculate students’ final grades?

Schools have discretion in deciding which specific measures are factored into students’ grades. However, determinations of passing or failing must be based primarily on how well students master the subject matter, concepts, content, and skills addressed in a class or course. This means that students may not pass or fail based solely on non-mastery measures (e.g. behavior, compliance, participation, conduct), but rather based on how well they demonstrate their understanding of the content and skills required in the course.

The goal of a documented grading policy is to provide students, families, and teachers a shared understanding of what is required in order to achieve a specific grade. Students should clearly understand and be able to articulate how their grades in classes are derived.

6. How should schools determine if a student has mastered a course or subject?

Determinations of passing or failing should be based primarily on how well students have demonstrated their understanding of the concepts and skills taught in a subject or course throughout the term. Students should have the opportunity to demonstrate mastery through multiple measures of performance, such as assessments, classwork, projects/assignments, and homework.

Students with disabilities who receive accommodations and/or supplementary aids and services are graded based on their demonstrated understanding of the concepts and skills taught when these accommodations and/or supplementary aids and services are provided. Accommodations and supplementary aids and services are designed to “level the playing field.” Students with disabilities should never be penalized because they receive accommodations and/or supplementary aids and services.

Grading student work for understanding of concepts and mastery of skills is different than grading student work based on completion of assignments alone. When student work is graded based on how well students understand the content and perform in the subject, both the students and teachers are receiving valuable information about how well the students are doing. Grading based on completion may be valuable for other purposes and can count for a portion of students’ grades, but it must not be the sole reason a student fails a course.

Example: Class A is instructed to turn their homework assignments in at the beginning of class. The teacher collects the homework and grades each student’s assignment based on the accuracy of the answers provided. The teacher grades the homework assignment on the understanding, skills, and knowledge demonstrated by the

² Effective school year 2018-19, schools will no longer be able to use an annualized instructional approach. Schools that currently use an annualized instructional approach may continue to do so through the end of school year 2017-18. See [questions 13-17](#) for more information.

student. This is an example of grading for mastery because the teacher is able to assess the student’s knowledge and skills at a given point in time.

Non-Example: Class B is instructed to have their homework assignments on their desk at the beginning of class. The teacher walks around the classroom and gives each student who has a completed paper a 100 for that homework assignment. This is *not an example* of grading for mastery because the teacher is not able to assess the student’s knowledge and skills. The teacher is primarily assessing the student for completion and compliance. This may be valuable for other purposes, and could be worth a portion of the student’s grade, but it should not be the sole reason a student fails a course.

7. To what extent can non-mastery measures of performance (for example, attendance, participation, adherence to the student code of conduct, etc.) be factored into final grades?

Non-mastery based factors measure students’ effort, behavior, and preparedness. Examples of non-mastery measures of performance include, but are not limited to, attendance, participation, preparedness, professionalism, respect, and adherence to the school code of conduct (e.g. wearing uniforms, not wearing hats or other specific clothing). Non-mastery measures of performance can be included in the final grade as long as they do not primarily determine the course grade. Since students’ grades should be based primarily on mastery of the learning standards, *students cannot pass or fail a course solely based on non-mastery measures of performance.*

Schools must clearly define how these factors contribute to students’ course grades and how they will be measured to ensure that all students have an opportunity to work toward the expected outcomes.

Example: Teacher B determines that students can earn 10 extra points on their final exam at the end of the term based on participation in designated class discussions several times per week. Each time a student contributes positively and meaningfully to a class discussion, she tells them they are receiving a bonus point and notes it in her grade book. At the end of the term, when calculating final exam grades, she adds in the bonus participation points for students who have earned them. Students understand how participation can positively affect their grades. This is helpful because the teacher can also incentivize participation in her class.

Example: Teacher C determines that 10% of students’ grades are based on “engagement.” He clearly defines engagement as a willingness to learn, which in his room, means “coming to class with a pencil and a notebook.” Each day that a student is present, he tracks if he or she met this requirement. There is no need to make this up when you are absent; those days are simply not included in the average. Students clearly understand how coming to class prepared influences their overall grade in class. However, the majority of their grade is based on their understanding of the content, not on preparedness. The teacher feels this incentive helps students learn to come to class prepared to work.

Non-Example: Teacher A determines that 10% of students’ grades are based on class participation. At the end of the term, she gives an overall assessment of student participation based on her memory of the extent to which students participated (e.g. some students did not attend class often; some raised their hands more often than others). She gives 100% to the students who raise their hands often, 75% to students who sometimes do, and 65% to students who almost never attend. This is *not an example* of a transparent and clearly defined practice.

Schools can also use non-mastery measures in other meaningful ways. For example, schools may choose to make certain special privileges or citizenship/honor roles contingent on participation, behavior, or wearing a uniform. Schools may also choose to provide information about a student’s attendance, work habits, engagement, and collaboration using the [Academic and Personal Behaviors competencies](#) or narrative sections of the report card.

Example: Teacher D grades using a mastery-based grading scale and grades students exclusively on their progress toward learning the content in her class and mastering the specific learning standards. However, in her

school, the grading policy states that no student can use the vending machines during free periods, or be on the honor roll if he or she has conduct complaints. The school's policy in this area allows the teacher to separate out conduct issues from those that are more specifically academic.

8. Is grading students based on mastery of a subject or course the same as using a mastery-based model of learning or grading?

Grading students based on mastery of a subject or course, learning standards, concepts, and skills is not the same as employing a mastery-based learning model. Mastery-based learning is an approach based on the principle that students can advance to the next course on upon demonstrating mastery of learning standards, goals, or outcomes. Implementing mastery-based learning requires long-term planning and strong support from the school community, including teachers, administrators, students, and families. For guidance programming students in mastery-based learning models, see the [Overview of Mastery Based Learning](#) and contact the [Mastery Collaborative](#), a program of the NYCDOE's Office of Postsecondary Readiness.

9. Can make-up assignments or late work be considered in final grades?

Schools determine how make up assignments are factored into final grades as part of setting their grading policies, in alignment with academic policies. Grading policies must address when and how students can submit make-up assignments and missed work. A strong grading policy also indicates if there are different considerations of when assignments and missed work can be handed in and how those assignments are factored into the final grade (e.g. if a student is submitting make-up work due to an absence versus failure to complete the assignment).

If students are given the opportunity to make up assignments, those assignments must be handed in and graded during the same term (i.e. no later than four weeks after the end of a marking period) before final grades are due once grades are entered in STARS, they cannot be changed without completing transcript update (even if this is within the 20 days).³ Students with disabilities are subject to the same grading policies as other students unless the student's IEP or 504 Plan states otherwise. If health-related absences occur because of the student's disability, guidelines for make-up assignments and missed work need to be written in the IEP or 504 Plan.

Example: A school states in their grading policy that students have up to one week after the end of a marking period to hand in any missed or late assignments. Assignments that are handed in within this timeframe will count towards the final grade, though each assignment that is handed in late due to non-completion or an unexcused absence will be docked 5 points. Assignments that are handed in late due to an excused absence will not be docked.

Example: A school states in their grading policy that students must hand in all assignments by the last day of the marking period. No assignments are accepted after the last day of the marking period.

Non-Example: A school states in their grading policy that students who turn in work up to a year late can have their grades changed. *This is a policy violation.* Schools may not change students' grades more than a term later simply based on the fact that he or she turned in missing work. Grading policies cannot contradict DOE academic policies.

³ In special, specific circumstances, students can be awarded marks of 'NX' or 'NL' and be allowed to submit work up to a full term late. See [question 21](#) for more information.

10. How can Regents exam scores be factored into final grades in middle and high school?

As part of a grading policy, schools should indicate if/how Regents exam scores may be included in the calculation of a final course grade. Regents exam scores may be included in the calculation of the final course grade only if the score is:

- Weighted no more than 33 percent of the terminal course leading to the exam; and
- Calculated into the course grade as a component of the weighted average.⁴

For students who complete a course of study culminating in a Regents exam, the Regents exam may not be the only reason a student passes or fails a course.⁵ Schools may not add points to the total grade because the student passed the Regents exam. Similarly, schools may not change a grade retroactively if a student passes the Regents exam several terms later.

Example: A school chooses to incorporate Regents exams into students' grades as the culminating assessments that measure students' mastery of course content. For all classes culminating in a State examination, the Regents score will be calculated as 20% of the final grade.

Non-Example: A school adds 10 points to the grades of all students who were failing their courses with grades of 55 if they pass the Regents, updating their grades to 65. *This violates DOE academic policies* because it does not incorporate students' actual Regents scores into their final grade calculations. Schools may not add points to final grades based on Regents exam outcomes.

For other examples of acceptable ways to incorporate the Regents exam into a grading policy and calculate the weighted average, see [Weighting Regents Exams in Grading Policies](#).

11. Can schools set quotas of students receiving passing or failing grades?

No. Schools may not maintain quotas of students passing or failing courses. Student performance may result in passing grades for all students in a course, if all students demonstrate mastery of the learning standards, concepts, and skills addressed. However, a grading policy may not state that, by definition, all students must pass or that only a certain percentage of students can pass.

Non-Example: A high school states in their grading policy no student can earn a grade of below a 65 in any course. This means that all students pass every class. *This is not permitted*, because it does not recognize that some students may not have mastered the content well enough to move on.

Non-Example: A grading policy states that a course is graded "on a curve." Students are compared to one another so that their grades are determined not objectively, but by their relative standing compared to their peers. The teacher says that 20% of students will receive grades of As, 20% of students will receive grades of Bs, 20% will receive Cs, 20% will receive Ds, and the remaining 20% will fail. *This is a non-example* because the teacher is setting a quota and is grading students' work against their peers.

⁴ Schools using grading systems not based on weighted averages must ensure that the Regents exam does not result in the student passing or failing if they failed the majority of the course.

⁵ Per the [NYSESED School Administrator's Manual](#). The only exceptions are when a student's credit in an online or blended course or credit recovery is contingent on passing the Regents exam. See the [Online and Blended Learning](#) and the [Credit Recovery](#) guidance documents for information on when passing a Regents exam is required in order to earn credit for a course.

12. If a student retakes a previously failed course, can the school update the report card/transcript to reflect only the highest grade earned?

No. All final grades awarded at the end of a course must be represented on a student’s transcript. Grades are a reflection of a student’s progression through concepts and skills at a given point in time. The report card and transcript demonstrate a student’s progress term over term, year over year. The report card and transcript should therefore include information about every course taken during a student’s academic career, even if the student previously failed a course and upon retaking the course passed or earned a higher grade.

13. What is an annualized instructional approach to grading?—Updated January 2018

An annualized instructional approach is one where a school that does not employ an annual term model in STARS offers courses that operate as a year-long learning cycle. Using an annualized approach, a student is given the full year to demonstrate mastery of the courses learning standards, even though they receive final grades and credits throughout the school year. **Effective school year 2018-19, schools will no longer be able to use an annualized instructional approach. Schools that currently use an annualized instructional approach may continue to do so through the end of school year 2017-18. Beginning in school year 2018-19, these schools can either switch to an annual term model if they would like to continue to assess students’ mastery over the entire school year, or keep their current term model (semester-, trimester-, or cycle-based) and assess students’ mastery and award final grades and credits only at the end of each term.**

For schools that are using an annualized instructional approach during school year 2017-18, the course must have a syllabus, scope and sequence, lesson plans, assessments, and grading policy that reflect a year-long (i.e. 36-week) learning cycle. Typically, both semesters of the course are instructed by the same teacher. In cases where this is not true, the syllabus and course work should clearly demonstrate that mastery of the learning standards in the second semester requires mastery of learning standards in the first semester. The students’ final performance at the end of the school year will be the primary determinant of the final grades associated with the course. For this reason, grades awarded in previous terms may be retroactively changed via [transcript update](#), based on final grades awarded for the last term of the course.

Schools that use an annualized approach to instruction and grading for select courses in school year 2017-18 must explicitly outline this in their grading policy. Schools must include:

- A list of the specific or types of courses in the school that use an annualized instructional approach (e.g. all English courses or all core courses for 9th graders). A grading policy stating that “our school is annualized” or that “all courses are annualized” is not sufficient
- Which new marks will be utilized
- If applicable:
 - The additional requirements and/or minimum mark a student must earn in the first term in order to be eligible for an update due to annualization, and
 - The additional requirements and/or minimum mark a student must earn in the final term in order to be eligible for an update due to annualization
- How and when students are notified of grade changes made due to annualization (i.e. within 20 days of the end of the second term)

14. What marks can schools use to replace failing grades after students pass an annualized course?—Updated January 2018

For school year 2017-18, schools may choose which marks to use in accordance with their grading policies. For example, one school may choose to update a failing score to a numeric grade of 65 while another may choose to

update a failing score to a non-numeric mark of a 'CR'. However, schools must explicitly state this in their grading policies and must consistently apply these policies to all students. **Beginning in school year 2018-19, schools may no longer change a student's final grades due to annualization.**

15. Does the new annualized mark have to be factored into the GPA?

No. Schools may choose how the failing mark is updated and if the mark is factored into a student's GPA. However, they must explicitly state this in their grading policies and must consistently apply these policies to all students. For additional information on how grades are factored into the GPA, please see the [question 22](#).

16. When must schools complete a transcript update for grade changes due to annualized instruction? —Updated January 2018

For school year 2017-18, an annualization update must be completed immediately following the termination of the final course in the yearlong sequence. This is completed via [transcript update](#), and the appropriate documentation and the [transcript update form](#) are retained in case requested. Schools have the 20 days immediately following the end of the course to make the annualization grade update. The school should communicate the update to students immediately, so students are aware of their current credit accumulation and can be programmed for the next course in a timely fashion.

Schools should have an articulated process for identifying students that are eligible for updates (e.g. Custom Report 1.05), collecting necessary documentation, and submitting the transcript update form as to ensure all updates are made within the appropriate time frame and that students receive accurate information about their credit accumulation.

Beginning in school year 2018-19, schools may no longer change a student's final grades due to annualization. As of September 2018, annualization will no longer be an accepted reason for a transcript update, and this option will no longer be available on the [transcript update form](#) or in STARS.

17. When schools update marks due to annualized grading, what documentation are they required to maintain?

For school year 2017–18, schools must maintain the following documentation when completing a transcript update for an annualization grade change:

- The schools grading policy with the criteria described in [question 13](#); and
- The teacher's grade books for all courses.

Schools are not required to maintain a course syllabus as part of the transcript update process; however the [State's ED-1 Records Retention and Disposition Schedule](#) requires that all "course curriculum and related records describing course of instruction and course content" be retained by the school permanently, even after the teacher leaves the school.⁶ Schools should maintain the course's syllabi that outline the yearlong learning cycle in case requested later as documentation.

⁶ See the [Student Records Maintenance and Requests](#) guidance document and the [State's Records Retention and Disposition Schedule](#) for more information.

Scale of Marks

18. What type of marks can be used to award grades?

Elementary, middle, and high schools may choose to award grades using one or more grading scales, based on their grading policies.⁷ Grading scales available to schools include, but are not limited to, numeric grades (e.g. 1-100), alpha grades (e.g. A-F), and performance levels (1, 2, 3, or 4). Each course mark has a citywide pass/fail equivalent (and, for alpha grades, a default numeric equivalent which is used in the calculation of GPA), whereby a passing grade equates to earning credit in the course.

19. Can more than one scale of marks be used?

Yes. Schools may determine whether grading scales are set at the school, department, grade, or course level, and can use multiple scales, provided they are clearly explained.

Example: A K-8 school uses a 1-4 grading scale (which awards marks 1, 2, 3, or 4 based on performance level) for students in kindergarten through grade 5 and alpha course grades (A-F scale) for students in grades 6-8.

Example: A school awards numeric grades on a scale of 45-100 for all courses except science labs, which are graded on a P/F scale.

Example: A school awards grades to all students using the mastery scale (ME, MA, MT, MP, MB) to all courses, with the exception that all non-credit-bearing courses are given pass/fail marks and courses where students pass after completing credit recovery are graded with a pass/fail as well.

20. What is the minimum passing grade in a course?

While all grading policies should specify what grading scale is used, a strong grading policy also specifies the minimum grade a student must receive to pass a course and the lowest grade that can be awarded to students. Each mark that can be awarded is assigned a default numeric equivalent in STARS and a pass/fail equivalent. Elementary, middle and high schools should consult their respective course and exam marks table for a list of all available grading scales, along with their pass/fail equivalents and default numeric equivalents. In alignment with DOE policy, passing grades have numeric equivalents no lower than 65.

In some cases, a school may choose to change the numeric equivalent in accordance with its grading policy, provided the change does not impact the pass/fail equivalent. Schools must request this by contacting their academic policy and systems lead.

21. What grade can schools award if there is not enough student work to determine mastery?

In the rare situation that a student has not had the opportunity to demonstrate mastery of the course content and skills due to extenuating circumstances, schools may award one of following special marks as a final grade:

Incompletes: Schools may award a grade of incomplete ('NX') if a student has a documented, extreme extenuating circumstance that prevents him/her from completing the course in its established timeframe (e.g., surgery, death in the family). A student who receives an incomplete must successfully complete remaining course requirements by the end of the term following the termination of the course in order to receive a final grade and credit, as applicable. 'NX' does not have a pass/fail or a numeric equivalent.

⁷ While schools are not restricted to using specific grading scales for certain types of courses, schools should consider students' academic needs and postsecondary goals in selecting grading scales. For example, a numeric or alpha grade may convey recognizable information about students' mastery for particular postsecondary options. While schools may define their grading policies at the school, department, grade, or course level, schools are encouraged to adopt a consistent mark form across courses.

New or Recently Admitted Students: Students who enroll in a course after it has started may have missed assignments or assessments needed to generate a complete course grade for a given marking period. These students may be given a grade of ‘NL’ in STARS to indicate this circumstance. ‘NL’ does not have a pass/fail or numeric equivalent. Students who receive a mark of ‘NL’ must successfully complete remaining course requirements by the end of the term following the termination of the course in order to receive a final grade and credit, as applicable.

No Show: A grade of ‘NS’ is given to a student who fails to attend a course and does not participate in any of the work from which a grade can be derived. ‘NS’ has a pass/fail equivalent of fail and a default numeric equivalent of 45.⁸ This mark should be used in egregious situations, when students have been given reasonable chances to make up missed work and their absences are so chronic that only a failing mark is appropriate. Instead of giving failing grades, long-term absentees (LTA) should be discharged appropriately, whenever this is possible. Similarly, students who are on home and hospital instruction should not receive ‘NS’ marks. See this [Home and Hospital Guidance](#) for more information on how schools should collaborate to ensure continuity for these students.

22. How are the cumulative average and class rank calculated for middle and high schools?

Schools may choose not to rank students, and they may print student transcripts with or without the cumulative average or the rank displayed. Schools may adjust the following parameters for cumulative average and rank.

For cumulative average, schools may determine which courses to include in the calculation. Schools may use [STARS to assign additional weight](#) to honors, [Advanced Placement](#), International Baccalaureate, and college courses. They may not change the credit value of courses simply to adjust GPA.

Schools that choose to rank their students must establish school-based policies for class rankings and determinations of a valedictorian and salutatorian. Schools should have clear, documented policies in these areas that take into consideration which students are eligible to be ranked, which courses count in the ranking, how courses are weighted, and how and when the final rank will be calculated. For example, schools should have clear, documented policies on how [incompletes](#) (‘NX’) and [transfer credits](#) (‘CR’) are factored into a student’s GPA or rank. Schools cannot automatically exclude English language learners or students with disabilities simply because of their status. In STARS, when calculating the rank by running reports, schools can determine which students are included in the denominator by creating a [custom group](#) and excluding or including students based on their ranking policy.

When Grades are Awarded – Updated January 2018

23. When must students receive grades?

Schools must give at least two grades (marks) in each course or subject per term (annual, semester, trimester, or quarter/cycle, based on the school’s term model).⁹ While marking period grades can be standalone or cumulative, every student must have an opportunity to receive an interim grade before receiving a final grade in a course.

Example: A school uses an annual term model, meaning that students take year-long courses with the same teachers. At the end of each course, they receive a final grade and credits as appropriate. The school has four marking periods throughout the year, so that students can receive regular updates of their progress in the course.

⁸ Schools that use numeric grading scales that extend below 45 should consider altering the ‘NS’ numeric equivalent to align with the numeric scale used.

⁹ Some schools choose not to give grades, and instead use narratives and/or student-specific comments as a means of providing feedback. Schools can also use these in addition to grades. The use of narratives should be described in the school’s grading documents. The policies in this document still apply to schools that use narratives in lieu of alpha-numeric grades.

Example: A school uses a semester term model, meaning that students take half year long courses with the same teachers. At the end of each course, they receive a final grade and credits as appropriate. Each semester, they have two marking periods, so students receive one interim and one final grade.

Schools should have clearly defined procedures to ensure that students' final course grades are entered in STARS in a timely manner, up to four weeks after the end of the marking period. Once final grades are entered in STARS, they cannot be changed without completing a transcript update (even if it is within the 20 day window). See the STARS wiki for information on how to enter marking period grades in STARS in [elementary school](#) and in [middle and high school](#).

24. When and how can a grade be changed after it has been finalized?—Updated January 2018

Grades represent a student's mastery of concepts and skills at a given point in time. There are very few situations in which it is appropriate to retroactively change a student's grade. Schools should distinguish in their grading policy who at the school can change a student's grade after it has been finalized and when and how a grade can be changed. Schools may only change an existing grade for the following reasons:¹⁰

[Annualization](#) update —**not available starting school year 2018-2019** (additional policies are outlined in questions 13–17);

Grade calculation/entry error;

Grade updated based on [completion of outstanding coursework](#) (marks of [incomplete](#) ['NX'] or [recent admit](#) ['NL'] only; this may not be used for credit recovery); and

Principal override, in accordance with CSA and UFT contracts.¹¹

Implementation

25. Can schools have multiple grading policies?

Yes; schools may establish grading policies at either the school, department, grade, or course level. However, each grading policy must apply to all students in the school, department, grade, or course level (as applicable), including students with disabilities and English Language Learners (ELLs). Grading policies should explain when students receive grades, how courses are graded, how mastery is measured, and the scale of marks the school uses.

Example: An elementary school has grading policies set at the course level. Each grading policy addresses how mastery is measured, how the course is graded, when students receive grades, and the scale of marks used. Each teacher incorporates the grading policy for the course he/she teaches in the course syllabus, which is distributed to students at the beginning of each term.

Example: A middle school has certain policies that are uniform across their entire school. These school-wide policies are published on their website, and the school distributes a hard-copy of the grading policies to students and parents at the beginning of the year:

- The school awards grades four times per year in every course;
- Grades are cumulative and show students' progress throughout the year;
- All courses are graded on a 1-4 scale; and
- Students have up to two weeks after the end of each marking period to complete missed work.

¹⁰ See the [Transcript Update Form](#) for information on how to update a student's record in STARS.

¹¹ A teacher must be notified in writing of any principal override of his/her final course grades.

In addition to the school-wide grading policy document, teacher teams also have downloadable documents posted on the website with more specific grading policies. These address the specifics of how individual classroom and course grades are calculated. Between these sources, all school community members have a strong understanding of how the schools' grades are awarded.

Example: A high school has a school-wide grading policy that addresses the grading scale, the marking periods calendar, and how grades are weighted in a student's GPA and class rank. The grading policy is incorporated into the student conduct handbook, which is distributed to students at the beginning of the school year and is available on the school's website. Each department also has a grading policy that includes a rubric of how class assignments, assessments, Regents exams, and non-mastery based measures are factored into the final grade.

26. Can schools have different grading policies for different student populations?

Schools may establish grading policies at the school, department, grade, or course level. However, grading policies must apply to all students, including students with disabilities and English Language Learners (ELLs).

ELLs – the grading policy should consider the student's English as a New (ENL) proficiency level, and should include opportunities for students to demonstrate mastery of the New York State Learning Standards in their native language.

Students with disabilities – annual goals, plans for progress monitoring, and promotion criteria are documented in the IEP, while the report card documents progress made in the general education curriculum. All students, including students with disabilities, receive grades based on how well they master the subject matter, concepts, content, and skills addressed in a class or course. The IEP describes specially designed instruction and accommodations for an individual student that is used to create access to grade-level standards and enable progress toward annual goals. All students, including students with disabilities, should be working toward grade-level standards.¹² Students' receipt of accommodations does not impact the grade that can be earned. Students with disabilities have the same opportunity to earn grades as all other students.

Students with disabilities receive progress reports on their annual goals. Progress reports are usually distributed at the same time as report cards and reflect the likelihood that a student will meet their annual goals or has already met their annual goals. Progress reports do not replace report cards for students with disabilities.

Students with disabilities who participate in alternate assessments – Students with disabilities who participate in alternate assessments receive grades that reflect their mastery of the courses, skills and modified content of the general education curriculum presented. Due to the severity of the students' disabilities, the content of the general education curriculum and instruction needs to be modified to provide the students with access and allow for participation and progress. Modification results in a change in the expectation of what skills the students need to demonstrate that they have mastered. To accommodate for the difference in expectation, a school's grading policy should address how students with disabilities who participate in alternate assessment are graded.

27. How do grading policies apply to physical education (PE) classes?

As in all other classes and courses, PE grades must be based primarily on content area knowledge and skills and not on non-mastery measures. Students may not be graded solely on attendance, participation, and preparedness. Grades should be based on multiple measures in which students demonstrate mastery of PE content and progress towards NYS PE Learning Standards. Students whose disabilities interfere with their ability to perform activities involved in a regular physical education program may be recommended for Adapted Physical Education (APE)

¹² See the United States Department of Education's [Dear Colleague Letter](#).

services. Students who participate in APE should be graded based on their performance in this specially designed instructional program.

It is important to note that some factors related to fitness development are beyond the student and teacher's control. In physical education, improvement and performance on NYC FITNESSGRAM may not be used to determine student grades. Participation in the NYC FITNESSGRAM assessments may be used to determine a portion of student grades, as long as it is identified in the written grading policy; however, improvement in NYC FITNESSGRAM scores may not be used as a part of a student's grade. Individual student fitness scores should be kept confidential and should be used for fitness education and goal-setting activities. Students may be evaluated on their knowledge and understanding of fitness concepts and how to design and implement a fitness program. Schools can contact [Office of School Wellness Programs](#) for curricular and instructional support as they implement these policies.

28. How are grading policies shared with students and families?

All schools (elementary, middle, and high schools) must document grading policies and make them transparent to staff, students, and families. The NYCDOE [Student Bill of Rights](#) and the [Parent Bill of Rights](#) include the rights to know and be provided with *written* documentation of grading policies and to receive grades based on those policies. Schools must have their grading policy (or policies) written down and available to students and families upon request. Schools must distribute a copy of the grading policies, translated as needed, to students and families at the beginning of the school year or term, as appropriate.

29. When should schools draft new or update their existing grading policy?

Schools that need to update their grading policies should do so no later than the first day of the school year. As part of the process, schools are encouraged to create time for teacher teams to review and discuss policies before they share them with the school communities at parent teacher conferences or another time before they release report cards. Schools may not update their grading policies mid-year; schools with extenuating circumstances should contact their [academic policy and systems lead](#) for support.

30. How should schools keep records of old grading policies?

Schools should keep records of old grading policies in a similar manner as how they keep records of other key documents, such as course content documentation. It is important to keep a history of records as it relates to students, schools, and families to ensure a mutual understanding of how grades have been earned. In addition, as stated in the [Records Retention Schedule](#), principals must ensure that teachers' gradebooks are retained for at least two years.