

Consistent Grading Practices FAQ

The Pittsford Central School District Grading Philosophy supports [practices](#) that result in grades that are meaningful, accurate, consistent, and supportive of learning. After several years of providing opportunities for teachers to learn more about the grading philosophy and associated practices, there are two practices that all teachers are expected to follow. These two practices represent a first step in a continuing journey to align grading practices, district-wide, with the Belief Statements in [our Grading Philosophy](#).

Here are answers to frequently asked questions about the two established practices.

What are the agreed upon grading practices to be followed by all secondary teachers?

The two specific practices that have been agreed upon as expected common practice are:

- no grade representing anything lower than a 50% will be calculated into a student's quarterly average.
- no extra-credit will be awarded.

How were these decisions made? Who made them?

After three full years of providing professional learning related to the PCSD Grading Philosophy, the district conducted a survey of all secondary teachers in the fall of 2017. The results of the survey were analyzed by the Instructional Leadership Council (ILC), the Secondary Academic Council (SAC), building and department teams. Based on a review of that feedback, SAC determined that it was important to provide teachers with clear and common expectations regarding certain grading practices in order to ensure better alignment with our Grading Philosophy. SAC recommended these two specific practices to ILC; ILC agreed. A subcommittee comprised of ILC and SAC members worked together over several months to work out the details and develop a communication plan.

During the 2022-23 school year, another representative committee assessed and refined the implementation of these agreed upon practices. The work done by that group resulted in significant updates to this FAQ document; clarification of the types of Essential Tasks that if not completed could result in an INC for a quarterly grade; and important updates to the "Resolving Essential Missing Assignments" flowcharts for teachers and administrators.

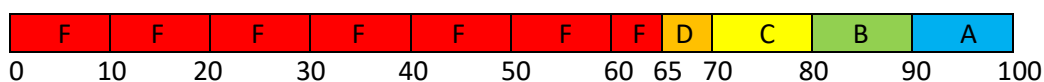
Why was the decision made to not allow extra-credit?

We believe that grades should reflect [progress toward learning standards](#). Extra-credit not only inflates grades, but results in grades which are no longer exclusively reflective of progress toward learning standards. Please refer to the [PCSD Grading Practices](#) document for more information about what is, and is not, considered extra-credit.

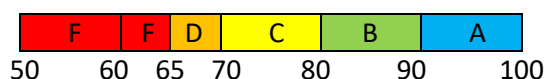
Why did we decide to not allow any grade below a 50 to be calculated into the quarterly average?

We believe that [grading practices](#) should be set up to support student motivation to learn. Our intention is to avoid having any one grade on an assignment have a disproportionate impact on the student's grade, while

we also acknowledge the need to communicate when a student has failed. Limiting “failing” grades to scores between 50%-64% strikes the balance between communicating a failure while still giving the student the opportunity to recover through continued efforts at learning. Consider the fact that in [the traditional 0 to 100 grading scale](#), there are 64 degrees of failure, compared with 36 degrees of passing:



Our goal is to come closer to a more proportionate grade distribution:



What does this mean for me if I use a cumulative point system for my gradebook, rather than a percentage system?

If you grade using cumulative points, at the end of the marking period you will need to reconcile any score that represents less than 50% of the possible number of points for that particular assignment up to a score representing 50%. For example, if an assignment/assessment was worth a possible 40 points and a student only scored 15/40 points on that assignment, at the end of the marking period, the 15 would need to be adjusted up to a 20/40.

What does this mean for me if I use a rubric (1-4, 1-5, or other) for my gradebook?

If you grade with a rubric scoring, you should set the Assignment Mark conversion tables with 1=50% (or higher). This way, no score in your grade book would ever convert to less than 50% when you post your end-of-quarter grades.

Does this mean we are not allowed to enter a “0” into our grade books?

No. A teacher may enter a “0-49%” into the grade book, but at the end of the marking period, before grades are posted, any “0-49%” in the grade book must be converted to a “50%”, excluded from the quarterly grade calculation, or converted to an INC.

Will Infinite Campus automatically convert any score under 50 at the end of the marking period?

No. Unfortunately, Infinite Campus is not able to automatically change any score under a 50% to a 50% at the end of the marking period. Teachers will need to make these adjustments manually before doing their final grade calculations. Teachers do have the ability to make any failing score show up in red, which will help you to more quickly identify the marks below 50%.

How do I determine which assignments result in an INC being recorded as the grade for a marking period?

Only those tasks considered essential should, if not completed, result in an INCOMPLETE on a student’s quarterly report card grade. Other tasks, while important for learning, if not completed should not result in an INC on the report card. Teachers are encouraged to include comments on the report card indicating that the student is not following through on all assignments. The chart, below, has been developed to help guide teachers’ thinking around tasks that, if not completed, could result in an INC for a marking period.

Ideally, Essential Tasks are ones that are agreed upon by all teachers of the same course, rather than decided upon by individual teachers. Recognizing that there is work to be done to bring about this level of “per course” agreement, as of this writing plans are in the works to devote the necessary time and resources to this important work.

Nothing about this chart should be interpreted to mean that non-Essential Tasks do not provide important learning experiences for students. These are important and valuable learning experiences that build students’ academic knowledge and skills, leading them to success on Essential Tasks. This chart is intended to communicate only that the failure by a student to complete a task(s) designated as non-essential should not result in an INC as a quarterly grade.

Criteria*	An assignment/task IS essential ...	An assignment/task is NOT essential...
Purpose	...if it is summative by design.	...if it is formative by design.
Wholistic	...if it was designed to provide evidence (summative) that a student has reached proficiency on a set of standards, skills, or learning targets at the conclusion of a unit of instruction.	...if it was intended to give student a chance to practice a skill (formative) that they would later be assessed on in a more wholistic or comprehensive manner.
Critical	...if the learning measured by the task is critical to the student’s ability to succeed in the next step of the learning journey AND that learning will not be assessed, later on.	...if the learning measured by the task is not critical to the student’s ability to succeed in the next steps of their learning journey OR the learning measured by the task, will be assessed again at a later time.
District-wide expectation	...if it is a district-wide agreed upon assessment embedded in curriculum/instructional roadmaps.	
State required	...if it is tied to a lab experience required by New York State in order to be eligible to sit for the associated Regents exam or earn credit for the course.	
Student Compliance		...simply because it was assigned.

****an individual task need only meet one of the listed criteria in order to be considered essential.***

What are the different “placeholders” in the Infinite Campus gradebook and what is the impact of using each of them?

“M” for Missing: This will calculate as a “0” in the rolling average. Since no grade lower than a 50% will ultimately be calculated in the quarterly average, it is important to understand using M will result in a rolling average that may temporarily be lower than the final reported quarterly grade IF the missing assignment is one that will be calculated into the quarterly grade. The M will need to be adjusted, by the teacher, to either a 50% or an INC if it is an Essential Task, before the quarterly grades are reported.

“INC” for Incomplete: Since an INC entered for an individual assignment will not be calculated in the rolling average, the rolling average may not accurately reflect what the quarterly average grade will be. A student who has failed to complete essential assignments may have INC recorded for their quarterly grade until those assignments are turned in.

Leave the grade blank: This will carry the same implications as the INC, in terms of its impact on the rolling average.

What is the problem with giving students a “0” when they have failed to complete an assignment?

The practice of using zeros for an incomplete assignment violates the principles of sound assessment by assigning a value to work that the teacher has not seen. On a 100- point scale, a 0 can have a devastating effect on a student’s average, serving to de-motivate students to the point where they won’t bother to do the work because failure is inevitable. If a student fails to complete an assignment, our goal is for the student to complete that assignment. The most important outcome for not doing the work should be to do the work.

What if a student scores below 50% on a local final exam or assessment?

No grade lower than a 50% should be used as part of a student’s grade calculation; this includes final exam scores used for grade calculations. If a student scores lower than a 50% on a final exam used for grade calculation(s), the score must be adjusted to a 50%. Additionally, a comment must be made that includes the actual score on the exam so that the student, and parents, are provided with that information. As a reminder, Regents exam scores must be reported on the transcript as they are received and they are not calculated into the final grade for the course.

If a student has a grade below a 50%, why should I raise that grade to 50%? Isn’t that just giving away points?

Adjusting a failing grade up to 50% is still assigning it a failing grade, but it puts the student in a place where, mathematically, they can recover and therefore are more likely to continue to be motivated to learn and put forth the effort to meet the standards for the course.

Can an INC be given if a student fails an assessment with a score below 50% (instead of converting the lower score to a 50 when calculating the marking period grade)?

An “INC” is intended to communicate a lack of evidence and should not be used to replace a failing grade. If a student has made a genuine attempt to complete an Essential Task but, in doing so, has provided evidence that they have not learned the material at a level that would earn them a passing grade, that is still evidence and therefore should not be recorded as an “INC”. Teachers are encouraged (but not required) to provide students with additional opportunities to learn and to re-assess to demonstrate proficiency. If, however, a student chooses not to re-assess, the original grade (below a 50%) should remain notated in the gradebook but should be re-set to a 50% for the purposes of calculating the quarterly grade.

What do I do if a student cheats on an assignment?

If a student cheats, use one of the “placeholders” in your gradebook until the student satisfactorily and honestly completes the assignment. The student must be expected to re-do the assignment (or complete an alternative assignment/assessment at the discretion of the teacher) in order to demonstrate their learning. Work with your building administrator regarding the appropriate consequences for the negative behavior of cheating. Consequences for violation of the Academic Honesty policy are outlined in the Student Handbook and are reviewed with students annually.

What do I do if a student simply refuses to do an assignment, or multiple assignments?

There are many reasons why a student may fail to complete an assignment, or multiple assignments. If a student refuses to do an assignment, use one of the “placeholders” in your gradebook until the student satisfactorily completes the assignment. If an assignment is essential it needs to be completed, therefore the outcome of not doing the assignment should include doing the assignment. If, after notifying the student that they are missing an essential assignment, the assignment has still not been submitted after one week, the teacher and student should work together to make a plan to resolve the missing assignment within a reasonable timeframe. The teacher should notify the parent/guardian of the plan for the student to resolve their missing work. If the work continues to be unresolved after the agreed-upon timeframe, the teacher completes an Academic Concerns Referral. Please see the complete flowchart for more specific information about resolving missing essential assignments at this link: [filedownload.ashx \(pittsfordschools.org\)](filedownload.ashx (pittsfordschools.org))

It may also be appropriate to involve the student’s counselor, or the building IST, for assistance in addressing these issues. Students who do not complete assignments because of an academic skill issue need the opportunity for more teaching and learning to take place in order to build their competence to the point that they are able to complete the assignments.

Please refer to the “Resolving Essential Missing Assignments” flowchart that has been developed to guide teachers and students through the necessary process of resolving incomplete Essential Tasks.

How can I communicate learning behaviors to students, parents, and other stakeholders?

As always, teachers are expected to communicate with students and parents about learning behaviors that may be interfering with, or positively contributing to, a student’s academic success. Communication tools include, but are not limited to, phone calls, emails, conferences, and comments posted in the grade book or on the report card. Experience tells us that limiting communication solely to comments posted in the grade book and/or report card is not effective as there is no guarantee parents are seeing those comments. If the information is important and needs to be acted upon, it should be communicated via email and/or a phone call to the parent/guardian.

How will we handle students that determine they can do nothing for the next 2 marking periods and still pass the course?

Students who fail to complete essential learning for the course, as demonstrated by the Essential Tasks, will receive an INC for the quarter grade (no credit) until they complete those essential learning tasks.

Please refer to the “Resolving Essential Missing Assignments” flowchart that has been developed to guide teachers and students through the necessary process of resolving incomplete Essential Tasks.

Teachers, administrators, and counselors should work together to determine the appropriate outcome for any student with one or more quarterly grades of INC in a course at the conclusion of the academic year.

Will the practice of not allowing any grade under 50% to be calculated into a student’s quarterly average impact a student’s ability to be considered for special education services?

Consistency among teachers in adhering to grading practices helps all stakeholders better understand what an individual student's grades actually represent in terms of their learning. A student's grades are only one data point used by building PSTs and CSEs in determining a student's eligibility for services. Many other aspects of a student's performance are carefully considered in weighing these decisions. Any failing grade, no matter what its numeric equivalency, is considered a red-flag and a cause for concern. Therefore, we do not anticipate any negative impact of this practice on our PST or CSE processes and decisions.

Why don't we just get rid of the 100-point scale and move to a 1-5 scale, or something similar? Wouldn't that fix a lot of problems?

It may be true that using a 1-5 grading scale to report out on student learning would resolve some of the challenges we are currently experiencing as we work to align grading practices with our grading philosophy. There are, however, other unintended consequences to making this kind of change and we need time to consider all the potential ramifications. We will continue to look at this idea with our various stakeholder groups including teachers, parents, students, college admission offices, scholarship programs, and others.

Who do I talk to if I have additional questions or need any clarification?

For additional questions or clarification, please talk with your building administrator. Your Standards Leader and the Assistant Superintendent for Instruction can also be resources for you.