

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, it is time to establish two practices that all teachers are expected to follow, effective September, 2018. 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:

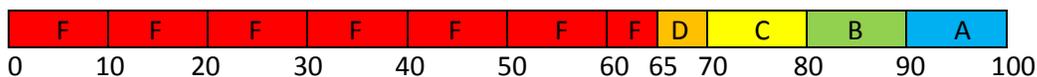
- no grade representing anything lower than a 50% will be calculated into a student’s quarterly average
- no extra-credit will be awarded.

How were these decisions made? Who made them?

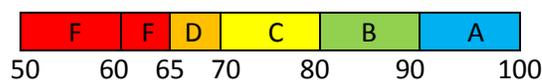
After three full years of providing professional learning related to the PCSD Grading Philosophy, the district conducted a survey of all secondary teachers in the fall of 2017. The results of the survey were analyzed by the Instructional Leadership Council (ILC), the Secondary Academic Council (SAC), 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.

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:



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.

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.

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

No grade lower than a 50% should be used as part of a student's grade calculation; this includes midterm and final exam scores used for grade calculations. If a student scores lower than a 50% on a midterm or 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.

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%.

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

If a student fails to complete an assignment, our goal is for the student to complete that assignment. The consequence for not doing the work should be to do the work. 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 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.

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

If a student cheats, use one of the “placeholders” (Missing, Incomplete) in your gradebook until the student satisfactorily and honestly completes the assignment. 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?

If a student [refuses to do an assignment](#), use one of the “placeholders” (Missing, Incomplete) in your gradebook until the student satisfactorily completes the assignment. If an assignment is important, it needs to be completed, therefore the consequences for not doing a graded assignment should include doing the assignment. Teachers should work with their building administrators, if needed, to put into place structures and supports that will facilitate student completion of work.

There are many reasons why a student may fail to complete an assignment, or multiple assignments. Refusal to complete work may be a behavioral infraction that should be responded to with a behavioral consequence, not an academic consequence. It may also be appropriate to involve the student’s counselor, or the building IST, for assistance in addressing these issues.

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.

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, will receive an INC for the quarter grade (no credit) until they complete those essential learning tasks. Teachers should work with their building administrators for support in making sure that students complete the expected assignments and assessments.

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 of 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.