



Date: February 18, 2011

To: High School Principals

From: Shael Polakow-Suransky, Chief Academic Officer

CC: Network Leaders, High School Superintendents, Cluster Leaders and Teams

RE: High School Grading Policies

Grading policies and procedures are an important part of a school's instructional program. According to State regulations, determinations of passing or failing should be based on student mastery of the learning standards and competencies addressed in the course. This means that 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 addressed. But a grading policy may not state that, by definition, all students must pass. Students who do not pass a course required for graduation should be given the opportunity to make-up course credit, per the credit recovery policy outlined below.

Review of NY State and City Policies

New York State regulations and NYCDOE policies define the parameters within which schools may determine grading policies that fit their instructional program and approach. Principals are responsible for ensuring that school and course grading policies are aligned with these policies:

- **Credit Accumulation:** High school students [earn credit](#), reflected in a passing course grade, by demonstrating mastery of the learning outcomes set forth in a syllabus for a given high school subject, after the student has had the opportunity to complete a unit of study in that subject (defined as at least 180 minutes of instruction per week throughout the school year, 54 hours over the course of a semester, or the equivalent).
- **Regents Exams as Part of Course Grades:** For students who complete a course of study culminating in a Regents exam, the Regents exam should not be the only reason a student passes or fails a course, per the [NYSED School Administrator's Manual](#). Regents scores, if included as part of a final course grade, should be weighted *no more than 33 percent* of the terminal course leading to the exam. (Note: this weight may be used for entire year courses if the course is annualized.)
- **Annualization:** Annualized programming is a ten-month learning program, where a course's syllabus, scope and sequence, lesson plans, assessments, and grading policy reflect a ten-month cycle (usually with the same teacher and students). Semester-based programming is a five-month learning program, reflecting a five-month cycle. Both approaches can be valuable, depending on the needs of your school. If students in a semester-based course fail, they may not receive credit for that course in the second semester as part of credit earned in a second-semester course. In this situation, your school should either:
 - Design an annualized program with a syllabus that demonstrates academic standards spiraled throughout a ten-month learning cycle and a grading policy that reflects that cycle; OR
 - Maintain a semester-based program and follow the State's credit recovery policy to give the student the opportunity to make up the work in a future semester.
- **Credit Recovery:** Schools determine how to calculate grades for make-up courses as part of their grading policy and in accordance with Commissioner's Regulations on [awarding make-up credit](#). Grades and credit previously recorded for the course the student is making-up should not be changed. Instead, the student should receive a grade (and credit, as appropriate) for the new make-up course *in the semester in which the make-up course was completed*. In cases where the student is completing a targeted program instead of repeating the entire course, the school should determine and

document in advance its policy for how the original course grade will be reconciled with the targeted program's grade, and record that grade (and credit, as appropriate) *in the semester in which the make-up program was completed*.

Expectations for Documentation

School grading policies provide clear expectations for student learning and support families in tracking progress towards learning goals, and should be transparent to staff, students, and families. Schools must have their grading policy documented as part of the student handbook and/or course syllabi.

Programming the School Grading Policy in STARS

Successful implementation of a school grading policy includes [effective programming in STARS](#). Using STARS, schools identify courses to be included in students' GPA and assign course weights to individual courses. Schools have two options when producing averages: simple and weighted. The simple average includes the grade earned and weight assigned for courses the school has designated to be included in the GPA. The weighted average also factors in the credit value. Student transcripts display the weighted average.

If you have questions about grading or course credit policy, click [here](#) or contact your [network](#).