

February 23, 2012

Dear Colleagues,

Over the last year, we conducted an internal audit of high school academic data, including a close review of academic credits, student discharges, and Regents exam scores at 60 high schools. The [audit](#) focused on schools with the most significant data irregularities in order to address these issues and to better understand the changes needed to improve practices across the City. I'm writing to explain the steps we are taking to address the issues identified in the audit and to remind you of the resources available to support you.

First, we are publishing a new [High School Academic Policy Reference Guide](#), which compiles City and State regulations and guidance relating to academic data and student programming. This guide summarizes major requirements, provides links to additional resources, and includes five major policy changes and clarifications:

- 1. Regents scoring.** Beginning in the 2012-13 school year, schools will no longer score their own students' Regents exams. Consistent with State law, and in anticipation of Regents exam scores being used to inform teachers' evaluations, we are shifting to a new system for scoring Regents exams. School staff will gather on their campus or at a nearby school to score the Regents exams of students from other schools, similar to the way elementary and middle school State ELA and math exams are scored.

In January 2012, 27 schools participated in a pilot of this scoring system. While transitioning to a new system is always challenging, these schools found the new process quicker and more efficient than scoring exams on their own. This June, additional schools will participate in this pilot; next year, all high schools will transition to this new scoring system. Your network will reach out to you with more information about this process.

- 2. Credit recovery.** State regulations allow students who fail a course to make up credit by engaging in targeted, intensive instruction in their identified deficiency areas. Appropriately implemented, credit recovery gives students time and flexibility to master standards and complete coursework at the same level of rigor as the original course. To ensure that City high schools' credit recovery programs award credit only for rigorous work, we are limiting the use of credit recovery. Starting with courses failed in spring 2012 and corresponding credit recovery programs beginning July 1, 2012, credit recovery programs must meet the following criteria:
 - Only students who have attended at least two-thirds of the original course are eligible to earn credit through credit recovery.
 - Students may earn no more than three (3) core academic credits through credit recovery.
 - Students can earn credit through credit recovery only in the semester or summer immediately following the failed course. After that period, students can earn make-up credit only by repeating the course.
 - In deciding whether credit recovery is an appropriate way for a student to make up a course, the school-based panel that approves students' participation in credit recovery must consult with the teacher of the course the student originally failed. The panel must document its decisions.
 - All online credit recovery programs must be approved by the DOE, and students enrolled in these programs must meet the requirements above.

- 3. Physical education requirements.** All students must earn four physical education credits to graduate and take PE every year they are in high school. If your school has facilities limitations, please work with the Office



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of School Wellness Programs and your network to identify appropriate PE program options. For more information on policies and options for designing PE programs, please review this [new guidance document](#) and reach out to the [Office of School Wellness Programs](#) for training and support.

4. **Student information systems.** With high schools entering information about student credits, exams, and programs in STARS, the quality of our student data and academic record-keeping has greatly improved. Building on that success, we are continuing to take steps to make sure our student data is as accurate and complete as possible. For example:
 - Beginning in June, when school staff enter graduation discharge codes in ATS, the system will automatically check whether students have met relevant credit and exam requirements before allowing a graduation code to be entered.
 - Beginning this fall, all schools will be required to code courses according to a new coding format. The new codes will strengthen data quality, enable more useful academic programming reports, reduce school workload, and make transcript and program information more accessible to colleges and employers. An [overview of the new codes](#) is available online, and the new course code directory will be posted in *Principals' Weekly* next month along with supporting resources.
 - We are continuing to enhance STARS to better align with academic policies, including adding restrictions to course credit values, providing more useful student data reports, and streamlining the process for making transcript updates.

5. **Discharge documentation.** Though documentation of student discharges has improved since State and City discharge requirements have aligned, the audit revealed that some students continue to be discharged from schools without complete documentation. Schools should continue to ensure that discharges meet current [City transfer and discharge guidelines](#).

The audit identified a limited number of cases of possible misconduct. These cases have been referred for investigation, and if substantiated, disciplinary measures will be taken. However, most of the errors the audit identified resulted from misunderstandings of required policies and protocols or from poor record keeping. All participating schools engaged in an action-planning process, which involved reviewing errors and making adjustments to school protocols and student programs where necessary.

To support your school in strengthening record keeping in alignment with the policies listed in the guide, your network's designated academic policy and data application point people will provide additional training to you and your staff. If you identify areas in which your school needs to make changes, please work with your network to plan and implement those changes.

Thank you for the work you and your teams do each day on behalf of our students. As always, I welcome your feedback. If you have questions or comments, please share them with your network team or with me at ssurans@schools.nyc.gov.

Best,

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Chief Academic Officer