

D34 MIDDLE SCHOOL GRADING GUIDELINES - PARENT DOCUMENT

Our middle school teachers have spent a great deal of time over the past year and a half discussing issues related to grading. We have also reviewed best practices and research that identifies how grading can best support and represent the learning process. From this dialogue and study, the middle school staffs have adopted new grading practices that will provide more consistent, accurate and meaningful information about student learning. These new practices will be implemented by all middle school teachers in District 34 beginning this school year. This document is provided to introduce these guidelines to parents and, most importantly, to help parents connect the guidelines to their children's learning experiences and progress reports.

ISSUE/QUESTION	GOAL	GUIDELINE
1. What do the letter grades on report cards represent?	Grades must be accurate and meaningful. They must communicate information about a student's understanding of concepts and attainment of information and skills learned during the marking period.	With our new grading guidelines, trimester grades will reflect a student's proficiency in the subject matter. Proficiency refers to a student's skill level and/or level of understanding of concepts. When a teacher assigns a project, gives a quiz or test, and believes that your child is ready to demonstrate proficiency in the concepts being studied, the grades for those assessments will account for no less than 80% of the trimester report card grade. These types of assessments of learning are referred to as "summative" assessments because they occur after all teacher instruction and student learning has taken place. If homework or class work is intended to provide students with an opportunity to practice their understanding of concepts (formative), these marks will account for 20% or less of the trimester grade. (Note: Science classes will weight summative assessments no less than 70% of the total grade and formative assessments no more than 30% of the total grade.)
2. My child refers to "formative" and "summative" assessments. What does this mean?	Assessments provide both the teacher and student with important information about learning. This information is used to make critical decisions in the classroom. Formative assessments represent learning <i>in progress</i> while summative assessments are used to gauge students' understanding at the end of instruction – typically at the end of a unit of study.	Formative assessments give the teacher and students information about the level of understanding <i>at a point in time</i> during instruction. A formative assessment can be written work that the teacher assigns to the class, oral questions and class discussion about a concept, written or oral surveys conducted in class. Using the information from these assessments, a teacher can gauge the level of students' understanding, adjust lessons, and plan learning activities. Students can use the information to identify what they know and what they do not yet know. Since learning is not yet complete, formative assessments do not carry as much weight as summative assessments. Formative assessments will account for no more than 20% of the trimester grade. With summative assessments typically coming at the end of units/chapters after many checks of student understanding (formative assessments) and opportunities for practice and reinforcement, they will account for at least 80% of trimester grades.
3. How do homework grades impact my child's trimester grade?	The purpose of homework is to provide students with <i>out-of-school</i> opportunities to practice new skills and reinforce concepts. Homework provides students with safe opportunities to practice their thinking and make mistakes. Students are not expected to show proficiency in a topic when they are practicing.	Homework can help students deepen their understanding of concepts as well as increase their retention of information. These benefits may extend to increased achievement on quizzes and tests. Because homework is primarily intended to provide practice and reinforcement (and not proficiency), it will not be a major component of a student's trimester grade (20% or less).

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4. My child gives her best effort on homework and studying for tests. How is her effort reflected in a trimester grade?	If we include marks for behaviors that impact learning (effort, class participation, etc.) when calculating trimester grades, we would be working against our intent to keep grades as accurate indicators of proficiency.	Behaviors that contribute to learning will not be graded and therefore will not be included in report card grades at the middle level <i>unless they are a stated part of a learning goal</i> , as in Physical Education and the Fine and Performing Arts. There are many behaviors that contribute to learning that we want to reinforce and help strengthen in our students. Middle school teachers are currently working to develop a new report card format that will provide information on some of these behaviors that contribute to learning <i>in addition to</i> trimester grades.
5. Will my child be able to re-take a quiz or test?	Learning takes time because learning is developmental. We want trimester grades to represent students' final levels of proficiency. If students demonstrate that past assessment information no longer accurately reflects their learning, that information must be dropped and replaced by the new information.	We expect students to meet standards and give their best effort at all times. Rather than accept less than a student's best, teachers may provide students with opportunities to re-do work or re-take quizzes and tests. In order to ensure that students' understanding has increased and thus are ready to demonstrate proficiency, teachers may require students to come before/after school for additional help and/or to complete additional work.
6. Is it fair for some students to re-take a test to improve their grades when some students get good grades on the first attempt?	Learning is not a game of winners and losers. We believe all students can learn and we will do everything necessary to make this happen. Students are individuals and need to be treated as such.	Giving a student more time to learn does not negatively impact the learning of another student. Middle schoolers readily accept that <i>fair</i> does not always mean <i>equal</i> . Rather than judge students against each other, a student's grades will be based on his/her own achievement. Providing one student with more time or an additional opportunity to demonstrate proficiency does not diminish another student's accomplishments.
7. My child is very motivated by good grades. Will this new grading approach impact student motivation?	We strive to nurture life-long, self-directed learners. Students who are <i>intrinsically motivated</i> , whose desire to achieve and improve comes from within rather than from external rewards, are more likely to become successful, responsible learners.	Students feel good when they experience success. This success leads to greater confidence and increased learning. Our goal is to help all students learn and grow and our new approach to grading provides students with a more accurate representation of their learning. With more supports and greater use of formative assessments to shape learning, more students will experience greater success – the ultimate motivator!
8. GBS has a different approach to grading. Why don't the middle schools use the same grading strategies as the high school?	Our approach to grading and our instructional strategies must not only reflect best practice and research but must also be responsive to the unique developmental needs of young adolescents.	Our 10-14 year-old middle school students have different needs than 14-18 year-old high school students. As such, some of our approaches to teaching and learning will be different than those students may experience in high school. One of the best ways we can prepare our students for high school is to ensure that they have a solid academic foundation. Our new approach to grading places the emphasis on learning and supporting students through the learning process while maintaining high academic standards.