



## Frequently Asked Questions: Grading Practices

The primary purpose of grading in the Interstate 35 Community School District is to communicate information about student achievement to students, parents, and others. Please see the below questions to clarify key frequently asked questions regarding grading practices to ensure that communication is accurate, timely and responsive. If you have additional questions, please feel free to contact one of the building or district administrators listed at the bottom of this letter.

**Parent Informational Nights:** June 15, July 13 and Aug. 5. All will begin at 6pm in the Auditorium

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### **1. Does the district have common grading practices across buildings? Where can I learn more?**

Yes. Interstate 35 Community School District believes that all students should have access to fair and consistent grading practices no matter their school or teacher, and we are working toward that goal. We will eventually have a link on the school website to house all of the SBG information.

### **2. What is the role of “practice” in grading?**

We do not penalize students for making mistakes when completing practice assignments. Some may have previously referred to a practice assignment as homework. Because learning occurs at different rates and in different ways for individual students, all students have multiple opportunities to practice key skills before they are assessed and graded. Teachers are still responsible for recording practice assignments in PowerSchool for parents to review and monitor throughout the semester. Practice, including homework, is still a key component of learning, and in most classrooms, students may be required to complete key practice assignments before they are able to retake an assessment. The key to getting better through practice is the feedback. Feedback can come in many different forms, 1 on 1, written, phone call home but if ever there is a student or parent feels there is a lack of feedback please reach out to the teacher for clarification. To see your student’s most recent grade, please view the “Current Grade” in PowerSchool.

### **3. What if my student did not do well on an assessment? Can they redo a test or show they know the learning another way?**

If your student needs more help learning a skill or to retake or redo an assignment, they are able to work with their teacher to do so. Evidence of relearning can take a lot of different forms, and is not always shown through a traditional “quiz” or “test”. Students may also be asked to show their learning through other assessments, including projects, writing assignments, or in conversations with their teacher. Regardless of your student’s achievement, an assessment can always be improved. It’s about taking the feedback and applying it to show the students understanding. Please encourage your students to communicate with their teacher regarding reassessment policies if they would like to retake or redo an assessment.

Grades will never be based on a curve. The goal is for all students to achieve at grade level so feedback is going to be provided by teacher to work toward that goal for all students.

It's also good to remember that standards will be assessed multiple times throughout the semester. That doesn't mean that a score of 1 shouldn't be reassessed, that means that students will have multiple opportunities to show their understanding. It's not a one time snapshot that holds the student to the standard.

### **4. What does it mean if my student has an “M” listed as the score for an assignment in PowerSchool?**

If your student has an “M” or “missing” flag for an assignment, this is considered an essential priority assessment and is a critical assignment for them to complete. Please help us by identifying missing assignments in PowerSchool and reminding your student of the importance of them completing these missing assignments. The “M” will also count as a 0 toward the final grade calculation. Encourage them to visit with their teachers about ways they can complete these essential priority assessments. Without students completing this evidence, teachers may be unable to assign a final grade at the semester which may result in a student receiving an INC (Incomplete) or an F (failing grade) in a class.

**5. Which letter grade is the “final” grade for a class? When do grades “start over”?**

The only grade recorded on a student’s transcript or permanent record is the 18 week (semester) grade. All other grading periods (4.5 week, 9 week, 13.5 week) are just informal “checkpoints” in PowerSchool. Learning *does not stop* at these checkpoints; rather, student learning is an ongoing process that teachers support throughout the semester and school year. The only courses that do not operate on a semester grading period are the middle school exploratory courses which only meet for 6 weeks at a time. To see your student’s most recent grade, please view the “Current Grade” in PowerSchool

**6. How does the district calculate letter grades? What are the percentages associated with a letter grade?**

The final (semester) letter grade for every secondary course at Interstate 35 is calculated using the District Letter Grade Scale in PowerSchool. Letter grade percentages are determined by averaging the power standard assessments for the semester. Generally speaking there are 7-10 power standards assessed during the semester, however that will vary based on the curricular area. A letter grade is then assigned based on the total score. These calculations are the same as what is currently being used in powerschool.

Course letter grades are determined at semester using the following scale:

<u>Scale Score</u>	<u>Letter Grade</u>	<u>GPA</u>	<u>Percentage</u>	<u>Descriptor</u>
4.0-3.67	A	4.0	94-100%	Exceeds Standard
3.66-3.34	A-	3.667	90-93%	Meets Standard
3.33-3.01	B+	3.33	87-89%	Meets Standard
3.0-2.67	B	3.0	83-86%	Meets Standard
2.66-2.34	B-	2.667	80-82%	Approaching Standard
2.33-2.01	C+	2.33	77-79%	Approaching Standard
2.0-1.67	C	2.0	73-76%	Approaching Standard
1.66-1.34	C-	1.667	70-72%	Developing Standard
1.33-1.01	D+	1.33	67-69%	Developing Standard
1.00-.67	D	1.0	63-66%	Developing Standard
.66-.01	D-	0.667	60-62%	Developing Standard
0	F	0	0-59%	Incomplete or No Evidence

\*Percentage is used for reference to see how it compares to the scale score, percentage will eventually be removed from this chart

**\*\*\*Students in classes using a 4 point scale CAN earn “+” or “-” grades. Letter grades are determined based on the average of graded scores in PowerSchool.**

**7. Why are some teachers using a 4 point scale? I am used to seeing assignments out of total points.**

Departments using a 4 point learning scale are farthest along in our implementation of the standards based grading practice. The state of Iowa has articulated learning outcomes, or standards, for all students in grades K12. It is then up to local school districts to develop their own curriculum that is aligned to these standards. In Interstate 35, that means our teachers clarify power standards, develop common rubrics and assessments to ensure every student is held to the same standard *no matter the teacher they are assigned*. Those classrooms are beginning to use those rubrics as a way to score assignments and give students feedback about where they are in relation to the standards being taught. Many districts, including Interstate 35, refer to this practice as standards based/reference grading. All departments are engaged in this work in their Curricular teams and will be implementing a 4 point learning scale over the course of the next year. By the end of the 2021-22 school year, all programs will have piloted and implemented this practice

**8. What is the difference between total points and the 4 point scale? Is my student disadvantaged because they are in a class that uses one way versus another way?**

The difference here is in *how a teacher arrives as a score for an assignment or assessment*, not how the letter grade is calculated. There is no mathematical disadvantage in earning a grade in a classroom that uses one way versus another because all letter grades are calculated using the District Letter Grade Scale. The goal of our common is to ensure that Interstate 35's grading system is fair, accurate and consistent for all students. See the table below for more clarity.

Key Question	Total Points	4 Point Learning Scale
What does this mean?	Teachers assign specific assignments a point value. Assignments do not all have the same point value, typically based on the level of difficulty or importance placed on the assignment.	Teachers use a common scale to score all assignments against a common standard. Based on the student performance on the assessment, the teacher assigns a level of proficiency as the score.  4 = Exceeds Standard 3 = Meets the Standard 2 = Approaching Standard 1 = Below Standard
How is the percentage calculated?	The percentage is calculated automatically in PowerSchool  Total points possible / total points earned = percentage	An assignment is given a score of 4 to 0 which is assigned a percentage using the District Letter Grade Scale.
How is the final grade in the class calculated?	The overall percentage earned in a class is converted to a letter grade using the District Letter Grade Scale.	The overall percentage earned in a class is converted to a letter grade using the District Letter Grade Scale.

## 9. Why is the district transitioning away from “total points” toward the use of a common 4 point scale?

Research has shown that when teachers assign their own weighting and point values to assessments, students can receive a broad range of scores from teacher to teacher on the same assignment. This can lead to inconsistencies, and potential inequities, with regard to grades that students earn. As our district grading philosophy articulates that we value “fair and equitable practices across the district” for all students, we need to align our practices to that value.

The concept of using a common 4 point scale is similar to an approach most parents and students are very familiar with: the use of a rubric to score assignments. Well written rubrics, or scales, define a continuum of knowledge and understanding related to a topic or standard. An assessment can be created so a teacher knows the understanding of his or her students on a certain standard.

Example: Standard A can be assessed in questions 1-5, Standard B can be assessed on questions 5-10. At the end of the assessment a teacher can see if there is a learning gap for students on a particular standard. From that data teachers can create next steps for all students, not just students who are struggling.

As a part of our professional development, all content areas are developing common scales so that we evaluate student work *through the lens of the standard* on a scale that is *common across disciplines*. From a practical perspective, consider how much value there will be for both students and parents when you can view each of your student’s gradebooks from a common perspective without having to decipher individual classroom scoring preferences.

**Generic Form of a Proficiency Scale**

4	Exceeding Standard: in depth inferences beyond what was taught
3	Meets the Standard: meets target goal
2	Approaching the Standard: key foundational skills and academic vocabulary
1	Below Standard: with help, partial success at 2.0 and 3.0 content
M = 0	Even with help, no success

## 10. My student believes it is impossible to get an “A” on a 4 point scale. Is that true?

Earning an “A” in the Interstate 35 Community School District means that you have *met* the target learning goals of a class. The same is true whether or not you are in a class that uses a 4 point scale or a total points calculation. Likewise, all classrooms are working to implement the, including opportunities for students to have clear learning targets, to show their learning in multiple ways, to receive descriptive feedback, and to relearn and reassess when needed. These teaching practices are focused on student learning, our primary purpose. One fundamental shift for all of our classrooms in Interstate 35 is that grades will be based on *levels of achievement* and will not include “grade inflation” measures that can distort the accuracy of a grade, including: the use of extra credit and/or rewarding behaviors through the use of a grade. Accurate, fair and consistent grades reflect what your students *know* and *are able to do* in relation to our district academic standards.

**11. My student earned a 2 on his/her first assignment which calculates as a “C”. Should I be worried? How should I respond to my student’s concern?**

Earning a 2 on a 4 point scale means that students are approaching proficiency on a key power standard for the class. In late September/early October, this is entirely appropriate and expected. Throughout the semester and year, our teachers revisit key priorities and offer students multiple opportunities to demonstrate proficiency and beyond (to include 3 or 4). Further, practices indicate that we do not penalize students for early attempts at learning or for making mistakes when they practice a new skill, so when students demonstrate they know and understand the target, they are given full credit for that understanding. When students have this accurate feedback about where they are in relation to the learning target, they have the information, support and instruction that they need to close that gap. Please partner with us as a school community in helping our students focus on *learning* and on developing the stamina and habits of mind to work hard, to persevere, and to embrace a growth mindset.

**12. How are you communicating decisions about grading with students?**

No matter how a teacher assigns points in a gradebook, students are a fundamental part of the grading process. In fact, research indicates that when students (1) understand the learning target, and (2) receive feedback about where they are in relation to the learning target, they have a much greater likelihood of learning at a high level. This process is at the center of learning, and as such, belongs as a conversation in every classroom at Interstate 35.

**13. So does all of this mean that Interstate 35 is working on transitioning to standards based grading? I know other districts in the area are already grading this way, and I would like to learn more about it.**

Yes, however “Standards Based Grading” is not a one size fits all initiative, and Interstate 35 is working toward developing a practice that works for our district. We have reviews surrounding district practices and adopted what fits for our setting.

We plan to communicate and host upcoming sessions at parent/teacher conferences and develop parent guides regarding how to access/understand PowerSchool. This plan and timeline will be revised and shared over the course of 2021-22 school year based on feedback from all stakeholders.

**14. How does this impact my student’s DMACC concurrent, PSEO, or AP course grade?**

The letter grade earned in a DMACC concurrent or PSEO course is subject to that institution’s grading scale and is subject to their grading policies. If the course is taught on campus by an Interstate 35 teacher, then the grading scale and policies are those of Interstate 35 Community School District. If the course is taught online or at another institution (ex: DMACC Career Academy), then the grading scale and policies are those of the higher education institution. Advanced Placement (AP) classes, whether taught on campus or through an online system, are subject to the grading scale and policies of Interstate 35 Community School District.

As a system, Interstate 35 faculty and staff are constantly engaged in the process of continuous improvement. We pride ourselves at Interstate 35 on the partnerships we build between parents, the community, the students, and the school, and we are no different in the area of grading. We thank you for trusting us with the responsibility of teaching, supporting, and nurturing your children, and we welcome your thoughts and additional questions at any time.

**15. How does this impact my HS student's GPA?**

The formula for calculating an Interstate 35 High School student's GPA is not changing. GPA is calculated on the basis of credits and grades earned in academic subjects and is reported on the student transcript. See the chart below:

A	4.000	B+	3.333	C+	2.333	D+	1.333	F	0.000
A-	3.667	B	3.000	C	2.000	D	1.000		
		B-	2.667	C-	1.667	D-	0.667		

Example GPA Calculation from Powerschool

***Example of Final Topic Scores converted by PowerSchool and converted to a letter grade:***

<b>Final Topic Scores (based on body of evidence + teacher professional judgment)</b>	<b>Average of Final Topic Scores (computed by PowerSchool)</b>	<b>Letter Grade for Course (converted by PowerSchool)</b>	<b>Traditional GPA Value</b>
Standard A: 3	2.66	B-	2.66
Standard B: 2			
Standard C: 3			
Standard D: 2			
Standard E: 3			
Standard F: 3			

**For more information, please visit our district website or contact one of the administrators listed below.**

Interstate 35 Community School District Secondary Administrative Team

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