SPS Board Adopts Temporary Grading Policy

School Building Closures Made Change Necessary

SEATTLE – The Seattle School Board of Directors today approved a new temporary grading policy to be used for all Seattle Public Schools high school students at the conclusion of the current school year.

The policy – referred to simply as “A or Incomplete” – temporarily suspends the normal grade-marking portion of the district’s high school grading policy. Normal grade-marking is now replaced by either an “A” or an “Incomplete.”

This temporary policy will be used by high schools as students’ final grades are determined for the Spring 2020 semester.

SPS Superintendent Denise Juneau said the change was necessary because of the unique challenges presented by the mid-March closure of SPS school buildings for the remainder of the school year during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“After looking at several options, we determined the “A or Incomplete” policy is the best option to make sure the extended school building closure doesn’t harm any of our students, particularly those furthest from educational justice,” said Superintendent Juneau.

The policy was developed using the district’s Racial Equity Analysis Tool, in order to avoid applying an inequitable approach to grading during this disruption to normal teaching and learning. Historically, grading has been one of the biggest sources of inequities in education because student performance may be influenced by factors outside a student’s control, including access to resources and opportunities outside school.

“Of course, nothing can replace normal in-class teaching and grading, but I believe this is the best option for the unprecedented challenges our students are facing,” said Board President Zachary DeWolf. “With the “A or Incomplete” policy, we’re ensuring that no students are penalized because they might not have the same advantages at home that other students have.”
Dr. Mia Williams, SPS Executive Director of the African American Male Achievement department, Dr. Keisha Scarlett, SPS Chief of Equity Partnerships and Engagement, and Dr. Diane DeBacker, SPS Chief Academic Officer, provided a statement of support for the policy:

- “We are grateful that this decision keeps all students at the center of our work in Seattle Public Schools. Our racial equity analyses revealed that this grading policy benefits all students, not just some, and makes the most sense for students and families during this extraordinary time.”

Other temporary grading options that were considered included using “credit” or “no credit”; using regular letter grades; keeping the letter grade as of March 10, 2020 with an opportunity only to improve; or letting schools and teachers decide.

Details about the new grading policy will be sent directly to families through School Messenger and will also be available from an in-depth FAQ posted on the SPS website.