



## Board Special Meeting High School Grade and Credit Marking During COVID-19 School Closure

April 20, 2020, 12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.

*Meeting to be held remotely*

By [Microsoft Teams](#)

By Teleconference: 206-800-4125 (Conference ID: 124 705 709#)

### **Agenda**

#### **Call to Order**

12:00 p.m.

#### **Action Item**

- Action Item: Suspending provisions of Board Policy No. 2420, High School Grade and Credit Marking

#### **Adjourn**

1:00 p.m.\*

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** This meeting will be held remotely without an in-person location per the Governor's [Proclamation 20-28](#), which currently prohibits public agencies from conducting meetings subject to the Open Public Meetings Act in-person to curtail the spread of COVID-19, and consistent with [School Board Resolution 2019/20-29](#). The public is being provided remote access through Microsoft Teams and teleconference as noted above.

*Special meetings of the Board, including work sessions and retreats, may contain discussion and/or action related to the items listed on the agenda. Executive sessions are closed to the public per RCW 42.30. \*Times given are estimated.*

## **SCHOOL BOARD ACTION REPORT**

**DATE:** April 16, 2020  
**FROM:** Denise Juneau, Superintendent  
**LEAD STAFF:** Dr. Diane DeBacker, Chief Academic Officer, (206) 252-0180, dmdebacker@seattleschools.org; Dr. Caleb Perkins, Executive Director of College and Career Readiness, (206) 252-0062, cbperkins@seattleschools.org  
**For Introduction:** April 20, 2020  
**For Action:** April 20, 2020

### **1. TITLE**

Suspending provisions of Board Policy No. 2420, High School Grade and Credit Marking

### **2. PURPOSE**

This Board Action Report suspends portions of Board Policy No. 2420, High School Grade and Credit Marking, during the COVID-19 school closure to change available grade options for courses that earn high school credits to an “A” or “Incomplete”.

### **3. RECOMMENDED MOTION**

I move that the School Board temporarily suspend identified provisions of Board Policy No. 2420, High School Grade and Credit Marking Policy, as identified in Attachment A to the Board Action Report, to be replaced with grade marking options “A” or “Incomplete” for courses that earn high school credits, for the duration of school closure due to the containment of COVID-19. Immediate action is in the best interest of the district.

### **4. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

#### **a. Background**

The school closure required by Governor Inslee through the end of the year creates a range of challenges for Seattle Public Schools’ educators, students, and their families. Determining how to address grading and earning credit is a key concern. The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) asked districts to determine locally how to provide meaningful opportunities for students to earn credits and provide meaningful feedback to students and their families. The district considered grading options for courses for high school credit that align with the vision for college and career readiness and employed the district’s Racial Equity Analysis Tool, including case studies, to provide an intentional focus on students furthest from educational justice as part of the ongoing strategic plan commitment to *Seattle Excellence*.

The following guiding principles for these grading options were developed to further racial equity with regards to grading practices in this unprecedented time. The district wants to:

- Ensure that the school closure does not have a negative impact on students, especially students furthest from educational justice. *This is the most important and overarching principle guiding our decisions.*
- Keep students engaged in learning.
- Keep teachers engaged in teaching.
- Meet the state’s requirement to make a good faith effort in providing meaningful credit-earning opportunities.
- Provide space for flexibility and individualized plans to ensure equitable outcomes.
- Promote common expectations across high schools to guide their work.

The racial equity analysis of possible high school grading guidelines during the school closure, particularly their effects on SPS students furthest from educational justice (SFFEJ), revealed two stronger options:

- Credit or Incomplete
- A or Incomplete

Both options have anticipated advantages for SFFEJ: their GPAs will not drop in comparison to their SPS classmates, there are incentives to stay engaged in learning, and most institutions of higher education have indicated that they will not penalize students for either option. Both options also strike a balance between ensuring that students can make progress towards content standards and acknowledging challenges to learning at this time.

That said, *SPS leadership is proposing “A” or “Incomplete” as the only grading options for the Spring 2020 semester.* We believe this will be the best option for our students furthest from educational justice given our overarching goal of mitigating harm to students caused by the school closure.

Specifically, we note that:

- Many universities and other programs across the country have stated that students will not be penalized for posting credit/no credit transcripts for this semester, but this approach is not universal across all postsecondary institutions. Making “A” the only credit-based grade will ensure students are not penalized.
- Other school districts are already taking different approaches. Some are deciding to give letter grades, which could put our students at a relative disadvantage.

Students will be asked to remain engaged in the standards-based activities and learning assigned by their teacher(s) to the extent possible to receive an “A”. We will also have the option to give “Incompletes” to students who did not engage in learning and activities although they had the ability to do so. These students will have through Fall Semester to complete work and earn an “A”.

To support the implementation of this new policy, the district will develop other guidelines to ensure that all staff continue to make extraordinary efforts to keep students engaged in learning and earning the credits they need to take the next steps on their paths to college and career readiness.

**b. Alternatives**

Do not approve these policy changes. This is not recommended as it would mean schools and educators would have to rely on existing grading approaches during this

extraordinary time. That would result in greater inequities in student outcomes, particularly for students furthest from educational justice.

Another alternative is to consider changing our grading policy to be “Credit or No Credit” or allow students to earn a semester grade based on the grade they had when schools closed. Neither of these options is recommended. Based on the district’s equity analysis, it is believed both options will be more likely to result in inequitable outcomes for SPS students.

**c. Research**

The district reviewed and consulted with hundreds of sources across the state and country in determining the recommended approach to a high school grading policy during the school closure this semester. This included external conversations and consultation with colleagues and experts from the Council of Great City Schools, the Association of Washington School Principals, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, and districts throughout the Puget Sound and region. The district also consulted internally with experts and colleagues, including the Curriculum, Assessment, and Instruction (CAI) team, the Department of Racial Equity Advancement (DREA), and Office of African American Male Achievement (AAMA).

In addition, district leadership arrived at this new grading proposal after conducting a racial equity analysis of different grading policy options to see how they would affect students furthest from educational justice in general, as well as particular students in our system. Specifically, they looked at how the following options would connect with our most important guiding principle of ensuring no negative impact and specifically, how they would impact the desired outcomes for SPS students furthest from educational justice: 1. A or Incomplete; 2. Credit or Incomplete; 3. Letter Grades per current policy; 4. Giving students the grades they had as of March 12 when schools closed. This analysis revealed that the “A or Incomplete” approach was the best option.

Staff also conducted two formal analyses to gauge the effect on different grading policy options on students furthest from educational justice:

- Analysis of Schoology Data: The Department of Technology Services (DoTS) and Research and Evaluation have been collecting data on Schoology log-ins by students post school closures. In the absence of data on how many students currently have access to computers and internet, Schoology log-ins can be seen as proxy data. Students may be able to access Schoology through their phones, but are likely not able to fully participate in remote learning using only their phones. Early analysis indicates that a large number of African American male students are not connecting with their teachers via Schoology. The overall percentage of students who have logged into Schoology since the school closure is 71.5% while the percentage for the African American males is 60%.
- Analysis of Gradebook data: DoTS and Research and Evaluation are working to analyze gradebook records from Quarter 3 of this semester to Quarter 3 of spring 2019. If they see a steeper decline in grades for SFFEJ/African American males than other students, that would suggest that SFFEJ/African American males are being disproportionately impacted by the closure of school due to COVID-19. Their initial findings suggest that school closure has disproportionately impacted the GPAs of

Students of Color relative to other students across the district. However, the current impact is small. They did not see evidence of disproportionate impacts for African American male students. They will need to do additional analysis to confirm these initial conclusions.

These analyses further solidified our conclusion that continuing the current letter grade policy or giving students grades for where they were on March 12 would result in more inequitable outcomes for students furthest from educational justice.

## 5. FISCAL IMPACT/REVENUE SOURCE

There is no fiscal impact to this action.

Expenditure:  One-time  Annual  Multi-Year  N/A

Revenue:  One-time  Annual  Multi-Year  N/A

## 6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

With guidance from the District's Community Engagement tool, this action was determined to merit the following tier of community engagement:

Not applicable

Tier 1: Inform

Tier 2: Consult/Involve

Tier 3: Collaborate

Staff have engaged in broad conversations on high school grading during school closure with a number of stakeholders prior to bringing this Board Action Report forward including School Board Directors, Principals' Association of Seattle Schools (PASS) leadership, Seattle Education Association (SEA) leadership, Seattle Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) leadership, Associated Student Body (ASB) leadership, the Superintendent's Advisory Group, the African American Male Achievement Student Leadership Council, high school principals, department chairs, and other teacher leaders. We have also reached out to School Board Directors, PASS leadership, SEA leadership, and PTSA leadership about the specific proposal in this Board Action Report.

After approval of the change, the new policy will be posted, and the changes will be communicated to middle and high school staff. We are including middle school staff since there are high school credit-bearing courses offered at the middle school level and this potential temporary suspension of policy will be applied to them as well.

We will also develop a plan of action with community-based organizations (e.g., Africatown; Manhood Development Program; WA-BLOC; Urban Family Center; Rainier Vista Boys & Girls Club; College Success Foundation) in addition to other Community-Based Organizations that are accountable to African American students and families to provide additional outreach.

## 7. **EQUITY ANALYSIS**

As noted above, racial equity analyses of the grading policy options have been central to the development of this proposed policy. To reiterate, the analyses of effects on specific SPS students furthest from educational justice revealed two stronger options:

- Credit or Incomplete
- A or Incomplete

SPS leadership is recommending that “A” or “Incomplete” be the only grading options for the Spring 2020 semester because this will be the best option for our students furthest from educational justice.

Also noted above, we developed this recommendation after conducting a racial equity analysis of the options to see how they would affect students furthest from educational justice in general as well as particular students in our system. Specifically, we looked at how each option connects with our most important guiding principle of ensuring no negative impact and looked at the following desired outcomes for SPS SFEEJ:

- Earn credit in every class they are enrolled in this semester.
- Stay engaged in learning and learn what they need to learn in order to find success in their future coursework and/or employment.
- Do not end up with lower GPAs relative to their SPS classmates given comparative lack of access to teaching and learning resources.
- Are admitted to the colleges of their choice and earn any scholarships that they are good candidates for, given their academic records.

Moreover, the district also conducted two formal analyses to gauge the effect on different grading policy options on students furthest from educational justice: Analysis of Schoology Data and an Analysis of Gradebook data (see explanation above).

These analyses further solidified our conclusion that continuing the current letter grade policy or giving students grades for where they were on March 10 would result in more inequitable outcomes for students furthest from educational justice.

## 8. **STUDENT BENEFIT**

As noted above, SPS leadership is proposing “A” or “Incomplete” as the only grading options for the Spring 2020 semester as the best option for the district’s students furthest from educational justice, given the overarching goal to ensure that the school closure does not result in any harm to these students.

## 9. **WHY BOARD ACTION IS NECESSARY**

- Amount of contract initial value or contract amendment exceeds \$250,000 (Policy No. 6220)
- Amount of grant exceeds \$250,000 in a single fiscal year (Policy No. 6114)
- Adopting, amending, or repealing a Board policy

Formally accepting the completion of a public works project and closing out the contract

Legal requirement for the School Board to take action on this matter

Board Policy No. \_\_\_\_\_, [TITLE], provides the Board shall approve this item

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. POLICY IMPLICATION**

This motion would result in the temporary suspension of identified provisions in Board Policy No. 2420, High School Grade and Credit Marking Policy, as described above and in Attachment A of this Board Action Report.

This motion is in alignment with the principles found in Policy No. 0030, Ensuring Educational and Racial Equity.

**11. BOARD COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION**

This motion was not reviewed in a committee.

**12. TIMELINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION**

Upon approval of this motion the identified provisions of Policy No. 2420, High School Grade and Credit Marking Policy, will be suspended for the duration of the COVID-19 school closure and secondary school leaders, counselors, and educators will be informed of the change to grade marks “A” or “Incomplete”. In addition, PowerSchool will be modified to give teachers only “A” or “Incomplete” as options when recording grades for high school students.

**13. ATTACHMENTS**

- Attachment A: Policy No. 2420, High School Grade and Credit Marking Policy – provisions to be temporarily suspended are crossed out (for reference)