

Time to join the conversation about grading practices

As school district leaders must make decisions about the end of the school year and assessing student progress during the COVID-19 crisis, educators need to share their insight on what works best for students.

During the chaos and uncertainty that come with COVID-19 as it relates to our public schools, educators have questions about how to determine students' grades. Local district administrators have broad flexibility with practices of grades and course credits. This crisis offers educators an opportunity to influence district policy when teachers collectively agree on how to handle grades.

Keep in mind that grading policy may differ by grade level. For example, one policy might apply to elementary grades, while another applies to high school grades.

DESE staff members suggest districts have three options for grades, but they recommend districts consult the Missouri State High School Activities Association and the National Collegiate Athletic Association clearing house about how these choices affect sports eligibility in high school and college.

- With the COMPETENCY-BASED approach, the educator determines the degree to which the student mastered the concepts. The student shows this competency through projects or assessments.
- Under the PASS/FAIL approach, students do not receive letter grades. They earn credit, or they don't earn credit.
- With the HOLD-HARMLESS approach, a student's grade can go up but not down from where it was when school buildings were closed. If a student has an F due to an assignment after school stopped in-person classes, the educator has the ability to waive the F and pass the student. If the student has an F because he or she did not master the coursework as of when school ended in-person classes, then the student gets an F unless the student shows improved work after in-person classes end.

District administrators should work with educators to determine how to handle grades. After that, they should look at local policy to identify changes they need to make, make the necessary changes, and then apply the new policy consistently throughout the district.

