

Student Learning & Grading Guidance: Frequently Asked Questions

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) released [guidance on Student Learning and Grading](#) on April 21, 2020. Subsequently, on April 29, OSPI filed [emergency rules](#) to mandate certain aspects of the guidance. OSPI has collected and reviewed questions since that time. Below, please find answers to frequently asked questions. These questions apply specifically to courses with high school bearing credit. Questions are being addressed broadly with the goal of maintaining the ability of local school districts to better understand the rule and apply the guidance to respond to local needs.

Q-1: Why is OSPI adopting emergency rules regarding student learning and grading?

OSPI made the decision to eliminate the 'Pass/Fail' grading option as a matter of state policy during this exceptional time in our world's history. It is neither equitable, informative of student learning, nor is there a guarantee that it won't harm students in future educational pursuits. OSPI values local control and local decision-making. In some areas of education and fiscal policy, OSPI is granted explicit legal authority to create statewide consistency and statewide accountability. Policy related to the awarding of high school credit is one of the areas OSPI has significant legal authority.

Q-2: How do teachers determine grades that are fair, accurate, and consistent with the Student Learning and Grading Guidance?

Teachers of high school credit bearing courses first need to identify essential student learning standards necessary for student success in their course or grade level. The next step is narrowing their focus to the essential Washington State K–12 Learning Standards for the remainder of the year.

Teachers are expected to teach and provide feedback to students. Students are expected to engage in learning in order to maintain their underlying "date of closure" grade. Students will not receive a letter grade less than the letter grade the student was earning in a course when the school facility closure began (March 17, 2020). In some cases, students will not engage or cannot engage because of extenuating circumstances, and then it will be up to a teacher and school administrator to determine if the student is better served by receiving an 'Incomplete' (I) or maintain the grade they had on March 17.

Teachers are expected to continue to communicate with students and families about the student's educational growth and development to the extent feasible. It is OSPI's expectation that teachers and students engage in continuous learning through the end of the school year in order to maintain or increase their academic grades.



Q-3: What role does a CTE Course Framework have in identifying essential standards?

The Career and Technical Education (CTE) Course Framework, which identifies unit-by-unit academic and industry standards, should serve as an instructional resource to educators. Courses with articulation agreements that identify learning outcomes for post-secondary partners can support the educator in identifying essential standards to focus on for the remainder of the year.

Q-4: Does OSPI's guidance still allow districts to provide emergency credit waivers for seniors?

Yes. School districts can receive emergency credit waivers, per the rules adopted by the State Board of Education (SBE). First, the school district must get approval from SBE to be able to grant waivers. Then, if seniors are unable to earn the credits for courses they were enrolled in, they may be able to receive a waiver of those credits required for graduation. The waiver determination is ultimately up to the school district.

Q-5: Will high school transcripts contain any notations related to the COVID-19 emergency?

Yes, there will be a designation on student transcripts to indicate if a course/term included school facility closure days due to the COVID-19 emergency. In addition, there will be an indication if required credits associated with a specific course were waived under the SBE emergency rules for students in the Class of 2020. More specific information on how districts should include the designations on the standardized transcript format will be made available soon.

Q-6: Is a student 'absent' if the student is not responding to district-initiated communication or is not participating in continuous learning?

The district's plan for continuous learning must establish a district- or school-based system of collecting information regarding student engagement daily or weekly to determine if students are responding to district- or school-initiated communication and participating in continuous learning. Districts are not required to collect student attendance information for the purpose of reporting student enrollment pursuant to Chapter 392-121 in the Washington Administrative Code (WAC). The emergency rules bar districts from reporting truancy to juvenile courts for student "absences" that occur on or after March 17, 2020. Districts should avoid any practices that collect attendance information solely for the purpose of determining if a student is present. Instead, information should be collected that assists districts in determining which students are engaged in learning and participating in educational opportunities.

Q-7: How are Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) impacted by OSPI's grading guidance, particularly for IEPs that specify a 'Pass/Fail' grading system?

Districts and families may retain the grading practice that was established in the IEP prior to the closure. However, no failing grades are permitted for this term. OSPI's Special Education Continuous Learning Plan ([model form 16b](#)) is a resource for situations in which an existing IEP



outlines 'Pass/Fail.' Considering the recent OSPI guidance on grading, a failing grade should not be used for spring 2020. If it seems that a student with IEP grading accommodations or modifications may not pass the course, the district should discuss OSPI's grading guidance with the student and family. A similar process should be used for students with 504 Plans that include grading accommodations or modifications.

Q-8: How does an 'Incomplete' differ from an 'F'?

'F's' in any form are not an option. OSPI's rules and guidance were developed to create more consistency across the state and allow districts to identify which letter grade system to use. An 'Incomplete' communicates that a teacher was not able to determine proficiency of the learning standards for the course, which could be attributed to a variety of reasons. In order to assign an 'Incomplete' to a student, a teacher must be able to identify the specific standard the student was unable to meet and the steps to demonstrate meeting the standard. Students assigned an 'Incomplete' for a course will be given opportunities to reengage in the learning standards based on local school district decisions. An 'Incomplete' cannot affect a student's GPA and a subsequent attempt and grade of a course will replace that 'I'.

Q-9: Are there any circumstances or exceptions where it may still be possible to award students 'P' (Pass) grades?

Districts that use a 'Pass/Fail' designation for a course, class, or program prior to March 17, 2020 may continue to award 'P' grades for those courses or classes. Students may not receive a failing or 'F' grade. These classes must use a 'Pass/Incomplete' designation for the remainder of the 2019–20 school year. This includes homeroom or advisory courses, TA, credit retrieval, competency, and worksite learning courses that previously used 'Pass/Fail' designations.

Q-10: Does an 'Incomplete grade' affect a high school senior's ability to graduate?

Districts should make every attempt for seniors to earn credit. Districts may determine when it is necessary to grant waivers to the students as allowable through SBE's emergency rule waiver process. Districts should review information about the [waiver](#) and attend to the expectation of a good faith effort.

Q-11: Can any class convert to 'Pass/Incomplete' for the spring term?

No. Classes which were graded prior to the closure may not convert to 'Pass/Incomplete.'

Q-12: How does OSPI's grading guidance impact concurrent enrollment dual credit programs (Running Start, College in the High School, CTE Dual Credit, or programs offering college credit such as Open Doors)?

Districts must ensure grades earned through dual credit courses administered at the high school or college during the school facility closures are aligned with their locally adopted policy and in compliance with OSPI's grading guidance on the high school transcript. In addition, districts need to comply with the institution of higher education's grading policy and/or the local agreement between the district and the institution of higher education on the



college transcript. Districts should ensure their policies address how letter grades awarded by a college or university that fall outside of the district's grading policy will be translated.

Q-13: How does OSPI's grading guidance affect Bridge to College requirements for the college placement agreement and serving as an option for a graduation pathway?

Within the framework defined by OSPI in the statewide guidance regarding student learning and grading, Bridge to College teachers should assign final grades for students following the specific guidelines established by the district or school for all courses. Students still need a 'B' or above to be eligible for the college placement agreement for College Composition and/or specified entry-level college math courses at participating Washington institutions of higher education. Students need to earn credit for the class to earn the graduation pathway.

Q-14: If a district administers multiple educational programs (e.g., alternative high school, skill center, and comprehensive high school), do the grading policies need to be the same at each location?

Prior to the school facility closures due to COVID-19, most districts administered programs with multiple grading policies. District may continue to operate programs with varying grading policies, as long as these policies do not conflict with OSPI's emergency rules related to grading. Courses that utilized 'Pass/Incomplete' grades prior to the closure may continue to do so. In addition, courses that were letter graded must continue to be graded as such, and 'F' cannot be an option.

Q-15: How long does a student have to resolve the 'Incomplete'?

Before they graduate from high school. By graduation, students should be given multiple opportunities to resolve the 'Incomplete.' If this does not happen, then existing credit flexibility may be used if it is appropriate for the missed credit(s).

Q-16: How should a school district address an 'Incomplete' grade for a student who transfers to another school district before the 'Incomplete' is resolved?

The sending school district must communicate what the student needs in order to achieve a grade and for the student to successfully resolve the 'Incomplete.'

Q-17: If a student does not successfully resolve the 'Incomplete,' should the course be removed from the transcript and CEDARS?

No.

Q-18: How will an 'Incomplete' impact grade level and course placement decisions in the fall of 2020?

An 'Incomplete' communicates that a teacher was not able to determine proficiency of the essential learning standards identified for the course. In preparation for fall, schools and districts should begin planning for how this information will impact master scheduling activities. Districts should determine how to gather information about which specific standards



students need another opportunity to learn and develop a plan to allow students to meet standards.

Some shared strategies and future considerations include:

- Encourage teachers to keep an archive of assignments given to students and the associated standards as support for course completion with credit after receiving an 'Incomplete' during school facility closures.
- Use a diagnostic tool for student placement for next year for students who may be transferring in from another state or district.
- Build competency-based courses.
- Build credit retrieval courses, including virtual learning options, into the master schedule.
- Build interventions and additional or repeated support in the master schedule.
- Create opportunities for credit retrieval through independent study.
- Backfill the 'Incomplete' grade with the letter grade obtained in the next course taken in that subject area.
- Provide summer school options as appropriate.

Q-19: How will the designation of 'I' affect federal accountability down the road?

There will be no impact on the accountability system for 2019–20. Washington was granted a federal accountability waiver due to the school facility closures. The waiver guarantees that any school identified for comprehensive or targeted support in the 2019–20 school year will maintain that identification status in the 2020–21 school year. Those identified schools will continue to receive supports and interventions consistent with the school's support and improvement plan in the 2020–21 school year.

It is OSPI's expectation that districts will work with students to change the 'Incomplete' to a letter grade. Once this is done, it will be updated on both the student transcript and in CEDARS. This will ensure that the district efforts to resolve 'Incomplete's' will be reflected in the data that we use for accountability in the future.

