

# Grading and Reporting: Guiding Considerations in Remote Learning Environments

## Purpose

The following communication offers five guiding considerations for schools and supervisory unions/districts (SUs/SDs) as they make decisions to revise grading and reporting policies for students during school closure, and as they prepare for a healthy start to the 2020-2021 school year.

## Introduction

A driving educational equity concern related to student grading and reporting during school closure across the country has centered on traditional grading practices' ability to accurately report student learning, and instead reflecting students' lack of access to resources, particularly those students who belong to historically marginalized groups. In Vermont, with our statewide focus on personalized, proficiency-based education and flexible pathways, SUs/SDs are well-positioned to revisit and refine existing practices to prioritize a sense of wellness and connection for students during school closure, and to prepare for a strong start next school year. This includes examining the role that grading and reporting practices play.

The following five considerations are informed by current guidelines from national and state organizations, and offer local examples from Vermont SU/SDs' Continuity of Learning Plans (CLPs). While the intent to promote positive student outcomes and postsecondary readiness through proficiency-attainment remains intact, the most consistent recommendation across the nation is for schools to take a "less is more" approach when adapting grading and reporting structures. The AOE recommends that a first "less is more" step for Vermont SUs/SDs when adapting grading and reporting policies and procedures is to identify [critical proficiencies](#) for their students.

The [following guiding considerations](#) are organized to represent [Vermont practices](#) and to align with national guidance on how to assess and report on student performance during school closure as a result of COVID-19.

### **1. Communicate to students and staff that fostering a climate of care and connection is a critical protective factor for students.**

Supporting physical, mental, and emotional health must remain a top priority. An educational community must unify to support students, their families, the community, and each other. Throughout the duration of this crisis, seek to involve as many stakeholders as possible to foster a climate of care and connection. ([Learning at a Distance Guidance](#), Michigan Department of Education)

Feedback, grading and reporting are all important forms of communication with students and families; attending to how we communicate about student learning in the remote learning space is critical to fostering a climate of care.

## Vermont Example

The emphasis for schoolwork assigned, reviewed and completed during the remote learning period is on learning, not on compliance. Grading should focus on the continuation of learning and prioritizing the connectedness and care for students. *-Extracted from Essex North Supervisory Union CLP*

## **2. Take steps to address existing inequities and to ensure access to learning opportunities, resources, and supports to meet curriculum requirements and maintain student learning at home.**

Before moving forward with any determinations on grading, districts and schools must consider whether all students have had equitable access to learning opportunities during this closure, keeping in mind the variety of technology, health, disability, and language challenges that could occur.

([Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education](#))

However, educational inequity is not a byproduct of school closure; rather it has been exacerbated by it. As SUs/SDs address immediate concerns regarding students' ability to access instruction and manage the social-emotional impact of COVID-19, how might newly employed strategies inform a revised and lasting approach to how we deliver and authenticate student learning.

## Vermont Example

It is recognized that, despite our best efforts, some students will struggle to attend classes and/or complete work. Please do not make judgements about any of these students' motives for doing so. Simply stated, we cannot imagine the realities that many of our students are experiencing. We will assume best intentions and continue to reach out to students personally and through the MTSS team, starting with the school counselors, to ensure that our students know that we care about them and that we are there to partner in their learning if and when they are ready to join us. *-Extracted from Hartford School District CLP*

## **3. "Less is more": Provide clear guidelines that focus on teaching and assessing critical proficiencies; refine how to collect and look at data to support learning goals and curriculum development for a strong start next year.**

Developed collaboratively by over three hundred Vermont students, community members, and educators, a Vermont Portrait of a Graduate can be used as a tool for reviewing and refining proficiency-based graduation requirements, as well as a guide for making instructional decisions.

([Vermont Portrait of a Graduate with Performance Indicators](#), Vermont Agency of Education)

## Vermont Example

All teachers need to become familiar with the grade level expectations from the prior year to support weaving in missed content and skills at the start of the 2020-2021 school year. Ensure that families understand the procedures being used to collect evidence. *-Extracted from Slate Valley USD*

#### **4. Commit to meeting students where they are, moving them along a continuum of learning, and providing timely supports when needed.**

Assessment is ongoing and related to student learning and growth. The Illinois State Board of Education states that [equitable] grading of student learning during this new remote learning context is incumbent upon schools' flexibility and responsiveness to students' needs. ([Remote Learning Recommendations](#), Illinois State Board of Education.)

##### **Vermont Example**

(Elementary) Any grading/scoring should focus on the continuation of learning and prioritize the connectedness and care for students and staff. All students should have the opportunity to redo, make up, or try again to complete, show progress, or attempt to complete work assigned prior to the remote learning period in that timeframe. (Middle School/High School) Students will continue to be scored using our 4 level proficiency scales and rubrics on all assignments. These scales and scoring provide an incredible amount of feedback to students about where they are currently and what they need to do to achieve at the next level. Activity/task scores should reflect current state 1, 2 3, or 4. *-Extracted from Washington Central Supervisory Union CLP*

#### **5. Grading and reporting policies should support consistent feedback and consultation to revisions; allow students to complete work during the summer or later as needed.**

Pass/Incomplete grades may prove to be a viable option for K-12 educators. By making student learning the primary focus; helping students take that same focus; ensuring the criteria established for passing are clear and rigorous; and then by doing everything in our power to help all students meet those criteria; we may make the best of these difficult and trying times. ([Should We Consider Pass/Fail Grading?](#), Thomas R. Guskey, Senior Research Scholar, University of Louisville)

##### **Vermont Examples:**

- End-of-quarter summary of student progress that includes a narrative and one of three "marks" in relation to the identified learning: making exceptional progress, making satisfactory progress, not showing evidence of progress. *Excerpted from Burlington SD*
- Ensure that families understand the procedures being used to collect evidence. Focus on feedback and growth. Proficiency levels/grades should be temporary; markers that can be updated... *Excerpted from Slate Valley USD*
- Plan will also outline our response to students not completing work or engaging in the learning process for an extended period. *Excerpted from Essex North SU*

## Contact

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## Additional Resources

[Arkansas, AMI and Distance Learning - webinar](#)

[Assessment in a Remote Learning Environment: Recommended Practices](#)

[FAQs on Grading and Graduation Requirements](#), California Department of Education

[Grading Students During the Coronavirus Crisis: What's the Right Call?](#), Education Week

[In Pursuit of Equality: A Framework for Equity Strategies in Competency-Based Education](#), Competency Works

[Mastery Transcript Consortium](#)

[MIT- Teaching Systems Lab](#)

[New England Association of Schools and Colleges](#)

[New England Association of Schools and Colleges](#) , [College Admissions: Impact of the Coronavirus webinar](#)

[Proficiency-Based Grading and Transcripts, Proficiency-Based Learning: Responding to Parent and Community Concerns](#)

[Research Brief: Proficiency-Based Grading Practices](#)

[Supporting Continuity of Learning in Delaware Schools](#), Delaware Department of Education

[The University System of New Hampshire Policy on Pass/Fail Coursework](#)