

# FAQs on Grading and Graduation Requirements

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[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Main Web Page](#)

Over the course of the last several weeks, local educational agencies have begun to develop and implement distance learning plans for students. While physical school sites are closed, learning is continuing through these alternative platforms. Many parents and students have had questions about how students will be graded for interrupted courses being completed through distance learning, whether courses can be graded as pass or credit instead of assigned letter grades, and the impact of those decisions on college admissions and high school graduation requirements.

The following FAQ provides guidance for grades, grading, and graduation requirements. It is anticipated that this guidance will be updated as further information becomes available.

## **1. Can LEAs require graded work from distance learning students?**

Yes. The decision of whether or not to require graded work from students is a local one. There are a variety of considerations for local educational agencies (LEAs) to weigh as they review their grading policies during the transition to distance learning. LEAs should weigh their policies with the lens of equity and with the primary goal of first, doing no harm to students. Further, the distance learning grading plan that LEAs adopt in the short term, may differ from a plan that is created for the long term.

## **2. Can LEAs implement alternative grading systems, including a credit/no credit option or an A–C or A–D scale? What key considerations should an LEA weigh when determining grading policies for distance learning?**

There is nothing in the *Education Code* which governs whether a class can be offered as credit/no credit, pass/fail or a modified A–D. Given the circumstances of COVID-19, some districts are considering a variety of options.

If districts consider modifying their existing grading systems, they should consider the following:

- How to deploy new distance learning and grading policies in consultation with the local bargaining unit and as reflected in locally-negotiated agreements.
- How to clearly communicate changes in coursework or grading policies to staff, students, and families, including the new grading criteria and how changes to the grading system will impact GPA calculations. See, for example, Palo Alto's recent communication of its credit/no credit policy for the remainder of the school year: <https://www.pausd.org/explore-pausd/news/superintendents-message-extended-closure-secondary-grading>.
- How to ensure that grading policies hold students harmless for their spring grades and the transition to distance learning.
- How grading policies take the needs of all students into account, including those of English Learners, homeless and foster youth, and those with differing access to digital learning and other tools or materials. As indicated in [Appendix 1](#), there are many different ways students can demonstrate understanding of the standards. Teachers can give students a range of options in how they demonstrate their understanding of essential standards, allowing them to utilize strategies, technologies, or platforms with which they are already familiar and that fit their differing context and needs.

For students with disabilities, any changes to learning strategies or grading policies should, as appropriate, be done in conjunction with the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) to ensure that the changes respond to their learning needs. Grading policies will likely differ for alternative schools, such as continuation schools and schools serving incarcerated youth, who may also need differentiated learning and grade strategies.

### **3. If an LEA switches to a “credit” or “pass” instead of a letter grade, how will that impact a student’s admission to UC or CSU?**

Leaders of CDE, the State Board of Education, and each of the higher education segments who are part of the Governor's Council for Postsecondary Education – the University of California, California State University, and Community College systems and the Association of Independent Colleges and Universities -- have been meeting to discuss the impact of school closures on this year's high school students to make sure that students are held harmless from any impacts of school closures.

The university systems are willing to accept credit/no credit grades in lieu of letter grades for all courses, including A–G courses, completed in winter/ spring/ summer 2020 for all students. Grades of credit/no credit will not affect the UC or CSU calculations of GPA. In addition, the universities have identified a range of other flexibilities they will offer to support students' access to college during this time. Please see the [joint statement between the colleges, universities, State Board of Education and the Department of Education](#)(DOCX). For more specific information from each of the colleges and universities please see below links:

- **University of California (UC)**  
[The University of California's Response to COVID-19: Admissions and Financial Aid](#)(PDF)
- **California State University (CSU)**  
[COVID-19 Interim Impacts on CSU Undergraduate Admissions Policies and Practices](#)(PDF)
- **Community College letter**  
[California Community Colleges Guidance Letter](#)(PDF)
- **Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities (AICCU)**  
[AICCU Institution Activities to Serve High School Juniors and Seniors](#)(PDF)

#### **4. How is dual enrollment impacted by credit/no credit grading?**

Dual enrollment policies, including grading, will be determined based on the agreement between the educational agencies (usually between a high school and a community college). LEAs should work with their partner colleges to make any necessary modifications.

#### **5. As an LEA transitions to a distance learning platform, when should grades start being assigned?**

The transition to distance learning, including when instruction and grading resumes, if it has been halted, is a local determination. LEAs should develop a timeline using stakeholder

input to clarify how distance learning is being implemented, including when and how grading of student work will begin.

For example, **San Diego Unified** offered a full list of online learning resources by grade level and subject area in an enrichment capacity when district schools first closed. The district then announced the launch of an online learning and grading on April 27 using the coming weeks to prepare teachers, platforms, and curriculum:

<https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/education/story/2020-03-24/san-diego-unified-will-transition-fully-to-online-learning-by-april-27>.

The Elk Grove Unified School District utilized the period of school closures to prepare its alternative learning and educational services plan. During this time grading was halted as instruction was not provided. The district utilized the transition time to approve a Memorandum of Understanding with its educator union, plan for providing essential technology needed for students, and modify its instructional calendar for the 2019–20 school year. Elk Grove Unified has provided timelines for distance learning milestones or calendars: <http://www.egusd.net/covid-19-community-letters/march-23-2020/>.

Natomas Unified School District has provided an outline of key milestones for distance learning and guidance for grading in its digital learning rollout:

<https://natomasunified.org/coronavirus/>.

## **6. Given the continuation of distance learning for the remainder of the school year, how should LEAs assign grades/credits for the spring 2020 semester?**

As noted above, the assignment of grades and credits is a local determination made in consultation with teachers. Generally, grades are a calculation used to represent student achievement and learning that is managed differently in different schools and districts. Local educators will need to determine the way grades can or will be determined to illustrate overall performance. Considerations for making this determination should seek to support students in preserving the progress they made prior to school closures and enabling them to demonstrate further learning in ways that are appropriate to their context. Educators may need to consider their overall learning goals; alternative means of administering tests, projects, and other assessments; adaptations to assignments; revised weighting in individual teacher gradebooks; and prioritizing the assessment of student mastery of essential standards.








## 7. What if a student gets sick and misses assignments?

LEAs and teachers establish policies for how students can make up late or missing work due to illness. Schools and teachers should reevaluate existing policy and make necessary changes based on the unique demands of distance learning, taking into account the need to be flexible given the public health crisis.

## 8. May a student utilize an existing virtual school program to complete courses?

It is a local governing board decision whether or not to award credit for courses completed outside of the district. A variety of courses are available online, including those that are grounded in the Common Core State Standards adopted by California and that meet A–G requirements.

### Resources

- [Free Access to University of California A-G Online High School Courses](#)(PDF)
- [Online Advanced Placement courses](#)
- [Online high school courses and materials for all core subjects](#)
- [Common Core-aligned high school mathematics assignments, by course and topic](#)
- [Stanford On-line Civic Reasoning Curriculum](#)
- [High School History Teaching Units and Materials](#)
- [National University Virtual High School: high school courses in all content areas free to all CA students, April – June, 2020](#)
  - [National University Virtual High School course list](#)

Districts should conduct a careful analysis of these courses and consider awarding credit where appropriate.

## 9. What are the minimum graduation requirements in California?

The California *Education Code* establishes a minimum set of requirements for graduation from California high schools. Please see the California Department of Education (CDE) Graduation Requirements web page for course information:

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/ga/hs/hsgtable.asp>.

It is expected that LEAs will enable students to complete state graduation requirements with needed flexibilities associated with the nature of assignments and mode of grading during any period of school closure.

A school district governing board, county board of education, or authorizer on behalf of a charter school may submit a request for a waiver of the state graduation requirements to the State Board of Education for specific students. Pursuant to the *Education Code*, the employee association must have an opportunity to participate in the development of the waiver and the waiver must be approved at a public hearing of the board. More information on the SBE waiver process can be found on the CDE Waiver web page at:

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/re/lr/wr/>.

## 10. Can LEAs modify local graduation requirements that exceed the state's graduation requirements?

Many local governing boards have adopted a policy setting graduation requirements beyond the state's requirements in the Education Code. The local governing board has the authority to revise that policy and modify those additional requirements.

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## Appendix: Distance Learning Grading Guidance for Teachers

### What constitutes “gradable” work in distance learning? What can I collect from students in order to provide feedback, evaluate learning, and inform next steps?

Assigning a grade in a distance learning context might require teachers to reconsider the kinds of materials they provide to and accept from students. Online resources, mobile applications, and web platforms can help teachers provide flexible means of furthering instruction. When students are working at home from other materials, these can be shown

or displayed by photographs attached to text messages where computers are not used or accessible. Some districts are also using school buses to drop off and pick up hard copy work in cases where packets of work are the norm, or having work delivered to and picked up from the school.

## **Examples of Platforms and Means for Demonstrating Learning**

- Slide-Based Presentations
- Platform options include PowerPoint, Prezi, and other presentation platforms. These can be presented in real time or recorded. Students can include talking points or presentation scripts in the slide notes or in a separate document.
- Video Recordings
- Platform options include videos uploaded to YouTube or recorded videoconferences. Popular apps like Tik Tok can also be used.
- Posters, Tri-Folds, Models, and Dioramas
- These can be presented using a video (live or pre-recorded) or digital photographs with an attached verbal or written narrative explanation.
- Audio Recordings and Podcasts
- Platform options include Audacity, Garageband, and other free audio recording software. These can also be used for performance-based courses like band/music, choir, theater, or speech and debate.
- Illustrations (flow charts, diagrams, collages, comic strips, infographics and other visual presentations) completed digitally using illustration software or can be scanned or photographed and uploaded. The Google Drive App can be used to scan and upload a smartphone camera.
- Free infographic platforms include Canva, Visme, and Piktochart, among others.
- Dialogue, Monologue, or Other Performance can be submitted in writing or recorded and submitted digitally.
- Discussion Threads, Journaling, or Interactive Notebooks through a shareable platform like Google Docs or through Google Classroom

## **LEAs should consider the following key considerations as they work with their staff to develop grading policies:**

- Does the distance learning plan adequately address access and equity for all students? Does the plan provide access to content and instructional support for all students?
- How can teachers use formative assessments (assessments for learning) and summative classroom assessments (assessment of learning)?

- Does the plan provide a transition period for students to receive support on the technology aspects of the course?
- How will students be provided with meaningful feedback to allow for multiple opportunities for success in demonstrating their learning? How will you connect with each student?
- What are the key activities/deliverables that can demonstrate student knowledge and mastery of standards? Which less informative activities/deliverables can be eliminated or modified?

## Final (Semester 2) Grading Options

LEAs have the authority to determine how final grades will be assigned and teachers have final discretion when assigning grades. There are several options for LEAs and teachers to consider and several factors that should be weighed before making a decision. The following is a non-comprehensive list of options that LEAs have considered and considerations associated with each option.

Final Grading Options	Factors to Consider
<p><b>Distance Learning Online</b></p> <p>Teachers will continue to provide instruction, assignments, and assessments using online tools and resources. Final grades will be determined using all assigned work through the end of the semester.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How will teachers be given time to prepare for the transition to full-time distance learning?</li> <li>• How will professional development be made available for teachers?</li> <li>• Do all students and teachers have access to the necessary technology and materials? Are there non-digital alternatives that can be provided, such as printable packets or workbooks?</li> <li>• How will technical support be provided?</li> <li>• How will tutoring and interventions be provided to students?</li> <li>• How will assignments and due dates be communicated? How will completed work be collected?</li> <li>• How will vulnerable populations, including foster youth, students with disabilities, homeless youth, and</li> </ul>



	English language learners, be supported?
<b>Use Current Grades</b>  Assign final grades based on students' third-quarter grades or students' grades when the school shutdown occurred, with opportunities to increase the final grade.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How will students with a D or F in a course be given opportunities to raise their grade (e.g., through distance learning assignments, extra credit or case-by-case independent study option)?</li> <li>• How will content in sequential courses (e.g., math or foreign language) that may not be fully covered this semester be taught to students who advance to the next course level in the fall?</li> </ul>
<b>Consider Student Opt-Out of Course</b>  Allow students to opt out of completing a course. Their grade would remain an incomplete until they could complete the course via independent study, online credit recovery program, or some other option.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What will the timeline be for completing an incomplete course?</li> <li>• What options will be available to students for completing a course?</li> </ul>

<p><b>Allow Students to Opt-In to Independent Study</b></p> <p>Allow students to choose whether they want to accept their current grade or continue via independent study.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At the secondary level, will students be able to opt-in to independent study for individual courses? Will this option be available for some or all courses?</li> <li>• Will teachers determine whether an independent study option is appropriate for their course, or will administrators decide?</li> <li>• If students do not fulfill their responsibilities, will they be graded on the work they have completed or given an incomplete?</li> <li>• What supports will teachers need to provide students?</li> <li>• How will assignments and due dates be communicated? How will completed work be collected?</li> <li>• How will vulnerable populations, including foster youth, students with disabilities, homeless youth, and English language learners, be supported?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Pass/No Pass or Credit / No Credit Grading Option</b></p> <p>Students will receive a pass/no pass grade for course.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How will students be held harmless so that these grading approaches do not negatively affect their GPA or eligibility for program placement (including AP or honors courses)?</li> <li>• What constitutes a “credit” or “no credit” grade? Who determines the criteria and will those criteria be consistent for all courses or subject to instructor discretion?</li> <li>• Will students who receive a “no credit” grade have the opportunity to submit extra credit or revise assignments to improve their grade?</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Will there be offer an option for students to petition the school for a grade?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Standards-Based Grading</b></p> <p>Students will be assessed on essential standards using a rubric model instead of percentages.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Which standards are considered essential?</li> <li>● How will standards mastery be assessed?</li> <li>● Will students have multiple opportunities to demonstrate understanding? What platforms and media will students be able to utilize?</li> <li>● Will the standards-based assessment include multiple metrics (like a portfolio composed of a collection of student work) or a single metric (like a multiple-choice final exam)?</li> <li>● Will students have a choice in how they demonstrate their learning?</li> <li>● How will students be provided the necessary instruction and guidance to master the essential standards?</li> <li>● What interventions will be used for students who struggle to meet the essential standards?</li> <li>● How will assignments and due dates be communicated? How will completed work be collected?</li> <li>● How will vulnerable populations, including foster youth, students with disabilities, homeless youth, and English language learners, be supported?</li> </ul>

<p><b>Final Grades for Career and Technical Education (CTE) and Performance-Based Courses</b></p> <p>Some courses include a requirement that students obtain a certification, participate in a performance, participate in a competition, complete a set number of hours of training or volunteer work, or complete some other task to demonstrate that they have mastered a given skillset.</p>	<p>Teachers of performance-based and CTE courses should consider the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the essential skills students should master to demonstrate course completion?</li> <li>• How can those skills be demonstrated by students?</li> <li>• What resources are available to students (e.g., does a theater student have access to audio/video recording tools)?</li> <li>• Will students will have the opportunity to complete those tasks remotely (e.g., recording a musical performance)?</li> <li>• Will students have additional opportunities to complete those tasks in the near future (e.g., postponing a performance until the fall)?</li> <li>• Can task expectations can be reasonably modified while achieving the same course objective (e.g., reducing the number of required volunteer hours or expanding volunteer options to include opportunities that allow for social distancing)?</li> <li>• Are there are alternative tasks students could complete (e.g., preparing a presentation or completing a research assignment instead of participating in a debate competition)?</li> </ul>
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Note: FAQs about the closure of schools in response to COVID-19, Form J-13A, the reporting of attendance for apportionment, and instructional time are available at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/aa/pa/covidfaqs.asp>.