

Dear Parents,

I hope you are well and ready to enjoy the weekend.

On Tuesday, April 21st, leaders presented an End-of-Year Grading Plan to the Board of Education. This plan was designed to bring academic closure to the year for all students K-12, which reflected guidelines from the State Department of Education. Superintendents were encouraged to incorporate a Pass/Fail model into their district's existing grading practices to provide a level of fairness and equity for all learners.

At the heart of our End-of-Year Grading Plan is the recognition that students have been working to the best of their ability despite the challenging conditions they have faced through a remote learning environment – uniquely different from the instruction and support they were accustomed to in the traditional classroom. Through the development of the grading plan, we wanted to honor our students' efforts throughout the school year but also to value the work they accomplished during distance learning. As you have been essential partners with the District in support of our Alternative Learning Plan, we wanted you to know that your hard work, patience, and support has largely contributed to students' engagement and motivation.

The **attached document** will provide you with an outline of the grading plan in its entirety for each level (elementary, intermediate, middle, and high school). You will be receiving a follow-up communication from the building principal of your child's school who will share specific elements of the plan for each level, including grading adjustments that will be made to recognize students' efforts and overall achievement for the 2019-20 school year.

On a final note, we plan on offering our teachers additional time to improve distance learning through professional development offerings on the integration of digital tools and instructional approaches. We will be holding "Quiet Fridays" starting next week, May 1st, and continuing through June 5th. On these days, students will continue to work on assignments as part of their remote learning. However, teachers will not be expected to respond to emails or provide immediate feedback.

Thank you, again, as parents and caregivers. We appreciate your role as part of our team during this stressful time. Please continue to check out distance learning resources for you on our website, and do not hesitate to reach out to your building principals if you have any questions or concerns. I am confident we will get through this as a thoughtful, compassionate, and collaborative community.

Sincerely,

Dr. Lorrie Rodrigue, Superintendent

Newtown Alternative Learning Plan

End-of-Year Grading

Introduction

In response to the Governor's call for school closure in March, Newtown's *Alternative Learning Plan* was created to provide flexible learning opportunities through a "remote" platform outside of the traditional classroom. Regardless of the length of school closure, our plan guided teachers across all grade levels and departments to engage students through a combination of print and digital instructional resources and tools so that learning could continue. The Alternative Learning Plan set out to accomplish several goals:

- Ensure continuity of learning during what might result in an extended closing
- Promote access to information needed for distance learning
- Encourage student independence and ownership of learning

The framework for the learning plan aligned with several ideals at the heart of the District's belief system: *collaboration, consistency, and communication*. Staff and leaders recognized early on that students would not have the same access to teachers during this period of time and may not have the same supports associated within a traditional school environment. Therefore, the alternative learning plan sought to make certain that all families received access to technology, clear directions around content and instructional activities, as well as communication regarding the use of digital and interactive tools to support students at home.

Moreover, teachers understood the delicate balance between flexibility and maintaining common expectations while delivering instruction, offering support, and assessing student learning. Teachers' priorities concentrated on facilitating student engagement and monitoring student progress, while remaining mindful of the obvious challenges posed by a distance learning format. It is important to note that the Newtown Alternative Learning Plan encouraged the use of formative assessments through a digital instructional format. Formative assessments evaluate "in-process" or ongoing learning in order to monitor student progress.

Although the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) noted that educational decisions, including student assessment and grading, typically rest with individual districts, they underscored the fact that students and families would be facing unprecedented challenges in the midst of this global crisis. As a result, the CSDE offered guidance for districts regarding assessment of student learning and grading practices. As part of the State's guidelines, districts were encouraged to adopt a P/F (Pass/Fail) model for the month(s) in which students worked remotely.

In alignment with the CSDE recommendations, the End-of-Year Grading Plan incorporates a P/F option into existing grading practices and honors student effort, performance, and improvement. The grading plan also minimizes the negative impact on students as a result of distance learning

and provides an opportunity for students to maintain or improve their end-of-year performance. While the District has adopted a P/F option for Grades 5-12, we wanted to assure students that their achievement over the course of the year would be equally valued.

End-of-Year Grading

Through the Alternative Learning Plan, students were provided both print and digital tools (such as tablets and Chromebooks), and elementary teachers developed appropriate activities in reading, writing, and math, as well as special areas. Grade level teams worked collaboratively to identify common assignments to measure student progress and continue to provide meaningful and timely feedback to students. As part of the end-of-year evaluation at the elementary level only, teachers will be asked to develop a final **narrative** for each student that focuses on specific standards in which students showed progress over the course of the school year (e.g., reading, writing, math), as well as participation. These narratives will celebrate student effort and improvement evidenced throughout the year.

In grades 5-12, teachers used Google Classroom to deliver content and provide digital instructional opportunities for students. While learning has been asynchronous at all levels, teachers continued to connect with students and monitor ongoing learning and progress. The end-of-year evaluation modifications at the intermediate, middle, and secondary levels were specifically designed to recognize students for their effort, progress, and academic achievement demonstrated prior to and during distance learning. It was important to staff and school leaders that students at these levels still be afforded recognition for their achievement and/or academic improvements.

Thus, the following adjustments will be made for students in grades 5-12:

- Decreasing the weighting of the final quarter for NMS and NHS, as well as the final trimester at Reed.
- Eliminating final exams.
- Distributing greater weight for the previous quarters/trimesters for Reed, NMS, and NHS
- Increasing scores from the previous grading period equivalent to an F to reflect a grade of 60.
- Providing an option of P (Pass) for students at NMS and NHS whose grade is 85 or lower and students at Reed whose grade is below a B-.
- Providing an option of P+ (Pass with Distinction) for students at NMS and NHS whose grade is 86+.
- Allowing students at NMS and NHS the option to maintain a traditional grading practice.
- Continuing to calculate scores into a student's GPA.

The following charts outline modified grading expectations, new semester or trimester calculations, and typical samples of students adjusted final grades:

Elementary Schools (K-4)

For classroom teachers, "narrative only" to include the following:

1-2 positive only comment(s) on participation.

1-2 comments (on each) reading, writing and math progress based on what has been measured over the course of the year (not limited to the time of distance learning).

Special area teachers will provide a "narrative only" to acknowledge students who made the effort to participate. No comments will be included for those students.

The boxes for the "achievement of standard" will be shaded.

Reed Intermediate School (5-6)

Step 1- Reduce the weighting of T3 on overall grades

New Calculations-

- $Y1 = (T1) 40\% + (T2) 40\% + (T3) 20\%$

Additional Information-

- T3 Grades between a D- and C+ inclusively will be given a grade of P for Pass.
- T3 Grades B- and higher will remain as the appropriate alpha grade.
- T3 Failing Grades (31%-64%) will be given an F.
- Incomplete (I) will be used for students with extenuating circumstances. Students who earn a T3 Failing Grade (0-30%) will receive an Incomplete (I) and will have an extended opportunity to complete any missing assignments.
- ALL Incomplete grades to be resolved by September 2020.

Student Examples:

	T1	T2	T3	End of Year
Student 1 - Traditional	92 / A-	88 / B+	70 / C-	83 / B
Student 1 - Alternative Learning	92 / A-	88 / B+	79 / P	88 / B+
Student 2 - Traditional	77 / C+	72 / C-	70 / C-	73 / C
Student 2 - Alternative Learning	77 / C+	72 / C-	79 / P	76 / C
Student 3 - Traditional	65 / D-	72 / C-	76 / C	71 / C-
Student 3 - Alternative Learning	65 / D-	72 / C-	79 / P	71 / C-
Student 4 - Traditional	80 / B-	74 / C	64 / F	71 / C-
Student 4 - Alternative Learning	80 / B-	74 / C	64 / F	74 / C

Newtown Middle School (7-8)

Step 1- Reduce the weighting of Q4 on overall grades, eliminate Final Exams.

New Calculations-

- $Y1 = (Q1)28.33\% + (Q2)28.33\% + (Q3)28.33\% + (Q4)15.01\%$

Step 2- Student selection of end of year grading option - June 8th

Option #1- Pass/Fail

- Q4 Grades between 30 - 64 will be given a Fail (F).
- Fail (F) will be given a numerical grade of 64.
- Q4 Grades between a 65-85 will be given a Pass (P).
- Pass (P) will be given a numerical grade of 85.
- Q4 Grades between 86-100 will be given a Pass with Distinction (P+)
- Pass with Distinction (P+) will be given a numerical grade of 93.
- Grades below 30 will be given an Incomplete (I) to offer an opportunity for students to complete missing work.
- Those with a grade higher than a 93 should choose **Option #2.**

Option #2- Traditional Grading

- Students will receive the earned numerical value for Q4.

Additional Information (for both Option 1 & 2)

- For ALL classes, teachers will raise all Q3 failing grades to 60.
- P/P+/F will be reflected in Q4 grades on PowerSchool.
- Incomplete (I) will be used for students with extenuating circumstances.
- ALL Incomplete grades to be resolved by September 2020.
- Students will only submit a change request if they would like Option #2.
- Option #2 change requests will be submitted through Google Forms in June.
- No Q4 Honor Roll.

Student Examples:

Please note that “Traditional” refers to the percentage weighting under normal circumstances as seen below for reference.

$$Y1 = Q1(25\%) + Q2(25\%) + Q3(25\%) + Q4(25\%)$$

Option #1 = Pass/Fail with adjusted calculation

Option #2 = Numerical Grade with adjusted calculation

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Y1
Student 1 Traditional	70	67	50	64	62.75
Student 1- Option #1	70	67	60	64	65.42
Student 1- Option #2	70	67	60	64	65.42
Student 2 - Traditional	67	68	66	72	68.25
Student 2- Option #1	67	68	66	85	69.7
Student 2- Option #2	67	68	66	72	67.75
Student 3- Traditional	90	87	85	87	87.25
Student 3- Option #1	90	87	85	93	88.18
Student 3- Option #2	90	87	85	87	87.28
Student 4- Traditional	95	92	90	88	91.25
Student 4- Option #1	95	92	90	93	92.43
Student 4- Option #2	95	92	90	88	91.68

Student Example: NMS Classes that had a Midterm Exam (E1):

- $Y1 = (Q1)25\% + (Q2)25\% + (E1)10\% + (Q3)25\% + (Q4)15\%$

	Q1	Q2	E1	Q3	Q4	E2	Y1
Student 5 - Traditional	96	94	88	94	89	88	92.2
Student 5 - Option #1	96	94	88	94	93	N/A	93.75
Student 5 - Option #2	96	94	88	94	89	N/A	93.15

Newtown High School (9-12)

Step 1- Reduce the weighting of Q4 on overall grades, eliminate final exams.

New Calculations-

- $Y1 = (Q1)25\% + (Q2)25\% + (E1)10\% + (Q3)25\% + (Q4)15\%$
- $S2 = (Q3)75\% + (Q4)25\%$
- $Q4 = (Q4 \text{ Classes Only}) 100\% \text{ (Physical Education \& Health)}$

Step 2- Student selection of end of year grading option - June 8th

Option #1- Pass/Fail

- Q4 Grades between 30 - 64 will be given a Fail (F).
- Fail (F) will be given a numerical grade of 64.
- Q4 Grades between a 65-85 will be given a Pass (P).
- Pass (P) will be given a numerical grade of 85.
- Q4 Grades between 86-100 will be given a Pass with Distinction (P+)
- Pass with Distinction (P+) will be given a numerical grade of 93.
- Grades below 30 will be given an Incomplete (I) to offer an opportunity for students to complete missing work.
- Those with a grade higher than a 93 should choose Option #2.

Option #2- Numerical Grading

- Students will receive the earned numerical value for Q4.

Additional Information (for both Option 1 & 2)

- For ALL classes, teachers will raise all Q3 failing grades to 60.
- GPA continues based on Y1 Grades.
- P/P+/F will be reflected in Q4 grades on PowerSchool.
- P/P+/F will not be reflected on a transcript, only Y1 will be reported.
- Incomplete (I) will be used for students with extenuating circumstances.
- ALL Incomplete grades to be resolved by September 2020.
- Students will only submit a change request if they would like Option #2.
- Option #2 change requests will be submitted through Google Forms in June.
- No Q4 Honor Roll.

Student Examples:

Please note that “Traditional” refers to the percentage weighting under normal circumstances as seen below for reference.

$$Y1 = Q1(20\%) + Q2(20\%) + E1(10\%) + Q3(20\%) + Q4(20\%) + E2(10\%)$$

Option #1 = Pass/Fail with adjusted calculation

Option #2 = Numerical Grade with adjusted calculation

	Q1	Q2	E1	Q3	Q4	E2	Y1
Student 1 - Traditional	70	58	63	58	65	63	62.8
Student 1 - Option #1	70	58	63	60	85	N/A	66.05
Student 1 - Option #2	70	58	63	60	65	N/A	63.5
Student 2 - Traditional	73	75	73	78	75	73	74.8
Student 2 - Option #1	73	75	73	78	85	N/A	76.55
Student 2 - Option #2	73	75	73	78	75	N/A	75.05
Student 3 - Traditional	89	85	87	82	90	87	86.6
Student 3 - Option #1	89	85	87	82	93	N/A	86.65
Student 3 - Option #2	89	85	87	82	90	N/A	86.2
Student 4 - Traditional	96	94	88	94	97	88	92.2
Student 4 - Option #1	96	94	88	94	93	N/A	93.75
Student 4 - Option #2	96	94	88	94	97	N/A	94.35

Final Thoughts

From the first moment Newtown Public Schools moved to an alternative learning model, teachers set a new benchmark for professionalism, working collaboratively to implement an environment for students and families that recognized the ongoing need for flexibility, equity, connection, and support. Both anecdotal and quantitative information have shown evidence of students' efforts, perseverance, and self-direction despite working in an environment outside of the traditional classroom environment. Parents who suddenly found themselves thrust into a supportive "facilitator" role at home remained focused as genuine partners with staff and school leaders in the best interest of their children. This partnership has made it possible for our students to find a level of success.

As we move forward, careful thought and planning must be given to the year(s) ahead of us. The result of this global crisis will leave an indelible mark on families, students, and staff. Discussions by school staff and leaders around the State have appropriately focused on potential learning gaps, social/emotional needs, and additional resources that may be necessary to mitigate both anticipated and unanticipated educational issues in the future.

Newtown Public Schools, like other districts, will continue to think ahead and make plans to support our students. An internal committee of Newtown educators and leaders will be called upon in May 2020 to formulate a plan prior to moving students into the next school year. Feedback will be solicited from staff, parents, Board of Education members, and members of PEAC (Parent Educator Advisory Council) as part of the process so that the Newtown community remains true partners in maintaining the highest level of educational quality for all learners.