

## Models for End-of-Year Grades

Distance learning has required drastic changes in teaching and learning and will have significant effects on how learning is assessed and grades are assigned at the end of the year. Below we present several models for end-of-year grading during distance learning. The model options are easy to articulate though their impact will affect transitions and the start of the next school year. There is a wide spectrum of thought currently happening; however, only a few sites have published concrete plans. This document will be updated as explicit, concrete plans become available.

In this guide, you will find:

- **Constraints to the Decision** for narrowing model options given State policies and recommendations
- **Recommended Conditions** for all the grading models in distance learning scenarios
- **Model Spotlight: Summit Public Schools** for a real world example and response
- **Models for End of Year Grades** for an overview of current models districts are using, resources, and pros and cons of the model
- **Other Implications** laying out elements that are beyond a single site's control
- **Resources** for longer form articles and reports

### Constraints

There are constraints that may limit the grading model choice. Many states have canceled end of year summative assessments and put policies in place for grading. Here are resources to find what's been published by your state.

### State Policy Recommendations

Several states have announced policies that will affect grading. You are encouraged to check your state's education site and announcements to understand constraints.

- [State by State Breakdown of COVID-19 Policies](#) - from The Hunt Institute
- [COVID-19 State Education Agency Remote Learning Guidance](#) from MIT's Teaching Systems Lab, a Google Sheet that includes Selected Excerpts from Key Recommendations/ Principles for Remote Learning and Link to Guidance on Students with Disabilities
- ["Data: How Is Coronavirus Changing States' Graduation Requirements?"](#) - from Education Week, State 12th Grade Grade Requirements & Resources data

## Recommended Conditions

These are recommended conditions with descriptions and resources for all grading models so that learning can continue unhindered.

### Recommended Conditions

Condition	Description
Considering next school year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Planning for the continuity of learning from the end of this year to next school year. A greater than the usual “Summer Slide” being called the “COVID-19 Slide” is expected for the start of next school year and accurate data from this year will be important to support next year. The grading choice now will affect this continuity and the ability to compare “apples to apples”.</li> <li>● Resource:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <a href="#">Summer Planning: Addressing COVID-19 Slide</a></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Equity for all	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Students will have varying degrees of access to learning, educators, and their supports (e.g. counselors, review of IEPs), which should be considered when determining grading policies.</li> <li>● Useful Resources:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <a href="#">Connecting with Students with Limited Access to Technology</a></li> <li>○ <a href="#">Getting Students Access to Devices and Broadband</a></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Engagement by all	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The engagement possible by students and families will vary. This is a time when fundamental factors of life are shifting and basic needs are paramount to families. This will require support and trust in self-directed learning and grace to account for what learning is possible. When deciding on a grading and assessment model, think about how to account for this in determining the model you will use.</li> <li>● Factors here are               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Attendance to online courses</li> <li>○ Attention to assignments and assessments</li> <li>○ Some decisions will affect educator and family engagement as well                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ “Chicago Public Schools posted on Twitter on Tuesday that work online or sent home during its shutdown won’t be graded, sparking criticism from some parents. “Gee thanks, you have taken away any incentive for my children to do any school work while they are home,” one response said in part.- <a href="#">“Online Work Won’t be Graded or Counted at Many Schools”</a> from the Wall Street Journal (Login or Subscription Required)</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ To help support student engagement, please see <a href="#">Sustaining Engagement of Students with Disabilities in Distance Learning Environments</a></li> <li>○ To help support family engagement, please see <a href="#">Family Engagement: Supporting Students With Disabilities During COVID</a></li> </ul>
Communication to and between all	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Good, equitable, and accessible bi-directional communication between all stakeholders (leaders, teachers, families, students) will need to be in place for any grading model to respond to variations</li> </ul>

**Models for End of Year Grades**

Districts are utilizing various models for end of year grading. The reality is that student learning and teacher practices have been significantly impacted during the pandemic, and should be considered when assessing student performance and assigning grades. [Supporting Educator Growth During Distance Learning](#) may be a useful resource to help support your educators. The following section describes models for end of year grades, examples, resources and the pros and cons of the approach. A common con for all is that any change in grading system will have an impact on the continuity of grading from this year to the next.

**Model A: Personalized Student Choice**

In this model students are given and guided through several options on what their end of year grades and work assessments will be. This model recognizes that students and families are in different places at this time and engages student agency. Summit Public Schools implemented this model, providing four options for grading and giving strong coaching and support to students and families in making personalized choices. The key elements allow for response to current conditions and **student choice** with support from educators to ensure equity, collaboration, and care. Options and guidance were provided through multiple means including email, virtual consultation, [video](#), and individual contact.

**Description of Options Provided to Students with Data on Selections**

Option	Description	Percent of Students Selecting the Option
Accelerate	Complete the rest of your work for this school year independently and at your own pace. End the school year as soon as you have completed everything.	30%

Stay on Track	Complete the rest of your work for this school year along with others in your class. The school year ends as scheduled.	54%
Focus on what is Most Important	Reduces the amount of work you must do and receive a Pass or No Pass grade.	15.5%
Step Back	Step back from school work for the rest of the year. Students selecting this path are required to have a PLP meeting with their mentor and teacher.	15 Students Total

Complete articulation including “Might be a good fit if...”, “Work I must complete...”, “Grades I will earn for the work I complete...”, and “Pro/Cons” of each can be found [here](#).

**Model B: No Change in Grading**

In this model, there is no change in grading policy but rather a reduction and focus on the "most essential" standards. For example, Salem City district (in VA), where "Every student in grades 3 through 12 has a Chromebook through its one-to-one program," also has about 200 “hotspots” for WiFi connectivity, and has secured free internet access for students qualifying for free and reduced-price lunches, plans on covering the most essential of its remaining state standards via online learning — and to continue issuing letter grades for students’ work. - from ["Grading Students During the Coronavirus Crisis: What's the Right Call?"](#) by Education Week

**Pro/Con - No Change in Grading**

Pro	Con
Known grading system for teachers, families, and students	Equity: Possible uneven access to learning and learning supports
Maintains continuity in grades, including course credit for next year	

**Model C: Pass/Fail**

In this model, any traditional A - F scale is suspended in favor of a binary Pass or Fail model. Pass/Fail can be an "opportunity to focus on simply doing the work of reading and writing and

seeing the learning that results rather than on evaluating it constantly,” as explained by Sarah M. Zerwin, author of *Point-Less: An English Teacher’s Guide to More Meaningful Grading*.

Zerwin goes on to explain:

To help apply structure to this model the Single Point Rubric is an easy way to define the Pass/Fail line "where instead of spelling out all the different levels of achievement for each category on the rubric, you just spell out one level. In a pass/fail system, you would describe the level of achievement you expect your students to hit in order to consider the task complete enough for it to earn credit. It can [but probably shouldn’t be right now] higher than what would earn a “pass” in an A-F system, but remember the extra grace and kindness we all need right now. Maybe don’t make it what it would need to be for an A (or even a B?) in that A-F system."

["Meet the Single Point Rubric"](#) from Cult of Pedagogy, has additional information on Single Point Rubrics with examples and templates.

**Pro/Con - Pass/Fail**

Pro	Con
Binary system - Easier to articulate criteria for teachers and more easily understood for students	Loss of nuance in a continuum of grades
	Possible impact for transitions, especially post-secondary not recognizing Pass/Fail course credit

**Model D: Only Grade Improvement**

In this model, the last grade/performance metric the student met before distance learning is kept. They cannot fall below that mark but can improve. For example, The Mountain Empire district is recommending "that, as long as students participate, teachers should revert to their previous progress grades. Students could potentially improve those scores, but they wouldn’t be penalized." - from ["Grading Students During the Coronavirus Crisis: What's the Right Call?"](#) by Education Week

**Pro/Con - Only Grade Improvement**

Pro	Con
Allows for differentiated learning and instruction. The grading model may actually change but the grade’s meaning is maintained.	May be an inaccurate measure of performance if a student “ended on a high note” prior to moving to distance learning.

Mitigates some equity issues because without even access to support mechanisms previous achievements are still recognized and there is still the opportunity for improvement.	May decrease engagement if a student is content with their grade prior to distance learning.
May increase engagement for both teachers and students since the penalty structure is removed.	

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### **Model E: Giving All Students Passing Grades**

Recently San Francisco Unified (SFUSD) has considered giving middle and high school students all A's for the ending grading period.

- [“San Francisco School Officials Consider Giving Students A's Due To Coronavirus Closures”](#) from KPIX CBS SF Bay Area
- SFUSD students have created [sfusd revolution](#) on Instagram to voice their recommendations for end of year grades. They are also articulating their concerns about this possible plan.
- Update: SFUSD did *not* end up giving all students passing grades opting for credit/no credit grades instead. Read more [here](#).

#### **Pro/Con - Giving All Students Passing Grades**

<b>Pro</b>	<b>Con</b>
A clear, consistent, known grade will be given	The interpretation of this grade in a student's history will be difficult without notation and context. This may be especially true in special education and matriculation.
Resources are available to think about next year, since the ending year grades will already be known.	May have immediate negative effects on teacher and student engagement.

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### **Model F: No Grades**

In this model, no grade is issued at all. The focus is on learning and experience. As narrated in the Heinemann Blog, "You and your students can simply focus on doing meaningful work together without the specter of any kind of grade hanging over you. You are free to imagine the most engaging you can for your students without having to think about how you'll grade them. It will take a bit of a leap of faith to trust that students will want to do the work. But they do. Really. They want to read and write in ways that matter to them. Give them choices. Ask them

what they want to work on. You have so much space now that you don't have to worry about grades at all."

- ["Pass/Fail or No Grades During Online Pandemic Teaching? A gift."](#) from the Heinemann Blog

Some states have announced this as their guiding policy in response to the possible inequity in access to technology, broadband, consistent instruction for all, involving already present home resource inequities (family elements, resource availability, multiple computers, etc.), security in basic needs, etc.

- "Some public schools are calling online work "enrichment," not part of the curriculum, because they can't guarantee that all students will have access to it. Students without the internet or home computers can't do it, and special needs students may require accommodations to complete it." - ["Online Work Won't be Graded or Counted at Many Schools"](#) from the *Wall Street Journal*

### Pro/Con - No Grades

Pro	Con
A clear known path exists	No opportunity for improvement
Resources are available to think about next year, since the ending year grades will already be known.	Possible impact for matriculation
	Possible negative impact on teacher and student engagement

### Additional Considerations

There are additional considerations to think about as you plan for grading that may be beyond your site's ability to control.

#### College: End of Year Credit Waivers and Scholarships

- The State by State Breakdown of COVID-19 Policies above will help locate the most current recommendations in your state.
- The grading decisions you make could have implications for students' future college admissions. In addition, states are making recommendations about college/end of year credits for admission. "Nationwide, states including Arizona, Idaho, Illinois, Kansas, Oregon, Virginia, Washington, and Wisconsin are moving to provide flexibility—such as waiving minimum attendance hours or at least some testing or college entrance exams, coursework, or senior projects—for seniors who may miss months of class before schools reopen, if they reopen at all this year." from ["The Lost Senior Year: Credits, Proms, Sports All in Jeopardy"](#) from Education Week (login or subscription required)
- States are making different policy decisions for accepting pass/fail on transcripts for courses. "For example, Utah, New Hampshire, and other states are interested in

allowing districts to change some course grades to pass/fail, but students may be ineligible for scholarships through the National Collegiate Athletic Association and state university systems if their transcripts include pass/fail grades. While the University of New Hampshire college system has explicitly set out guidance saying it will not count COVID-19-related pass/fail grades against students, not all other higher education systems have done the same.” from [“Amid Coronavirus Shutdown, States Tweak Graduation Requirements for Class of 2020”](#) on Education Week (login or subscription required)

- Checking with your state’s higher education board, may help you understand the future implications of your school’s policy.

### **Other Metrics to Base Ending Grades On**

- Some districts have chosen to use non-academic metrics to base ending grades on such as attendance, measures of engagement (logins to LMS, Google Classroom, exit tickets), wellness/SEL metrics, and others.
- This [Data Tools for Virtual Learning](#) is a Marshall-created resource on data tools that articulates some of these other metrics that could be used or incorporated in ending grade calculations.

### **Resources**

- [CRPE Database of District Responses](#) - A recommended database of what others are doing during closure which you can filter by state, instruction, grading, and other factors. Of note, most have no formal grading. CRPE’s description, “To create this database, we searched for as many district publicly posted plans as we could find via the Council of the Great City Schools, Chiefs for Change, and crowdsourced recommendations. (Please note that this is not a representative sample.) We currently present information for 82 districts, aiming for a range in size and geography, and serving nearly 9 million students.”
- [“COVID-19 Policy Considerations: Student Transitions”](#) - from the Hunt Institute, includes several state breakdowns of end of year activities
- [“How to Deal with Cancelled Assessments”](#) - from the Hunt Institute, focused more at the state policy level but good lens to frame implications
- ["Pass/Fail or No Grades During Online Pandemic Teaching? A gift."](#) from the Heinemann Blog, describing the learning benefits from a Pass/Fail or No Grade model right now
- ["On the Podcast: Moving to a Points-Free System with Sarah Zerwin"](#) - from the Heinemann Blog, an oral description of moving to a points-free, non-grading model
- ["Grading Students During the Coronavirus Crisis: What's the Right Call?"](#) from Education Week (login or subscription required), describing some of the ethical areas “grading” touches and the impact of the current crisis on the grading discussion
- ["Feedback & Grading"](#) from Fivestar, a one pager with tips on grading and providing feedback online



## Final Word

Assessing student learning and grading during distance learning is a big decision with many factors to consider with an array of possible implications. The best option for your community will be the one that takes into consideration your families, educators, and your state's requirements.



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