

Grades

NMPED GUIDANCE



Grades are deeply embedded into the culture and function of American education; they are used for state graduation requirements, military eligibility, community college transfers, and scholarship determinations. They are one of the chief mechanisms for linking high schools with colleges and universities. They communicate expectations and understanding of student performance for educators from one year to the next. Most importantly, grading is how we communicate information about learning with students and their families. Grades message to our students and their families how they are doing in preparation for pursuing their life goals. Parents and students depend on this information, and we must assure that what is communicated is accurate.

The New Teacher Project (TNP) has published an intriguing study titled, [“The Opportunity Myth.”](#) They poignantly chronicle, **“While more students than ever before are enrolling in college, far fewer are succeeding once they get there. Nationwide, 40 percent of college students (including 66 percent of Black college students and 53 percent of Latinx college students) take at least one remedial course, where they spend time and money learning skills they were told they’d already mastered in high school.”**

New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED) guidance for districts and schools is to use reentry as an opportunity to consider the effectiveness of pre-established grading policies at various grade levels. Purpose and effectiveness should inform local decisions about grading policies moving forward. The process and decisions about both standards and grading have profound consequences on students, potentially deepening the opportunity gap and existing inequities. As TNP explains, “In other words, ...millions of students across the country are working hard to get through school, only to find themselves ill-prepared to live the lives they hope for. They’re planning their futures on the belief that doing well in school creates opportunities—that showing up, doing the work, and meeting their teachers’ expectations will prepare them for what’s next.” When revising grading policies to respond to potential scenarios for Covid-19 Safe Operating Categories (full remote, hybrid or full reentry) it is important that policy and operational procedures support accurate information on student performance.



Districts and schools should examine how their decisions about grading policies affect student groups at various grade levels. Districts have an opportunity now to reframe their systems around culturally responsive and anti-racist practices, including how student performance is measured and communicated.

NMPED strongly encourages competency-based approaches, student portfolios, and standards-based assessment practices. While grades are an established tool that communicates proficiency, NMPED recommends districts and schools take the opportunity to reframe communication, emphasizing educator collaboration and interrater reliability that allows teachers to better understand student misconceptions. NMPED also recommends districts and schools promote deeper feedback for students and less emphasis on one-dimensional grades. Feedback should help students understand where they are in relationship to on-grade-level standards as well as help them see the roadmap of supports that teachers will provide to help them scaffold their learning. Offering students specific and timely feedback, opportunities for improvement and goal setting, and engaging in discussions around performance are much more substantial, cultivating both a growth mindset and student metacognition and should all be considered in grading policies. These practices also follow closely with improved, relevant, and culturally responsive educational tasks.

With these considerations, each district and school can approach grades as they find appropriate for their community. NMPED strongly recommends engaging parents and students to establish grading policy moving forward.