

Questions & Answers

If the traditional grading scale is still good enough for individual assignments and tests, why isn't it good enough for overall grades?

The issue with the traditional grading scale for the assignment of *overall* grades is that there are 59 ways to get an F and just 10 ways each to get an A, B, C or D—this gives F grades a disproportionately negative weight. Since most overall grades are determined by averaging multiple assignment and test grades, even just a few F grades will skew the overall grade downward. An F grade in a course should reflect the student's lack of proficiency in the subject—not the result of a few heavily weighted F grades pulling down the D and above grades.

Doesn't this make it easier to get higher grades?

No. Again, the modification of grading scales does not have an effect on how individual assignments and tests are scored, it merely changes the way they are entered into the grade book and used to determine an overall course grade.

You mentioned that balanced grading scales are the first phase of implementation of the new policy—what's next?

The next steps in the process will be to articulate standards for every course so students and parents will know what proficiency against those standards looks like; and to separate out and report separately non-academic indicators (behavior, tardies, homework for practice, etc.) from course grades.

For More Information

If you have additional questions about balanced grading scales, please feel free to contact your student's teachers and administrators. We have also created an e-mail address for you to submit your questions electronically: grading_practices@hsd.k12.or.us. We will compile these questions and provide answers via our Website and school newsletters.

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Secondary Grading Practices

Explaining balanced grading scales



Hillsboro School District



Background & New District Policy on Grading

Rationale

New state graduation requirements compel students to show they have mastered the essential skills in reading, math and writing based on their performance against standards.

The Hillsboro School District is committed to ensuring that the grades a student receives reflect their knowledge and ability in any given subject area.

Therefore, the District has revised Board Policy IK: Student Achievement to ensure that grading practices result in grades that are an accurate and reliable indication of student knowledge.

The first phase of implementation for the revised policy is to ensure all teachers are using balanced grading scales. A balanced grading scale is one where there are an equal number of points in each grading category: A, B, C, D, F.

Traditional grading scales have 10-point increments between grades A through D, but 60 points between D and F. This gives F grades a disproportionately negative effect on the overall grade, which, in turn, has three notable adverse side effects: 1) Just a few F grades can make it impossible to pass a course; 2) There is a disincentive for students to continue learning and trying in a course when there is no possible way they will pass; and 3) If an F has been given because an assignment is missing, it is not an accurate reflection of what a student knows and can do—there is no evidence from which to base that decision.

Grading Scales will Look Different

There are many different grading scales that teachers may use:

Balanced Grading Scale Example 1:

A	90-100
B	80-90
C	70-80
D	60-70
F	50-60

Balanced Grading Scale Example 2:

A	80-100
B	60-80
C	40-60
D	20-40
F	0-20

Balanced Grading Scale Example 3:

A	5
B	4
C	3
D	2
F	1

Balanced Grading Scale Example 4:

A+	4.3	C+	2.3
A	4.0	C	2.0
A-	3.7	C-	1.7
B+	3.3	D+	1.3
B	3.0	D	1.0
B-	2.7	D-	0.7
		F	0

Digging Deeper

One thing to keep in mind as you consider the various balanced grading scales and their implication for students' grades is that the points or percentage a student earns on a particular assignment (raw score) does not necessarily directly correlate to the grade they receive based on the grading scale (converted score).

The scale in Example 1 is perhaps the most understandable if you think about converting percentages to grades. If a student receives a 45% on an assignment, that is a failing grade—their grade in the teacher's grade book would be a 50, as that is the lowest score in that scale; if the student received 50% or higher, that percentage would convert directly to their grade.

If the same 45% assignment score is applied to the grading scale in Example 2, the student would still receive an F—not a C as you might think if the raw score directly correlated to the converted score.

Why and how?

Well, the same basis of thought around a student's grasp of a concept still applies—at least 6 out of 10 questions need to be answered correctly to show any level of proficiency. That means 60% is still the baseline for receiving a D, 70% for a C, and so on in the assessment of performance on an *individual assignment or test*. Back to the scenario above using grading scale Example 2, the teacher would use a ratio to change the raw score from an assignment or test into a converted score for entry into the grade book: 45% is 75% up the traditional F scale ($45/60 = .75$), so 20 points (the spread of the F) would be multiplied by .75 for a score of 15.