December 2, 2019

Dear City Schools Community,

We have heard from many of you about the district’s new grading policy, and as we review the first quarter of implementation, I want to share some thoughts and reflections.

**Why did City Schools change the grading policy?**
We adopted this grading policy because we believe that grades should be a helpful tool for teachers, students, and families. We heard from many of you through our engagements last year, and you were clear that you wanted to know whether your students’ grades reflected true learning. This revised policy moves us more transparently in that direction. Please read the attached document to learn more about the district’s core beliefs about grading.

**We owe a heartfelt apology to all stakeholders, especially to students and families.**
While we engaged many families in our grading policy development process, we made the final changes to the grading policy without clear and thorough discussions with students about the changes that were coming and why we were making these changes. Our insufficient communication has resulted in many students feeling confusion, frustration, and additional stress, and we apologize for not preparing students for the impact of this change.

**Going forward, here is what you can expect.**
This month, students will receive in-depth presentations about the grading policy, and parents and guardians will receive detailed communication from the district regarding the policy.

If you would like to share feedback, please e-mail gradingpolicy@bcps.k12.md.us. All e-mails will be read and gathered to provide a sense of how the policy is being felt across our city. We are dedicated to listening to all our communities and to making changes as needed.

Thank you for your continued feedback and partnership.

Sincerely,

John Davis
Chief of Schools
City Schools’ Beliefs about Grading

1) *What matters is that students have learned what they are supposed to learn by the end of the marking period. All students have a right to access reassessment.* For this reason, we expect each school to develop a *reassessment* practice for those who seek to improve. Reassessment opportunities should be transparently communicated in each class. [This document highlights district-recommended reassessment and homework practices.]

2) *City Schools believes that grades should reflect attainment of the standards taught.* We also want grades to reflect similar levels of mastery across the district. This is why grades at traditional schools are based on 70 percent assessment in the district.

3) There are two types of graded assessments in our district:
   - **Formative assessments** - Used to give feedback on movement toward content mastery. These “progress checks” take place during the learning process and provide teachers with data they need to make sound instructional decisions and help students and families understand student academic progress.
   - **Summative assessments** - Used to evaluate student learning at the end of a specific instructional period – typically at the end of a unit, marking period, semester, course, or program. These “major assessments” take place after the learning process.

4) *Assessments are not just paper and pencil test and quizzes.* Students should be seeing more and different opportunities to show their knowledge in the assessment portion of the gradebook. [The district has provided alternatives to paper and pencil assessments (linked here) to allow assessments to take place in multiple forms.]

5) *Grades should not be a mystery.* Any student or family member can check the Infinite Campus Portal to identify a current grade and there should be at least one grade updated per week. Please ask your school for your access code.

6) *Grading policy should incorporate best practices and engagement from stakeholders*
   - **Best Practices**: The policy is a hybrid between more traditional grading practices and standards-based grading – the best research-based approach, which is 100 percent assessment-based. We adopted a hybrid model to strike a balance between where we are as a district related to grading and where we want to be in the future.
   - **Engagement**: City Schools received survey responses from 1,267 students, 552 teachers, 474 parents/community members, and 140 counselors/administrators.
     - A majority of teachers, parents/community members, and counselors/administrators and a plurality of students believed that the primary purpose of grades is to reflect achievement.
     - All stakeholders believed that assessments should count the most towards a student grade.
     - A majority of parents and students and a plurality of teachers believed that grades should be entered weekly.
   - *The full presentation shared with the Board of School Commissioners can be found by clicking here.*

200 East North Avenue • Baltimore, Maryland 21202 • www.baltimorecityschools.org