



## Graduation and Grading Guidance for the 2019-2020 School Year due to COVID-19

As local education agencies (LEAs) consider graduation and grading practices during these exceptional times, the Utah State Board of Education (USBE) provides these considerations to support the local decision-making process.

### **Graduation Requirements**

High school graduation is an important milestone in the lives of our Utah youth. For our students working to graduate this spring, we want to support you in finding ways to ensure that students graduate ready for postsecondary education and the workforce.

USBE has not enacted any new policies for graduating seniors. The goal is to have students finish their classes and graduate with the anticipated credits for the year. Students should be able to work with their teachers and administrators in finishing out their final year with enough credits to graduate on time. If students are not able to continue their classes, we also allow competency-based credits. If students can demonstrate adequate proficiency in each area, credit can be awarded without the student spending the requisite amount of time in a classroom. LEA processes and policies for showing competency should be well-established and publicized in multiple languages.

Utah has a minimum graduation requirement of 24 credits in specified content areas. Those requirements aren't changing. Each local district has control of their graduation requirements, as long as they meet the state's minimum. Most districts in the state have more requirements than the state's minimum. Generally, we see anywhere from 25-28 credit requirements. With this in mind, our strategy in dealing with COVID-19 is to remind districts that they have the ability to reassess their local requirements, while maintaining the 24-credit minimum, to assist in graduating students on time with the appropriate credits for graduation.

One additional example of what we are doing in Utah is to ask schools to reevaluate the individual requirements they have for seniors and graduations. Many schools have senior projects or classes that involve the students going into the community to complete the requirements. USBE is encouraging schools to either develop waivers for the portion in-person community involvement or begin working on alternative means to complete that requirement. They may utilize video conferencing for the students to

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interact with their advisors or the community. The important goal is for schools to work on innovative and flexible methods to finish out the school year.

USBE recommends that LEAs move quickly to determine which students are eligible for graduation and which students will need targeted support to meet graduation requirements.

Some potential options to ensure seniors can earn credit and achieve eligibility for graduation may include:

- 1. Credit via a locally designed series of assignments or work completion:**
  - a. Examples include online coursework, written work packets, project-based learning, portfolios, or applied work experiences (where current high school course standards align with a student's employment).
- 2. Credit via competency-based assessment(s):**
  - a. Examples include a locally designed test, formative and summative assessments, leveraging a determined cut score from a college entrance exam, industry recognized credential or certificate, or college admissions/placement.
- 3. Credit through expanded course equivalency:**
  - a. College courses completed through concurrent enrollment or career and technical education (CTE) courses may meet learning standards for core credits. Schools should consider local emergency approval of additional equivalencies between college courses or CTE courses that are aligned high school courses to ensure seniors earn core credits.

With respect to grades 9-11, it is recommended that LEAs continue providing quality education and follow their submitted "continuous learning plan." This is particularly important with students learning English. It will be challenging, but Utah's world-class educators have risen to the we believe we can accomplish our goals with our world-class educators.

## Grading

The authority to award grades and determine grade point averages rests with local school districts and charters. USBE recognizes that grade calculations and GPA are a local policy issue. USBE does recommend that districts and charters establish a methodology to fairly calculate grades based on work previously completed and a methodology for GPA calculations, including considering pass/incomplete grade. LEAs have latitude in determining what grades to award, if any, for coursework and what coursework is required for credit.

For LEAs considering the use of pass (P)/incomplete (I) grades, there are some points of consideration to keep in mind.



- Currently, the NCAA calculates Ps as Ds as they relate to NCAA scholarships ([find updated NCAA reactions to COVID-19 here](#)). There are likely also other private scholarships that affect a small number of students that operate under similar circumstances.
- There are some professional applications (including the health professions) in some institutions that don't award credit for entry to students earning a P in a particular course.
- Many awards (including valedictorian and salutatorian) at Utah Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) can be affected by having Ps on a student's transcript.
- The Utah System of Higher Education (USHE) administered scholarships (including both Regent's and New Century) will be unaffected by P/I, nor will local scholarships administered by Utah IHEs.
- Federal financial aid guidelines are dependent on the pace of credit earning versus GPA and so will presumably be unaffected by P/I.

The emphasis for schoolwork assigned, reviewed, and completed during the remote learning period should be to focus students on improving their understanding and learning. A best practice would be to allow students to keep the letter grade they had prior to March 13<sup>th</sup>, and/or allow them to increase their grade through demonstrating additional learning. Decreasing a student's grade, without fully understanding each student's ability to access the learning resources or having control over their circumstances, is not recommended. Instead, consider the following best practices for continuous remote learning:

- Grading should focus on the continuation of learning and prioritize the connectedness and care for students and staff. All students should have the opportunity to redo, make up, or try again to complete, show progress, or attempt to complete work assigned prior to the remote learning period in that time frame.
- Consider competency-based grading rather than assigning percentages and grading everything for right and wrong
- Encourage the development of rubrics to grade the body of work rather than many individual assignments
- Consider alternative ways students can demonstrate their learning
- Give meaningful feedback on progress once or twice a week
- Concentrate on meaningful feedback, where students are in their learning and where they can improve
- Local districts and charters should develop alternate methods of assessment for course work, where appropriate, including use of video, electronic submission, etc.
- Consider allowing students to complete the requirements of the course beyond and grades as described in the course disclosure statement beyond the time of the semester
- For students who the LEA has had difficulty connecting with even after multiple communication attempts (e.g., calls, home visits, email)
  - Consider using their current grade at the start of school dismissal as the grade for fourth quarter



- Consider using an incomplete to allow students the opportunity to complete the missing coursework
- Consider averaging first, second, and third term grades to determine fourth quarter grades

For additional consideration, you may want to read:

- Guskey, Thomas R. (2020, March 29). Should We Consider Pass/Fail Grading? Retrieved from <https://tguskey.com/should-we-consider-pass-fail-grading/>
- Sawchuk, Stephen. (2020, April 1). Grading Students During the Coronavirus Crisis: What's the Right Call? Retrieved from <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2020/04/01/gradingstudents-during-the-coronavirus-crisis-whats.html>
- Staff. Grading Scales. Retrieved from <http://www.ncaa.org/student-athletes/future/gradingscales>

## Concurrent Enrollment

Because of the circumstances sparked by the COVID-19 pandemic, USHE institutions will be granting students the option of alternatives to letter grades for certain Spring 2020 courses, as determined by academic departments. This will include CE courses. If a concurrent enrollment student opts for one of these alternative grades Spring 2020, that grade must be recorded on both the institution and the high school transcript.

[Each institution has set deadlines for choosing an alternative grade option.](#) Institutions are also extending the deadline for withdrawing from Spring 2020 courses. Pass (P) or Credit (CR) grades, as well as a Withdrawal (W) grade will not affect GPA. Please refer to the chart below outlining deadlines and alternative grading options offered by each USHE institution.

USBE encourages CE students to complete their Spring courses and earn the college credit they have worked for. For students for whom the transition from classroom to remote instruction has disrupted their ability to complete coursework, a P or CR option provides credit without negatively affecting GPA. Because opting for a grade or withdrawing from a CE courses can impact future postsecondary work from financial aid and scholarship eligibility to requirements for specific majors, and because each Utah college or university has different deadlines and different alternative grade options, *CE students are strongly advised to speak with a campus advisor before choosing an option other than a letter grade.*

For more information or assistance in completing Spring 2020 courses, please contact the CE Office ([contact information found here](#)). If you have concerns about how this

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may affect a family member's NCAA scholarship, please see [this page](#) for further details and contact your campus advisor.

## **Grade Promotions**

With regards to grade promotions, we fully anticipate the majority of our schools to promote students as expected. Our expectation is for schools to finish out the school year and have students advance as expected. During the summer, USBE encourages LEAs to find ways to determine student learning gaps and find ways to administer programs to help fill in these gaps.