

Consistency in Grading Practices

Citizens For Education met with CRSD Superintendent Mark Klein and Director of Secondary Education Barry Desko on two occasions over the last year (April 2012 and January 2013) to better understand consistency in grading practices among different teachers who teach the same high school level course. The following Q&A provides a synopsis of the outcome.

Citizens For Education (CFE): In the five core curricula, which courses have district midterms administered?

Mr. Klein/Mr. Desko: The courses in the following table have district midterms administered. This includes all math courses except AP and Computer Science courses.

| Midterm Exams by Curricular Area | | | | | |
|---|--|---|---------|----------------|----------------|
| Grade | Math | Science | English | Social Studies | World Language |
| 9th | Alg 1 Accl Alg 1 Hon Alg 2 Concepts | Phys Sci Accl Phys Sci Hon Bio | None | None | All Courses |
| 10th | Alg 2 Pt A Accl Alg 2 Hon Geometry | Accl Bio Bio | None | None | All Courses |
| 11th | Accl Geometry Geometry Hon Analysis | *Physics *Accl Physics *Hon Physics | None | None | All Courses |
| 12th | Accl Analysis Accl Statistics Analysis Alg 2 Pt B Trigonometry | Behavioral Sci Environ Sci Microbiology | None | AP Psych | All Courses |
| *Physics midterms were not given in 2012-13 due to Keystone Exams | | | | | |

CFE: Which core courses have district finals administered?

Mr. Klein/Mr. Desko: All math, science, English, social studies, and world language courses have final exams, with the exception of the following: Animal Science and Astronomy, which have final projects instead of final exams. Read 180 courses do not have a final exam. [Note: Read 180 is a comprehensive system of curriculum, instruction, assessment, and professional development proven to raise reading achievement for struggling readers in grades 4–12+. Designed for any student reading two or more years below grade-level, READ 180 leverages adaptive technology to individualize instruction for students and provide powerful data for differentiation to teachers. Critical reading, vocabulary, writing, 21st Century learning, and grammar skills are components of the program.]

CFE: Are there plans to develop district midterms or finals for any courses that currently do not administer them?

Mr. Klein/Mr. Desko: Nothing additional is currently being considered.

CFE: Which courses have summer assignments? Please indicate the nature of the summer work, i.e., reading, reading and writing, math packet, etc.

Mr. Klein/Mr. Desko: The following courses have summer packets assigned:

- Science – AP Biology only. All AP Biology teachers use the same summer packet. The reading assignment is due in January but delivered in June to allow students the opportunity, if they choose, to do this over the summer.
- English – AP Literature, AP Composition, Honors 12, Honors 11. The assignments are the same by building.
- Social Studies – AP Euro, AP World, AP Psych, Hon Philosophy. Assignments are not consistent, but are determined by each teacher.
- World Languages – AP courses only. Consistent at school level only.
- Math – Students entering Honors/Accelerated Analysis and Calculus have summer packets. The math packet is the same across subject and across schools. Honors Analysis and Accelerated Analysis use the same summer packet.

CFE: Within a given course having multiple teachers in one or both high schools, is there consistency in:

- a. The assignment, extent, grading, and weight of summer assignments? If yes, how and by whom is this consistency assessed? Does anyone monitor if teachers count differently those packets that are turned in complete on day 1 of the school year versus giving students additional time to complete them after the start of the school year?
- b. The grading of homework, i.e., homework graded only for completion, homework graded for completion and accuracy, homework not graded at all?
- c. The use of partial credit on assessments?
- d. The inclusion/exclusion of class participation as part of grading? If included, is the weight of class participation monitored to determine consistency?

Mr. Klein/Mr. Desko: There is agreement across all curricular areas that there should be a level of consistency in the grading practices across all teachers of the same course. Some flexibility is necessary for the teacher to apply grading practices that best meet class needs. This has been a conversation led by Curriculum Coordinators and this will continue to be a focus for curriculum meetings. If a parent believes there is a major discrepancy in a teacher's grading practice, they should contact the teacher and then the Curriculum Coordinator or Principal.

CFE: How often do curriculum coordinators or other staff compare data on identical courses within and across both high schools? What data is compared? What actions are taken if inconsistencies are identified?

Mr. Klein/Mr. Desko: All district assessment results are reviewed and data collected for monitoring of curriculum and teaching except World Languages. World Languages is in the process of moving their district assessments into Performance Tracker (an online database containing test results for all students). The data collected on district assessments is shared with Principals and School-level Department Chairs.

CFE: Does the district monitor the Home Access Center (HAC) across departments/schools to compare how teachers are calculating grades?

- a. Are the same categories of assessment used across departments/schools?
- b. Are similar percentages of weight assigned to similar categories?
- c. Are similar quantities of assessments included?

Mr. Klein/Mr. Desko: The district does not have the ability to “monitor” HAC. Principals do review Teacher Grade Books when there is a concern or if they need to gather information.

CFE: Does the district monitor HAC across departments/schools to ensure grades are input in a timely manner? What parameters are used to define “timely manner?”

Mr. Klein/Mr. Desko: The district does not have the ability to “monitor” HAC. Principals and Curriculum Coordinators do regularly remind teachers to return assessment results in a timely manner; however, because of the number of variables, specific requirements are not in place. If a student/parent has a specific concern with a teacher they should contact the teacher.

CFE: Is training given to teachers on how to use HAC to provide helpful information, including the use of categories (besides “Other”) and weighting?

Mr. Klein/Mr. Desko: Teachers have been trained in the use of the electronic Grade Book on HAC. In addition, each secondary school has several trained teachers that in-service their staff and act as a resource. Teachers are given the flexibility to use total points or percentages to calculate their grades. A new version of Teacher Grade Book will likely be introduced in September 2013 and there may be changes to the system.

CFE: Is there a rationale for the inclusion of +/- designations on final grades and/or transcripts when they may not be used consistently by teachers and do not factor into GPA calculations? If so, what is it? If not, would you consider eliminating it from final grades and transcripts?

Mr. Klein/Mr. Desko: The teacher's electronic grade book will add a + and a - according to parameters set by the district. So, for any of the marking periods, an 89% will default to a B+ and a 91% to an A-. The final grade in any subject does not have that default. In fact, teachers need to manually enter that grade based on their consideration of the average of the four (or two) marking periods and any other considerations that would go into the final grade. The +/- discussion remains among school administrators for now. We are gathering some information from colleges and universities on the impact of +/- on transcripts and then will make a decision on how to move forward with this discussion. I don't expect to make any further progress on this issue until next school year.

Citizens For Education thanks Mr. Klein and Mr. Desko for their responses, and feels strongly that reasonable consistency in grading practices and HAC usage among teachers who teach the same course should be emphasized and monitored by the district Curriculum Coordinators or by the administration to ensure fairness for students. It is further suggested that each of the five core curriculum areas maintain a webpage to allow sharing of resources (e.g., website links, list of teachers who teach each course in that core area, grading criteria, etc.) for that department. The webpage would be a resource for staff, students, and parents and would go a long way toward efficiently enhancing collaboration and consistency. Finally, a staff in-service about HAC, specifically with a review of how the system's weighting works to support (or sometimes contradict) the teacher's grading system would be helpful.