



An Equity Approach

Rationale for Shifting from Letter
Grades to Credit/No Credit
Spring 2020

Covid-19 Pandemic



Our New Context...

- On **March 13, 2020**, all San Diego county districts decided to close schools in order to prevent the spread of the CoVid-19 virus.
- At the **secondary level**, when school closures occurred:
 - Quarter System schools were **close to ending** Q3
 - Trimester System schools were **just beginning** Trimester 3
- PUSD Schools are physically closed but **learning is “open”** with the launch of **Distance Learning on April 6th** through the duration of the “stay home” orders.
- As always, our **focus is on learning** and ensuring students are **on-track for graduation and post-secondary endeavors**.



Our decision-making process...

- CA State Superintendent, Dr. Tony Thurmond is clear in his message to **"DO NO HARM"** to students in terms of holding students harmless during these unprecedented times for students' grades.
- Consulted with our teacher leaders and principals on the design of our new PUSD Distance Learning Plan - which is a **NEW learning system and environment** for both students and teachers.
- Sought guidance from the state, county and local districts on the best path that supports **ALL students equitably**.



Our Focus: Supporting all Students Equitably

The learning environment is not consistent for all students.

Student A: My mom is an essential worker at the hospital each day. I am so worried about her that I can't sleep. I am trying to help my brother and sister with their work, but can't always finish mine. It's really hard to keep up.

Student B: The digital learning for me is going great! My friends and I have noticed that we have been less stressed and the flexibility in our learning right now just makes it so much easier for us, so we can get more rest and focus more.

Student C: Learning new class material and a new language is already difficult for me. I am getting help online but it's different. I just hope I pass my classes!

Student D: I am a struggling student. I normally get a lot of support during my class and now I need to wait to get my questions answered. Learning on my own is challenging. Am I only able ask my teacher for help during their "Office Hours"?



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Student E: I am so anxious. I am scared that another person in my family is going to get sick. My aunt in New York is in the hospital. I am glad my counselor and teachers check in with me but it's hard to focus on anything but all the bad news about coronavirus.

Student F: I have been working so hard to keep my GPA above 4.3 and school is so stressful. How am I going to balance my four A.P.s without classroom support?

Student G: I have autism and I am working with three teachers. My mom is trying to help but we also have a new baby. I am trying to do my best.

Student H: My dad just got laid off so I need to keep working at my job at the local fast food restaurant. I bumped up my hours so I can help out my family as much as possible. I'm trying to balance work and school, but I don't have time to fit everything in.



Our Focus: Supporting all Students Equitably

Our teachers are learning too.

Teacher A: I love distance learning! I use technology all the time and my students are familiar with it. The transition has been smooth.

Teacher B: I am stressed about trying to teach everything I normally would so I am assigning the same work I normally do. I also have three kids at home I need to support.

Teacher C: I often wonder if we are all calibrated. It is a tremendous challenge to all be on the same page with grading criteria, especially when a letter grade is a permanent mark on a student's transcript.



Factors for Consideration:

Issue Credit/No Credit vs. Letter Grades

- Enable our students the ability to continue to earn credit toward both their High School Graduation and College Admission Requirements, and/or additional post high school endeavors.
- Recognize the significant adjustments to both the teaching and learning environments our teachers and students are currently engaging in. The regular supports available to **all** students in a traditional classroom setting are not readily available to **all** students in an online setting.
- Hold our students “harmless” during our Distance Learning Plan. We recognize that one plan is not one size fits all. To that end, we are mindful not to unintentionally create barriers and widen the equity gap for students in our district.



Guiding Documents/Resources

Joint statement from the California State Board of Education, California Department of Education, California State University, University of California, California Community Colleges and the Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/he/hn/documents/jointk12highereducation.pdf>

- **University of California (UC)**
[The University of California's Response to COVID-19: Admissions and Financial Aid](#)(PDF)
- **California State University (CSU)**
[COVID-19 Interim Impacts on CSU Undergraduate Admissions Policies and Practices](#)(PDF)
- **Community College letter**
[California Community Colleges Guidance Letter](#)(PDF)
- **Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities (AICCU)**
[AICCU Institution Activities to Serve High School Juniors and Seniors](#)(PDF)
- **[Harvard](#) & [Stanford](#)** adjusted admissions policies



Our Recommendation:

Issue Credit/No Credit vs. Letter Grades for the following reasons:

- All PUSD students will have the opportunity to earn the same level of credit, across all Middle & High School learning communities.
- We must understand that grading a course in an online environment is different than a classroom-based course, and that student success is dependent on a number of factors and supports beyond their control. Several of those supports are missing in an online setting.
- Letter grades at this time can create additional anxiety/stress during the Pandemic. Students' #1 concern reported in Thoughtexchange: academic stress & pressure.



Our Recommendation:

Issue Credit/No Credit vs. Letter Grades for the following reasons:

- Letter grades benefit students who have ideal learning conditions at home knowing that not all students have optimal learning conditions at home.
 - Grading the learning environment vs. grading the actual learning
- Our Quarter and Trimester students **would not have the same benefit of learning time** as Semester students in other districts. Those districts are able to use the semester progress report grades as a safety net so that students can only increase their grade. Our Quarter and Trimester students are just beginning a new term and have no progress report grades to be used as a safety net.
- PUSD is joining other **high performing school districts in California** in issuing "Credit/No Credit": including San Dieguito and Palo Alto.



Transcripts and Credit/No Credit

The [UC/CSU systems](#) as well as many other public/private universities will accept “Credit/No Credit” for Trimester 3 or Quarter 4 marks for ALL students. This **will not adversely harm** our students’ future prospects.

“We want to help alleviate the tremendous disruption and anxiety that is already overwhelming prospective students due to COVID-19,” said John A. Pérez, chair of the Board of Regents, the governing board for UC. “By removing artificial barriers and decreasing stressors — including suspending the use of the SAT — for this unprecedented moment in time, we hope there will be less worry for our future students.”



Transcripts and Credit/No Credit

What does Credit/No Credit look like on my child's transcript?

- Students who earn credit will see a "CR" on their student transcript adjacent to the course for which they earned the credit.
- Students who do not earn credit for a course will see a "NM" on their student transcript. "NM" stands for "No Mark". Student may elect to retake the class later for credit or letter grade.
- Neither Grade Mark ("CR" nor "NM") will have any impact on a student's GPA.
- This aligns with the guidance from the State Superintendent to "Do no harm" to students current standing during this time.



"First, I want to send out a sincere "Thank You" to all our students and staff members for their efforts in bringing our vision of Distance Learning to fruition. For a school district that serves over 36,500 this is no small task, and I'm so proud see our focus on student learning continue during these difficult times. As we transition to a new grading format for the remainder of this school year, please know this was a decision based upon supporting all of the students in our great district. We will continue to honor the outstanding work of our students and teachers moving forward, as it is in those learning connections that Poway Unified will continue to thrive. Thank you for your continued support!"

-Dr. Marian Kim Phelps
PUSD Superintendent

