
Proficiency FAQ for Parents and Students

Our staff have been compiling questions from parents, students, and teachers about proficiency grading. We have tried to include as many questions and answers as we can on this document. Of course, we cannot answer all questions here and we are confident that some of the answers here will foster other questions the community members may have. Please contact your school's teachers or administrators for further explanations or questions.

What is proficiency grading and why has this change been made?

Proficiency grading is really just what it sounds like. Grades for students are based on students demonstrating knowledge and skills to a level of proficiency in a content standard or area of study. The reason this change has been made comes from the research on learning and an Oregon 2011 statute change that requires school policies to allow students to earn credits through a proficiency model. Probably the most significant change that students see is that the way a student behaves in class, positively or negatively, does not impact their academic grade. A student's grade truly reflects what a student knows or is able to do for each content area.

What is a formative assessment?

Formative assessments are any avenue used to give feedback to students about where they currently are on the proficiency continuum for any learning target. The key to effective formative assessments is feedback. Students often underestimate or have an inflated sense of what they know, and they may not see the value of assessments unless they are given timely feedback and specific direction on how they may improve.

What is a summative assessment?

Summative assessments are given to allow students to demonstrate their knowledge of the learning targets. Summative assessments should only be given once students have received ample feedback on formative assessments. Based on this feedback, both the student and the teacher should have a good idea of how a student will perform on a summative assessment. This feedback process will alleviate the students' use of the first attempt at a summative assessment as a "trial run" to see what is being covered.

Why is there a difference in meets/proficient for the high school and middle school?

To earn credit at the high school, a student must earn a C or better, therefore, the MEETS level on the proficiency continuum is equivalent to earning credit. At the middle school, credit is not awarded, so the proficiency continuum solely represents students' progress towards mastery. Here, students are experiencing proficiency for the first time. Having more steps available to show students' growth towards proficiency allows students to experience success as they reach new levels. Experiencing this success may motivate students to continue to work towards MASTERY.

What is homework?

In the simplest terms, homework provides students with the opportunity to extend their learning outside the classroom. More importantly it serves the essential purposes of allowing students to:

- prepare in advance for the next day's classwork;
- practice problems or ideas learned in the classroom; and
- integrate their learned skills or knowledge to a specific situation (Varlas).

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How has homework been used in a traditional grading system?

When homework is used as a classroom management tool, it devalues the intended learning expectations. Students are often motivated by the points given for homework rather than the learning derived from completing it. In the traditional setting, graded homework was often used as a reward for effort or hard work, even if a student's learning didn't increase or change. Lastly, homework often inflated the grades of students who tested poorly (Vatterott).

What is the value of homework in a proficiency system?

All homework should support and provide the opportunity for clear, timely feedback on a student's progress towards specific learning targets. Homework also provides the teacher insight into how a student is doing on the way to being proficient in a content area and whether a student needs more help or is ready to move on. Homework is not used as a summative (the final assessment of a student's knowledge of skill on a standard) assessment which often can penalize students for errors made during what should be risk-free practice. Teachers will provide safe opportunities for practice and preparation and avoid situations where there is punishment or reward based on homework completion. Even though homework is not summative, it is still required, relevant, scored by the teacher, and very important for student learning. This idea should be integrated into the school culture through student handbooks, course syllabi, and class discussions. Homework counts more than ever!

What is a process assessment?

A process assessment is any task that the instructor wishes to record as being important to their course, but does not necessarily reflect a student's level of academic proficiency. Examples could include bringing required materials to class, note taking, maintaining a binder, out-of-class practice reviewed as a group, or participation in a group exercise. Process assessments can improve communication with parents and students as well as be a record of students' activities in the classroom. Since process assessments are not authentic evaluations of a student's proficiency level, the proficiency codes (MTS, ADV, MAS, etc) will not be used.

What is our policy on allowing students to re-take an assessment?

Because a proficiency-based teaching and learning environment gives students the option to retake assessments in order to provide evidence of increased learning, teachers can easily be bogged down with students requesting to retake assessments. Therefore, a policy is in place to help guide teachers and students to use this option mindfully and appropriately.

In order to retake an assessment, a student must first demonstrate that they have invested additional time and practice to prepare for the reassessment. Examples of additional practice include homework, class work, study group, office hours, etc. Additional practice provides evidence that a student has increased learning and is prepared for reassessment.

The following guidelines for reassessment will appear in student handbooks, postings, and other communications to parents/students. Teachers should reinforce these guidelines in their course discussions and procedures. Teachers may decide to use a "Request to Retest" document similar to the sample included in the appendix.

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Guidelines for Reassessment

- Students must complete additional practice/preparation before submitting a request for reassessment.
- Reassessments will typically occur within the same quarter or by the end of the incomplete period.
- Reassessments from previous quarters may occur per agreement (contract) with teacher.
- All reassessments occur prior to the conclusion of the course and within the same school year.

How do we support an atmosphere of Academic Honesty? How does our current system for academic dishonesty change using proficiency grading?

Medford School District requires all students to demonstrate honesty and to abide by ethical standards in preparing materials, presenting materials, and in testing situations. Grades should be an authentic reflection of the student's own work. Academic dishonesty, cheating, or plagiarism involves an attempt by the student to demonstrate a level of knowledge or skill which the student does not possess. It involves any attempt by a student to substitute the product of another, in whole or in part, as the student's own work. This policy covers all school-related tests, quizzes, reports, class assignments, and projects. Academic dishonesty will be addressed through the disciplinary process and will result in an INCOMPLETE on the assessment. The student will be expected to re-take the assessment. In this way grades remain an authentic reflection of a student's academic achievement and are not skewed by the results of disciplinary actions.

Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the following:

Cheating

- Obtaining information from another student during an examination
- Communicating information to another student during an examination
- Knowingly allowing another student to copy one's work
- Offering another person's work as one's own
- Unauthorized use of an electronic device to solicit, transmit, or search for answers
- Taking an examination for another student or having someone take an examination for oneself
- Sharing answers for a take-home examination unless specifically authorized by the teacher
- Using unauthorized material during an examination
- Altering a graded examination or assignment and returning it for additional credit, under the pretense that the teacher made an error
- Having another person or a company do the research and/or writing of an assigned paper or report
- Misreporting or altering the data in laboratory or research projects

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Plagiarism

- Plagiarism is to present the ideas, words, or creative product of another as one's own. Credit must be given to the source for direct quotations, paraphrases, ideas, and facts which are not common knowledge.

Other Dishonest Conduct

- Stealing or attempting to steal an examination or answer key
- Stealing or attempting to change official academic records
- Alteration of computer and/or grade book records or forgery of signatures for the purpose of academic advantage
- Sabotaging or destroying the work of others

Collusion

- Collusion occurs when any student knowingly or intentionally helps another student perform an act of academic dishonesty. Collusion is an act of academic dishonesty and will be disciplined in the same manner as the act itself.

What is a teacher's role when academic dishonesty presents itself?

A teacher who has evidence that an act of academic dishonesty has occurred shall report the incident to student management (deans, vice-principals, etc. as determined by each school site). This is a serious infraction and needs to be given an appropriate disciplinary consequence. The teacher/PLC will take appropriate actions to ensure students have been re-evaluated. This includes for example: retaking an assessment, rewriting a paper, redoing a project, redoing a lab report, or redoing a research project.

What is the role of an Administrator/Student Management when dishonesty presents itself?

For any incident of academic dishonesty, the administrator will determine the appropriate level of discipline based on the school's discipline hierarchy. These consequences will be recorded as part of the student's discipline record. Students found to be academically dishonest are subject to disciplinary action up to and including suspension, dismissal from student offices, athletics, extracurricular activities, involuntary transfer, or expulsion.

Other than the Proficiency Continuum, what special codes are used in the grade book?

The assessment type and grade level will determine which special codes are available for use. In order to ensure that students receive proper feedback, teachers should use codes for formative and summative in the same manner. To ensure effective communication between teachers, parents, and students, an effort should be made to use the scores below so that no score is left blank after the assessment's due date. Any score can be flagged with an asterisk (*) to indicate that the assessment was completed after the due date. This will not negatively affect any grade determination, but will serve as an indicator that teachers may consider when assessing the Career Related Learning standards.

Formative and summative codes include:

- High School Proficiency Codes (MAS, ADV, MTS, APP, BEG)
- Middle School Proficiency Codes (MAS, PRO, APP, DEV, BEG)
- ATI (Assessment turned-in, but not yet scored by the teacher)

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- NA (Not applicable). This score is used in the case where a student does not need to complete a particular learning target within an assessment in order demonstrate proficiency; for example, the student demonstrated proficiency through a different assessment. This score may also be used for students with Individual Education Plan (IEP) for whom a learning target does not apply due to their modified curricular goals. A score of NA means that the assessment will not be considered in the grade determination for that student.
- INC (Incomplete). This score is used to indicate that a student has not provided any evidence of his/her proficiency level on an assessment. This could include situations where students were absent or unprepared to take an assessment at the scheduled time. A score of INCOMPLETE will be considered in the grade determination at one level below BEGINNING.

Process Codes include:

- COM (Complete). COM is used when a student has sufficiently completed a task/assessment.
- INC (Incomplete). INC is used when a student has not sufficiently completed a task/assessment.
- NA (Not applicable)

Note: The proficiency codes should not be used for process assessments.

Do we use zeros in the grade book?

No. All assessments and assignments will be scored using the proficiency continuum. If a student has not yet shown any evidence in a learning target, a score of INCOMPLETE should be entered. In our grade book program, this INCOMPLETE is one level below a BEGINNING as opposed to the traditional system of a zero being 49% lower than any other mark. An INCOMPLETE is a place holder in the system and will be considered in the grade determination at the learning target level until evidence is shown. In the **high schools**, this INCOMPLETE will have the same effect as any score below a MEETS if there is no other evidence shown in that learning target. The student will receive an incomplete in the class and will not earn credit unless evidence is shown at or above MEETS. In the **middle schools**, an INCOMPLETE on an assessment will only affect the student's overall grade if there is no other evidence shown in that learning target. The student will receive an incomplete in the class until evidence is shown.

When is an NA code used in the grade book?

The NA (not applicable) code is used in the grade book to indicate that a specific learning target within an assessment (formative, summative, process) does not apply to a particular student. Using NA has no effect on the student's overall grade.

The NA code could be used for situations such as the following:

- A formative assessment for which a student was absent or did not do the task and the teacher has adequate understanding of the student's ability level. Therefore, the teacher does not need this particular assessment to know where the student is on the proficiency continuum.

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- A summative assessment for which a student was absent or did not do the task. The teacher has additional summative assessment(s) of the same learning target and this (these) completed summative assessment(s) accurately represent the student's skill/knowledge level.
- A differentiated assessment that some students have been assigned and others have not. For those who do not need to complete that particular assessment, an NA will be entered.
- For assessments that are not applicable for a student on a modified diploma. The resource case manager and teacher collaboratively determine which learning targets may not apply to a particular modified diploma student.
- The NA code may, at times, be used for formative and process assessments for students entering a course in progress. Teachers should have the new student take previously given summative assessments to find out what the student knows and can do in regards to the learning targets taught and assessed earlier in the course. Those summative scores are entered into the grade book. If the student is at MEETS or higher, then all previous formative and process assessments can be deemed not applicable. If the student is not at MEETS, then the teacher can determine which formative and process assessments a student needs to complete to best assist the student in learning the skills and knowledge necessary to meet the learning target. For formative and process assessments that the teacher feels the student doesn't need to do, the NA code may be used.

What is a *modified* score on an assessment?

A modified score indicates that the learning target has been altered in order to meet the needs of a student working toward a modified diploma. Before a teacher can enter a score as modified, he/she will need to consult with the student's case manager for approval. A modified score will significantly impact a student's credit earned in the course. Note that modifications are only used when the learning target or grade-level standard itself has been changed. This differs from accommodations which do not imply that the learning target or standard has been altered in any way, only that a student used a type of learning aide on an assessment. Think of accommodations as tools or techniques (allowing extended time or allowing a student to complete a task orally) to level the playing field for students. Accommodations do not need to be indicated in the grade book.

The option to indicate a modified grade will only be available for students who are working toward a modified diploma.

When entering a score for this student, teachers will have the option to check a box that indicates "modified." When checked, a warning will appear:

This option may only be selected for courses identified as modified per a student's plan (i.e., IEP or 504 plans).

A comment must be entered detailing the modification that was made.

If you have any questions, please contact this student's case manager.

The score will then appear in italics. After growth, a different score without modification may replace a student's modified score.

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Are assessments weighted in the new grade book?

No. All assessments are equally weighted. Well-designed assessments should provide sufficient information to give a complete reflection of a student's proficiency level in the associated learning targets. Therefore it is not necessary to weigh one assessment more than another.

Larger or more complex assessments (such as unit tests and final exams) that address multiple learning targets will naturally hold increased significance because multiple scores will be given – one for each learning target.

For learning targets that are assessed multiple times, teachers will be able to specify the rule with which the grade book will determine the overall learning target score. Options include:

- Select the highest score (default)
- Select the most recent
- Consider all scores after dropping the lowest
- Consider all scores (used with multiple modes of assessments)

How is a grade calculated for a student who transfers into a course already in progress?

A student joining a course already in session will still be accountable for **all** of the learning targets required for the course. The student will take any necessary summative assessments that were offered earlier in the course. The results from those assessments will be used as a diagnostic tool to determine targets that are already known and targets where improvement is needed. These results should be recorded as evidence in those learning targets and if at MEETS or higher the formatives attached to that particular learning target will be recorded as NA (not applicable). The student will need to work on the formative assessments in the learning targets where improvement is needed and then any further summative assessment will be considered a retake. If the student's arrival is too late to earn credit, the teacher may record an X for the student's grade in that course.

How are a student's level of proficiency on the Career Related Learning Standards (CRLS) recorded?

The CRLS are the non-academic behavior standards that promote increased learning and a positive school environment. CRLS will replace the citizenship grade or the personal accountability report. The three over-arching strands of CRLS are:

1. Independence and Initiative
2. Work Completion and Work Habits
3. Cooperation and Participation

Each strand contains three measurement topics that teachers can select as an area of strength or weakness for each student. The strands and measurement topics are clearly outlined in the CRLS Matrix.

Two possible scores are available for the CRLS, MS (Meets Standard) and NI (Needs Improvement). These scores will appear on progress reports and report cards. Any score of NI will be accompanied by a descriptive comment on the progress report. Teachers will also have the ability to associate positive comments with a score of MS. If any measurement topic within a CRLS strand is marked NI, the entire strand will be reported as NI.

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The positive comments are simply the same language as the measurement topic listed on the CRLS matrix; for instance “Follows routines and procedures without supervision.” Comments generated by an NI include the term “needs to” prior to the measurement topic language; for instance: “Needs to follow routines and procedures without supervision.” Teachers have the option to generate up to nine comments for each student’s progress report.