

## **Grading/Assessment Philosophy - Spring 2020**

### **Upper School**

Our upper school grading policy for post-Spring Break 2020 has been built through discussions with department chairs and faculty and through consulting policies at other independent schools around the country. We recognize that for some students and faculty members the uncertainty of this pandemic or individual family situations may be causing untenable stress, and we are committed to a compassionate grading policy.

### **Guiding Principles**

- Engage in compassionate grading and trust the effort and intent of our students.
- Embrace the philosophy that “less is more” in this period of online school.
- Reduce stress for our students by eliminating high-stakes cumulative exams for May 2020. AP exams have already been adjusted by the College Board.
- Focus on the learning process over product. Recognize our students’ engagement and effort in their classes and their learning under these unprecedented circumstances.
- Maintain consistency for our students. PHS is a school with letter grades for year-long and semester courses.

### **Grading Procedures**

- Faculty members will use a student’s cumulative grade through Spring Break as a baseline for their final grade in the course.
- From this point forward (Monday, April 20), each class will have no more than 3 graded assessments in the fourth interim period, which includes the culminating experience for the course.
- From this point forward (Monday, April 20), all other course activity, including homework assignments, should be judged on completion and effort.
- Graded assessments in the time since Spring Break can raise a student’s cumulative average in the course.
- However, no student can experience more than a 5% drop in their baseline grade (i.e. cumulative grade through Spring Break) based on their work this spring.
- If, however, a student fails to remain engaged in the online learning process, we will contact the student’s parent, and--if appropriate--our learning specialist and/or upper school counselor.

### **Culminating Experience**

- In lieu of traditional Semester Exams, every class will have a culminating experience.
  - This culminating experience will count for no more than 10% of a student’s second-semester grade.
  - This can take place at a time other than the last week of the semester.
  - Seniors in good standing and students enrolled in AP classes are excused from the culminating experience.

- All seniors must turn in a final draft of their Senior Capstone project to graduate.

### **AP Exams**

- We continue to have the expectation that every student enrolled in an AP course (with the exception of senior-level AP English) is required to sit for the AP exam in that subject.
  - The AP exams will be administered at home this year.
  - Students will be emailed a link to their respective AP exams.

### **Calendar**

- [AP Exam Schedule: May 11-22](#)
- Students worldwide will log in to take AP exams at the same time. The time slots for the Central time zone are 11 a.m., 1 p.m. and 3 p.m.
- Given the heightened stress that the online, at-home, 45-minute format will undoubtedly cause, students with an AP exam scheduled on any given day are excused from all classes on that day.
- The last day of regularly scheduled classes for our seniors is Friday, May 8.

### **Middle School**

Our teachers and students have been working hard the past few weeks as they continually adjust to virtual learning. We continue to take a compassionate approach with grades, assessments and curriculum. During virtual learning, we are not fully aware of the stressors impacting students' cognitive skills. With the uncertainties of how online learning impacts students' ability to gain new knowledge, capacity to retain information, and accuracy of assessments, we have made adjustments to our grading approach for 4th-quarter of the 2019-20 school year.

After serious consideration and thorough consultation with other independent middle schools, professionals in the field of school assessment, and our faculty, we will replace traditional percentage and letter grades with two categories: *Engagement and Demonstration of Knowledge*.

It is imperative to note that this is not a “no grade” policy, but rather, a change from quantitative to qualitative feedback. Students will still be held accountable for their course work, but pointed grades on assignments and assessments will be replaced by timely feedback to students on the completion of assignments and their progress in demonstrating their knowledge of the curricular material presented. Teachers will provide specific feedback in a narrative format to students and

parents in the report card comment. This will provide a more detailed, equitable and accurate depiction of your child's progress during virtual school.

Due to the current circumstances and many unknown factors that contribute to our new learning environment, teachers will make every effort to allow students to complete all assignments. We are not letting go of expectations; we are meeting student and faculty needs with compassion and respect.

**Demonstration of Knowledge:** A student's ability to show their academic capacity for the subject matter required by the course. Feedback to the student on assignments will be in the form of one-on-one video conferences, written comments on assignments, video or audio clips in response to work and email communication. A summary of a student's demonstration of knowledge will be provided in the report card comment with specifics on subject matter domains.

**Engagement:** The student participates, attends scheduled classes, advocates and completes assigned tasks. A student is expected to stay engaged in these areas, but in cases where a student does not show appropriate engagement, the teacher or adviser will contact the student and student's parents stating the observed lack of engagement with a compassionate approach seeking understanding and offering assistance. A summary of a student's engagement will be given in the report card comment.

For the same reasons listed above, we will not have traditional semester exams. Exams will be replaced with opportunities for students to celebrate and share their learning through a culminating experience such as projects, activities and individual teacher meetings. These experiences will be planned and communicated to students in advance and the majority of any required work by students will be completed during class time. More information about these culminating experiences and the schedule for the last week of school will be shared soon.

The 4th quarter and year-end letter grade for the 2019-20 school year will not be recorded on the report card or student transcript. These grades will be replaced with a note explaining the removal based on the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Lower School**

While our teachers are working hard to make sure students can keep learning, we also know it is important to provide grace and flexibility due to the circumstances. Report cards for this final trimester of the school year will reflect this grace.

In the lower school, we will use everything we know about each child's efforts and learning over the course of the whole school year to provide relevant assessment information to families on the report card. With that said, for some standards, the teachers might have to indicate that they

do not have enough information about what a child has mastered, resulting in a grade of N/A. Finally, in keeping with tradition, the homeroom teachers will provide a qualitative statement that describes the learning habits, successes and areas for growth for each of their students.

### **Early Childhood**

We recognize that our young students have experienced tremendous changes in their lives since March 13 when they ended their day with a happy goodbye to teachers and friends as they left for Spring Break. We understand the unusual circumstances of social distancing and virtual classrooms make it impossible to accurately assess children's learning and development.

Rather than base our assessments on where a child was in March, we prefer to recognize that children are not going to be at the same developmental or content level they were when they left for Spring Break. In some areas, children will have grown and in other areas there could be some skills temporarily lost. What we know will be most helpful to families and children, is to share our knowledge of the child's strengths, and with the families input set child/family specific goals and strategies for supporting continued growth.

Teachers will email questionnaires to families. Teacher/family virtual conferences will be held May 11-22 to discuss strengths and set goals. At this time, the teachers will also share additional resources to support continued learning.

I want families to know that next year's preschool and kindergarten teachers understand how virtual learning and stay-at-home weeks may have impacted your child's learning. Our teachers are skilled at supporting the growth of the whole child as they prepare them for the next grade level. Your children are ready for next year and we are ready for your child.