

## Establish a Process for Determining Course or Standards Grades

Agree upon a consistent method for determining a final grade from multiple assessment grades. (Note: A separate verification system may be built in order to ensure that students can meet standards through internships or out-of-school projects.)

*This technical process represents an area of intense effort and questions posed consistently to Great Schools Partnership staff from the field. While we would be excited to present a single solution for this process, our experience has demonstrated that any aggregation system has benefits and concerns--and these frequently change based on local context. Ultimately, we would urge schools to weigh the pros and cons of multiple systems to determine a final system that aligns with their needs, addresses the tenets we have outlined in this resource, and which they believe best promotes equitable and rich learning for every student.*

### Examples from the Field

At **York Middle School in York, Maine**, teachers arrive at a final score for each standard by calculating the mean of each student's summative assessment grades (given on a 1-4 scale) within that standard. Habits of work grades are recorded separately. (This school does not calculate overall course grades.) They use this method because teachers believe it best represents the preponderance of evidence that a student has produced over a period of time. They have tried many strategies—mode, most recent score, and power law—but have settled on this because the teachers feel that it most frequently provides an accurate picture of where the student is. They also employ a teacher override function. If the mean does not seem like an accurate reflection of the student's level of proficiency, teachers can experiment to see what the various calculations would be using different formulas. Teachers can also drop a score that is an outlier or which the teacher decides is unreliable. This respect for the professional judgement of the teacher is a cornerstone of the system.

**Montpelier High School in Vermont** includes in the [Montpelier High School Personalized & Proficiency-Based Learning Guide](#) the following instructions for deriving course grades from an array of summative assessment scores and other data: “Summative scores for content-specific indicators will not be averaged across marking periods. Instead, the highest score achieved on a summative assessment within a given content proficiency indicator will be the score given to that proficiency indicator for the course. This is called “high mark” scoring. When the course concludes, the highest achieved summative scores from each content proficiency indicator will be averaged equally, with the course's identified learning expectation indicators' scores to make up 80% of the total grade. The remaining 20% of the course grade is determined by the Habits of Learning-Preparedness score.”

**Frank McCourt High School in New York City** uses the grading system JumpRope to record assessment grades and calculate final grades. Their [grading guide](#) explains: “JumpRope calculates and presents an evolving course average based on the number of times an outcome is used to give feedback and whether any tasks are weighted. Some tasks are weighted more heavily because more time is spent working on and coaching into them, or because they come at the end of the unit when the course has provided more of a chance to improve and master the skill. .... The running average is provided in JumpRope and impacted by rubric scores entered. Each outcome is required to have at least 5 grades in JumpRope for each term. Averages in JumpRope are on a 4 point scale and grades are reported on the transcript on a 100 point scale.”

Although each school has arrived at a different way of calculating a final grade from the scores given on student work, within each school there is strong consistency among teachers in how they do this. The teachers have worked together to design a method that works well to communicate accurately what the student has achieved; they use this method reliably so that students are not encountering wildly different systems in every classroom. This enables the school to be consistent and equitable in its practices.

## What We've Learned

The most important consideration for a school that is exploring new methods for calculating final grades is to be very thoughtful about the balance between maintaining consistency and allowing for teacher judgment. There is no formula that will perfectly capture the progress and performance of every student with perfect accuracy. The key is for the faculty of a school to decide what information they want their grades to convey, what gets counted, what process all teachers will use with fidelity, and to incorporate systems that allow teachers to recalculate any grade they feel does not accurately reflect the student's learning and performance.

Before making any final agreements on any algorithm, we would strongly advise testing each one. For example, while power law and decaying average may value later work more heavily than earlier work, either strategy can be highly inaccurate if only used with a handful of graded assessments. Similarly, simply averaging grades can lead to erroneous scores based on an outlier grade. In addition, counting on a teacher override system can lead to untenable teacher overloads. In each case, we are not arguing for or against these strategies but for schools to engage in thoughtful conversations that weight the pros and cons for each system within their local context.

## Quotes from the Literature

"In choosing an appropriate reporting form based on purpose, educators must seek a balance between detail and practicality. ... a standards-based report card should be compact and understandable and should not require inordinate time for teachers to prepare or for parents to interpret (Linn & Gronlund, 2000)... Report cards consisting of multiple pages with long lists of skills and multiple categories of information are not only terribly time consuming for teachers to complete, they typically overwhelm parents with information they do not know how to use." — Guskey, T., & Baily, J. M. (2010). *Developing standards-based report cards*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

## Resources from the Great Schools Partnership

- This [set of resources](#) from the Great Schools Partnership describes a variety of ways to calculate grades for standards and indicators.