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December 13, 2016

South Kingstown High School Parents and Students,

The purpose of this letter is to communicate important information about the high school grading policy. There are three main objectives: First, I want to share the results of a data study we have conducted comparing student quarter 1 grades from last year to this year. Second, I would like to address some parts of the policy that have caused the most confusion. And finally, I would like to provide you with important information about our upcoming exams.

Thank you for taking the time to read this and please email me directly with any questions at rmezzanotte@sksd-ri.net.

Part 1: Quarter 1 Data

This data table represents the comparison of grade distribution from quarter 1 of last year (before the new grading policy) to this year (after the new grading policy).

Grade Categories	15-16	16-17
A (89.5-100)	35%	35%
B (79.5-89.4)	29%	32%
C (69.5-79.4)	12%	14%
D (59.5-69.4 2015-16 only)	2%	0%
F (below 69.5 for 2016-17, below 59.5 for 2015-16)	3%	4%

Findings

- Grade distribution was not significantly changed at the top end of the grading scale. One can conclude that the new grading system did not compromise the level of academic rigor we have come to expect.

- At the bottom end of the grading scale there was a slight increase in the number of failing grades in the first quarter of this year. It can be reasonably determined that this is due in part to the fact that Ds are no longer issued as passing grades.

Part 2: Policy Clarifications

Homework

Homework has been the most discussed aspect of the new grading policy. It has been the topic that I have received the most parent and student questions, and in many cases it seems to be the most misunderstood.

So I would like to revisit this issue and clarify a few points:

1. Homework is **NOT** optional. When it is assigned, students are expected to complete homework as directed by the teacher.
2. The purpose of homework is to **practice important knowledge and skills learned in class**. Practicing skills is essential to success in school and in life.
3. There is a direct correlation between completing homework and high student achievement. Failure to complete this work will most likely result in lower overall achievement.
4. Homework or practice work **MAY** count towards a student's content mastery grade if:
 - The student receives feedback from the teacher on how they are doing on a particular skill or standard (in which case the teacher may issue "no penalty homework" grades whereby student grades are rewarded for success but not penalized for failure, also known as "formative assessment").
 - It should be noted that teachers may also assign take-home assessments such as projects, essays, research assignments, or other work that is done at home but is graded against a standard and counted towards content mastery.
5. Under all other conditions (i.e. homework being checked for completion only), it is counted towards a student's learner quality score.

Teachers have reported that students who did not complete homework on a consistent basis received, on average, lower content mastery grades. Furthermore, students who completed their homework were more likely to score well on tests and other assessments, and receive higher grades.

This had little to do with homework counting as a percentage of the grade. In fact, our study found that a perfect homework score, by itself, had very little impact on student letter grades. The real difference, however, came from the fact that students who completed their homework were more likely to be successful on major assessments, which significantly impacted their grade in a positive way.

Spirit of the Policy

I believe that teachers, as highly-qualified educational professionals, are the most equipped to issue student grades that reflect achievement of the standards taught, student growth over time, and fairness. The “spirit of the policy” refers to the fact that the policy was implemented in part to acknowledge that all students learn differently. It was implemented to push back against the “factory model” of education that does not work in the 21st century.

Therefore, it is my belief that teacher judgment is an incredibly important part of this policy. We trust our teachers to educate our students. We believe in the fact that every student possesses unique strengths and needs. We also believe in setting high expectations for ALL students, so that ALL students leave our school with the knowledge and skills necessary to thrive in college and career.

If we believe all these things, how would it be possible to accept that a student’s grade is only based on a calculation of percentages?

Having stated that, there is still the need for some level of consistency, which is why we have set the following expectations:

- Teachers are expected to keep parents/guardians informed of their child’s individual progress, including updating their Skyward gradebooks at least every two weeks.
- Teachers are expected to contact the parents of students who perform below proficiency on major assessments.
- Students are expected to complete all work as assigned by the teacher.
- Students are expected to arrive at school on time and ready to learn.
- Students are expected to persevere through challenges if they initially fail. In the spirit of demonstrating growth mindset, students are expected to actively participate in all opportunities for reteaching and reassessment.

Part 3: Exams

Exams will be administered to all students from January 20 through January 25. We will send out future information to families about our exam schedule for that week.

Unlike other major assessments, exams will NOT be subject to re-assessment protocols. The reason for this is as follows:

- Exams are lengthy, comprehensive assessments designed to resemble college-style finals. We feel there is value to this as both an assessment of important content and preparation for formal examinations in post-secondary institutions.

- Exams are administered at the very end of the semester. Student schedules change starting in quarter 3 and all students will have some classes that officially end after the exam.
- Exam re-assessments would significantly disrupt the process of getting senior transcripts to colleges in a timely fashion.
- Students who have continued to stay engaged in the prior reassessment process throughout the course would and should be ready to take this comprehensive assessment without needing to reassess.

It is expected that students diligently prepare for all exams, and that teachers make their expectations clear for students.

Conclusion

If you would like to explore our policy in greater detail, I would encourage you to visit our [website](#), which includes our SKHS Grading Guidelines, our FAQ document, and our Re-Assessment Protocol chart.

Change is never easy. We must recognize, however, that change also brings opportunity. I have been inspired by the many teachers who have embraced exciting and innovative teaching approaches such as personalized learning, project-based learning and blended learning that allow for more student flexibility and choice. I am continuously inspired by our students, who consistently demonstrate the values that we hold dear, namely respect for others, individual responsibility, perseverance through challenge, personal integrity and self-determination. I am also profoundly grateful to work in an environment that includes such a rich collection of individuals who seek both personal and collective improvement. If nothing else, I consider myself a lifelong learner, and together I am confident that we will build on our school's proud tradition of innovation and achievement.

Go Rebels!

Respectfully,



Robert J. Mezzanotte

Principal

South Kingstown High School