

From: Cathryn Mitchell <cathryn.mitchell@austinisd.org>
Sent: Wednesday, October 7, 2020 3:36 PM
To: Gorzyckistaff <Gorzyckistaff@austinisd.org>
Subject: Grades

GMS teachers,

As we approach the end of the first grading period, we felt it was important to address the potential elephant in the room: grades.

We know that you all have been working overtime to provide our students with a high-quality and rigorous education to start the year off right and to correct the perception of virtual learning from the students' experiences in the spring. We also know that some students have been more receptive to this idea than others. The challenges of teaching to a blank screen or trying to forge relationships with students you have never met (or, perhaps, even seen the face of) cannot be overstated. This is hard work.

That being said, we are faced with a campus-wide dilemma. We currently have 200 students that are failing more than one subject and 150 more that are failing just one subject. That means almost 25% of our students are currently failing in some area.

So many factors have contributed to this situation:

- The steep technological learning curve for teachers, parents, and students
- Lack of access to reliable Chromebooks and Wi-Fi
- Inefficiencies in BLEND
- A shortened grading period
- A small window of time between receipt of progress reports and due date for final grades
- No Kids' Day held on the Friday after Progress Report submission
- Shifting guidelines and directives on the phase-in plan
- Uncertainty and anxiety over the health risks of on-campus learning

These are just a few. There are certainly more. All of this is to say that the blame for these failures is wide-spread and not solely the fault of teachers or students. Because of these many contributing factors, we are advocating for grace for all of our students.

As you work to finalize your grades over the next 5 days, please ask yourself if you have exhausted all measures to assist the student before failing them. Have you directly reached out to the student to work with them one-on-one? Have you contacted parents via email? If unsuccessful, have you contacted parents by phone? If they are a Special

Education student, have you reached out to their Study Skills teacher or case manager?
Has the team set-up a Zoom parent conference?

We know that some students are taking advantage of the situation or have procrastinated to get themselves into this position. There is no question about that. But we also know that we have asked a great deal of them these first five weeks. If the answer is "no" to any of the above questions by Monday's deadline, we would request that you gift the student with a 70.

This will not be the norm every six-weeks. But, given the circumstances, in order to continue to build momentum and buy-in with students and parents as well as save yourselves a lot of time dedicated to future parent conferences and email exchanges, this is our recommendation.

Your Administrators,

Mrs. Black, Mrs. Ortiz, Mr. Summers, and Dr. Mitchell

Cathryn Mitchell, Ph.D

Diane Gorzycki Middle School Principal

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