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### Changes in Grading and Assessment for the 2010-2011 School Year...*A note from District Office*

The School District of Waukesha will be implementing a few changes to its grading and assessment practices beginning in the fall of next school year. Teachers and administrators have been studying current research and best practices in grading for the past 6 years. In August of 2008, our School Board passed a new policy on grading procedures that provided the foundation for this work. Through thoughtful study of post-secondary outcomes for Waukesha students and current practices within and outside of our district, we are making changes in our collective efforts to create a school system that provides students with consistent, meaningful developmental feedback about what they are learning so every student can achieve at their highest levels. We want to help our students become well prepared for life after high school, whether that means a 2 or 4-year college experience or the world of work. We recognize the need to continually strengthen and improve our instruction and assessment practices.

#### **What will remain the same?**

1. Students will continue to receive letter grades at the end of grading periods and those will be reflected on their transcripts.
2. Students' grades will be used to calculate their Grade Point Average (GPA) at the high school level.

#### **What will change?**

1. During the course of a marking period, teachers will provide feedback to students on assignments and assessments using a 5 point scale:

4 = Advanced knowledge

3 = Proficient knowledge

2 = Basic knowledge

1 = Minimal knowledge

0 = insufficient evidence to provide a judgment or provide feedback

Each assignment or assessment will be recorded in WebGrader using this 5 point scale system. At the end of the marking period, these numeric marks will combine to generate a letter grade. We will continue to assign additional weight to Advanced Placement (AP) courses. We will continue to use the current letter grade distribution that uses +'s and -'s.

2. Homework will not count for more than 10% of a student's overall grade.
3. Grades will reflect what a student knows and is able to do within the content of that course. Behavioral components (effort, behavior, attendance, etc.) will not factor into the final grade.
4. Grading and assessment practices will be consistent within department at each of our secondary schools. For example, all teachers within the math department will be using the same grading guidelines and expectations when it comes to homework, due dates and deadlines for assignments, the opportunity for re-takes, weighting of homework, etc.

In order to provide meaningful, specific feedback to students, we are asking teachers to work together to identify and teach to the learning targets that identify the essential knowledge and skills for each course. This will lead to consistency across the district so that if a student begins the year at one of our high schools and then transfers to another mid-year, the curriculum and teaching and learning experiences will be more similar than dissimilar. We also want to create a school system focused on student learning. At present in some cases, students are working to get enough “points” in order to earn a high grade. The focus is not necessarily on learning or growing as a student within the content and skills of a course. We recognize that we are doing a disservice to our students in this kind of system. This has created, in some cases, a discrepancy for our students in their GPA and their performance on nationally developed assessments like the ACT or college entrance examinations. Some of our graduates also experience a significant drop in their GPA during their first year of college and report they entered college unprepared for the rigor in coursework and expectations they experience. With these changes in our practice, we hope to give our students accurate and specific developmental feedback about their learning during a course so they know more precisely what they need to work on in order to demonstrate proficiency in their learning of the course objectives.

In order to create a system of consistent developmental feedback for students, teachers are being asked to develop scoring guides that describe for students the expectations for performance. In essence, we are asking teachers to provide a roadmap for students that will help them understand what they need to do to show they have “advanced knowledge” or “proficient knowledge” of the content and skills required for the course. Our teachers have been working very hard during the course of this school year to learn about the philosophy behind these changes and to prepare to implement these practices next year.

We have consulted with several area school districts and university partners, including the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Marquette University, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and Carroll University in our efforts to raise the level of rigor within our district. Everyone we have consulted with is in support of these changes. Several area districts, including Hartland/Arrowhead, Kettle Moraine, Whitefish Bay, Shorewood, and Pewaukee are incorporating similar policies and practices in their respective districts.

We will be holding informational sessions about these changes to our grading and assessment practices in coming weeks at our area high schools. Specific information regarding dates, times and locations of these meetings will be forthcoming.

Our teachers have been working diligently and collaboratively to understand and implement current research and best practices in grading and assessment. West High School has emerged as a leader in our district in this work as they have implemented the 5-point feedback scale this year. We have learned a great deal from WHS teachers and administrative staff and are encouraged by their work and its impact on overall student achievement.

We believe strongly in these changes and enhancements to our grading and assessment practices and their potential positive impact on student achievement and preparedness for post-secondary experiences. We look forward to dialogue and information sharing in the near future.