

GRADES, AWARDING CREDITS, AND GRADUATION DURING COVID-19

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It is the purview of South Dakota's school districts to determine grading policies and award diplomas, within the parameters established in statute and administrative rule. This document offers some considerations to inform those decisions. It is recommended that you communicate broadly to stakeholders the district's policy on grading and credit, irrespective of whether changes have been made due to COVID-19 closures.

When determining policies around credit and grades during the COVID-19 closures, know that students may be experiencing varying mental and physical health challenges and may have very different access to supports and technology at home. No student should be negatively impacted by the closure for factors outside of the student's control; furthermore, school district policies and procedures should not widen the opportunity gap.

The below is intended as broad parameters and impacts to consider when determining district policies during the COVID-19 closures.

Grading Considerations:

Consider the impact of decisions on the entire student body, such as how decisions for high school credit for 8th and 9th graders now will impact those students' ability to qualify for opportunities three and four years from now. Keep documentation about flexibilities the district extended due to COVID-19 school closures.

When determining if and what changes to a district's grading and credit policy may be appropriate during the COVID-19 closures, districts should keep in mind:

- Postsecondary admission requirements
- Scholarship requirements, including the Opportunity Scholarship
- [NCAA eligibility requirements](#)
- Calculation of GPA
- Calculation of class rank

Specific grades are not required to meet South Dakota's high school graduation requirements, the Advanced Endorsement, or the Advanced Career Endorsement; students simply need to pass courses in order to earn credit.

The Advanced Honors Endorsement requires students to earn a C or higher on all coursework. The department will determine a process to waive this requirement for courses completed during COVID-19 school closures. Credits earned during the COVID-19 closures must be completed with either a C or higher or a Pass, in accordance with district grading policies. More information will follow when available.

Please note admission requirements for South Dakota's higher education institutions have not changed. Any emergency policy changes due to COVID-19 will be reflected on university websites. However, the South Dakota Board of Regents *has* adjusted its policy regarding establishing initial eligibility in light of Spring and Summer 2020 grading policies. That guidance can be found [here](#). A full listing of South Dakota Board of Regents emergency policy adjustments can be found [here](#). Students and school counselors are encouraged to work in tandem, and to keep up to date on postsecondary policies, as circumstances evolve.

Students enrolled in weighted credit courses (AP, dual credit, etc.) should still receive weighted credit regardless of whether the student is able to take the AP assessment.

If a student was already failing a course before school closure and flex learning practices, consider how your school's support for those students work towards successful completion of the course. Also consider a policy for students not participating in flex learning (see more below).

Determining Course Mastery/Awarding Credit:

As provided by [ARSD 24:43:01:01\(53\)](#), districts may determine locally how to award credit.

In awarding credit and determining grades, districts may consider the following, but not limited to:

- Exams at the end of the semester or end of closures
- Use the 3rd 9-week grades as final grades
- Use an average of grades from the 3rd and 4th nine-week grades, or the 1st, 2nd and 3rd nine-week grades with 4th nine-week assignments to calculate the end-of-the-year grade
- Use an end-of-course assessment and average that score with the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd nine-week report card grades to calculate the end-of-the-year grade
- Pass/fail in place of letter or number grades
- A combination of grades earned prior to COVID-19 with determinations of appropriate levels of engagement in online instruction opportunities, completion of course packets, verification of continued learning as determined by the district and the circumstances for each family.

If the district is unable to provide flex learning for any of its students, follow local decisions as to how credit for this semester will be awarded.

Dual Credit and Concurrent Credit:

The [South Dakota Board of Regents Temporary Alternate Grading Options for Spring 2020 Semester](#) indicates that in addition to all college-level students, high school students taking dual credit or concurrent credit courses may choose to either receive a Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory grade or a letter grade. High school students participating in dual credit or concurrent credit courses are encouraged to consult with their school counselors/advisors prior to making a grading option selection.

As is current policy with dual credit, the grades students earn in dual credit courses must be reflected as-is on their high school transcripts. Schools may not transcribe a letter grade if a student has opted for a Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory grade.

Further questions on dual credit pertaining to South Dakota Board of Regents' universities should be directed to the respective university. COVID-19 campus-specific links can be found [here](#).

When a Student is Not Engaged:

It is a local district decision how to handle situations with students who are not engaged in flex learning. If the district is able to provide reasonable accommodations for flex learning and has reasonably sought to engage students and families to no avail, district leadership may determine that a student has not sufficiently mastered the content and thus cannot be awarded credit for the course. Such determinations should also take into account work completed prior to COVID-19 closures and follow district policies.

Class of 2020 (seniors and graduation):

The department recommends that seniors on track to graduate and in good standing as of the third nine weeks' reporting period be considered as meeting graduation requirements. For those not on track to graduate, consider how opportunities for credit recovery could be provided.

Districts have local control over graduation policies, including for honor graduates and class rank. Refer to "Grading Considerations" above when making these determinations.

Graduation Ceremonies:

School districts should take into account Executive Orders [2020-15](#) and [2020-20, social distancing guidelines](#), and local restrictions when determining how to honor seniors graduating in Spring 2020. Although districts will not be able to hold traditional graduation ceremonies this spring, there are many creative options to ensure the community and students have the opportunity to celebrate accomplishments during these unprecedented times. Consider *how to acknowledge what has been lost, while honoring the work done*, including recognizing the work accomplished at home and creating memories of both before and after COVID-19 closures. Options to mark graduation could include delaying ceremonies, virtual ceremonies, outdoor ceremonies that respect social distancing guidelines, and individual diploma ceremonies. It is the role of school districts to keep students and the community safe during any events held to celebrate this year's graduating class.