

Information for Parents on Cumulative Grading

What is cumulative grading?

Cumulative grading is a system for calculating a student's grade in a class that counts each new assessment at its assigned weight in a cumulative fashion throughout the year. It is a research-based approach that gives students more accurate feedback, since the student knows exactly where he or she stands for the grade in the class. We are no longer averaging four quarters of separate grades.

Why are we changing from the old system?

The old system originated in a time when it was challenging and time consuming to calculate student performance levels, so the frequency was limited (e.g. four times a year) and simplified the math (e.g. averaging the four marking periods). Our use of technology for grade reporting and calculating allows almost instantaneous feedback. Cumulative grading also provides a more accurate calculation. For instance, if in one marking period a student had four tests at 100 points each and in another marking period the student had two tests at 100 points each, those marking periods were averaged together at equal weight, despite one having twice as many points as the other. This skews student grades.

How will the final grades be calculated in cumulative grading?

Students will be scored on all assessments and each will contribute to an ongoing, cumulative grade-in-progress throughout the school year (counting 80%) and departments will determine a single (or series of) assessment(s) that require students to demonstrate mastery of the curriculum content and performance standards (counting 20%).

What are the benefits of cumulative grading?

- Students and parents know exactly where they stand. The old marking period grade was reset every 45 days and had no relationship to the other grades earned at other points in the year.
- As discussed above, cumulative grading diminishes inconsistent and disproportional weights of summative assessments created by averaging marking periods.
- It allows teachers to give weight to assessments later in the year that more accurately measure student growth toward course objectives. In the old system, marking period 1 grades counted the same as marking periods 2, 3, and 4, despite the fact that students were just learning new skills early in the year. Over time, as students grow in their learning, they generally perform better, and teachers can weigh later assessments to appropriately match the expected growth.
- It creates less student panic (or over-celebration) about the impact of a single grade. The overall grade-in-progress will be less impacted by a single assessment than the smaller window of the quarter.

What is happening with mid-term exams?

We will no longer be scheduling a four day block of exams in January. The instructional time gained from the exam days will benefit students and teachers. The stress around administering and taking midterms will be eliminated, and teachers will not have to take an arbitrary break in teaching the curriculum. They will also be able to assess students on more natural timelines in the learning. Students were often crunched with projects and tests immediately before midterms in the old system, and that will no longer be necessary.

Didn't mid-terms help students get ready for college?

With our 85 minute block schedule, students will still be challenged by larger scale assessments in the form of unit tests or performance assessments that cause them to be responsible for material over long periods of time. We are eliminating the unnecessary stress and unnatural timeline of eight periods of tests in four days but retaining the importance of learning and retaining material and skills over time.

What will the final assessment look like?

Each department is currently examining its options. Some may have an exam that covers material from the entire year but will incorporate a review of the material prior to the exams and/or periodically throughout the year. Other departments may opt for a performance assessment in the fourth term that asks students to demonstrate skills and knowledge leading up to and possibly including an exam as well.

What will I see in the Gradebook?

Students will notice that their gradebooks will be set up in categories, where their summative assessments are weighted at 100% and formative and behavior categories are weighted at 0%. The last two are still reported to serve as feedback to students and parents to help inform why students may be obtaining the grades they see in the summative category. In other words, if students do not complete homework assignments, this behavior (which may not reflect their mastery of the curriculum in any way) can be reported in the behavior section but it will not impact student grades. However, not completing homework would help tell the story why the summative grades are low. Whatever assignment the teachers choose to grade will appear in the summative section. This will also eliminate variation between staff members in the weighting of different categories.

Won't we need quarterly grades for reporting purposes?

Teachers will be scoring assessments and entering them into Infinite Campus as they are turned in (see timeline discussion below). However, we will continue to have four "TERMS" (timed similarly to our previously named Marking Periods) at which times the grade-in-progress will be "posted." This will allow us to continue practices such as reporting grades to colleges and determining sports eligibility. Posting will capture the grade in progress at that time based on all assessments up until that time. Each new term grade will include all grades from the previous term. The last day of each term are clearly defined for all teachers and students:

Term 1: Nov 2

Term 2: Jan 18

Term 3: Mar 29

Term 4: Last Day of School

How will this impact due dates for students and grade entering by teachers?

Students will still be expected to complete assignments on time. Teachers may also set a final deadline for any late work still accepted for credit based on the Term dates listed above. Teachers have also been told that all standard tests, projects, and papers will be graded and entered into Infinite Campus no longer than 10 school days after the due date. Lengthier/large-scale assessments may require an additional week. Teachers have also been told that they should share the estimated point values of future assignments so students can plan accordingly. A student who is struggling should know what opportunities he/she may have to improve the grade. Students will need to be mindful and plan accordingly, but their grade in progress will always tell them exactly where they stand.