

Foster-Glocester Regional School District
Virtual Learning Hold Harmless Grading Policy for 4th Quarter / 3rd Trimester

Dear Parents and Guardians:

With the Governor's decision to close schools through the end of the year and continue with virtual/remote learning, we are making some adjustments to our grading policies and procedures. For the last marking period of the 2019-2020 school year we are adding a Hold Harmless provision to our grading system for all classes. Under this system a student's performance can increase in the last marking period, but it cannot decrease provided the student is making a good faith effort to complete his/her assignments. This system is designed to encourage the continued pursuit of academic excellence, while minimizing any negative impact that the shift to virtual/remote learning and the ongoing pandemic may have on student performance. The Hold Harmless provision will apply to all full year and semester classes at the middle and high school. Several middle school classes operate on a trimester model. For these middle school trimester classes, we will be implementing a satisfactory/unsatisfactory grading system. A parent/guardian may request that we continue to use the traditional A - F system for trimester classes. (See the section at the end of this communication for additional information.)

The Hold Harmless provision is being implemented in response to the educational and societal changes associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. We recognize that many families are struggling to balance professional responsibilities and family responsibilities while concurrently supporting the virtual/remote learning of their children. We also know that many of our students are conscientiously continuing with their academic learning while experiencing stress and loss in their own personal lives. In some families one or more parent may have lost a job or business. Some students are helping to care for their siblings. Other students have limited access to the Internet. In some families a friend or relative is sick. In short, at-home learning experiences vary greatly among our students and we want to minimize any worry about managing their educational responsibilities along with everything else we know they and their families are handling.

Traditional A - F Grading System With A Hold Harmless Provision
(This is the default option and no action is required)

Over the past two weeks, teachers and administrators at our middle, high school, and central office met to discuss a modification to our grading system. We determined a Hold Harmless provision would promote greater equity among students' grades during the last marking period at our middle and high school, while still encouraging students to put forth effort learning content for a higher grade. The existing A - F system will still be in effect for all full year and semester classes at our middle and high school during the 4th quarter. The letter grade that students receive A+, A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, C-, D+, or D will be calculated into their Grade Point Average (GPA). As has traditionally been the case, if a student earns an overall final grade from "A" through "D" they will receive credit for the class. If a student earns an "F" they will not receive credit for the class.

Hold Harmless Provision Description for Full Year and Semester Classes:

We are augmenting our traditional grading system with a Hold Harmless provision. In the 4th quarter a student can earn higher grades than his/her previous grades, but cannot earn lower grades if the student is making a good faith effort to complete his/her assignments. The letter grade a student receives in the last quarter for a class will not reduce his/her overall academic performance. A student may still receive an F if he/she is not completing classroom assignments. If mitigating circumstances are present they must be promptly communicated to the school. To encourage a continued focus on high performance, if a student earns an overall 4th quarter numeric grade that is higher than the average of the previous quarter(s) the student will receive the higher 4th quarter grade. To minimize any potential negative impact of COVID-19 on performance, if a student earns an overall 4th quarter numeric grade that is lower than the average of the previous quarter(s) the student will not receive the lower grade. In this scenario, the student will receive the average of the previous three (3) quarters, which is a higher grade, for his/her 4th quarter grade.

Example of the Hold Harmless Provision Applied to Full Year Classes

Full Year Class Example 1 - a higher Quarter 4 Grade:

The grades for Q1 = 82%, Q2 = 83%, and Q3 = 84%. This averages out to **83%**.

If the student receives a grade of 89% in Q4 then the higher grade of **89%** will be used for the 4th quarter grade and to calculate his/her final grade.

This will result in a report card that shows the 4th quarter grade as **89%** and the final course grade of **84.5%** (the average of 82%, 83%, 84%, and **89%**).

Full Year Example 2 – a lower Quarter 4 Grade:

The grades for Q1 = 82%, Q2 = 83%, and Q3 = 84%. This averages out to **83%**.

If the student receives a grade of 79% in Q4 then this lower grade will not be used.

The average of the first 3 quarters which equals **83%** will be used for the 4th quarter grade and to calculate his/her final grade.

This will result in a report card that shows the 4th quarter grade as **83%** and the final course grade as **83%**. (The average of 82%, 83%, 84%, and **83%**).

Example of the Hold Harmless Provision Applied to Semester Classes

Semester Class Example 1 - a higher Quarter 4 Grade:

The grade for Q3 = **84%**.

If the student receives a grade of **88%** in Q4 then the higher grade of **88%** will be used for the 4th quarter grade and to calculate his/her final grade.

This will result in a report card that shows the 4th quarter grade as **88%** and the final course grade of **86%** (the average of 84% and **88%**).

Semester Class Example 2 – a lower Quarter 4 Grade:

The grade for Q3 = **84%**.

If the student receives a grade of **79%** in Q4 then this lower grade will not be used.

The previous quarter grade of **84%** will be used for the 4th quarter grade and to calculate his/her final grade.

This will result in a report card that shows the 4th quarter grade as **84%** and the final course grade as **84%** (the average of 84% and **84%**).

For Middle School Only

Satisfactory / Unsatisfactory Grading Practice for Middle School Trimester Classes **(This will be the default grading system unless a parent/guardian requests the A - F system)**

Several middle school classes operate on a trimester model, which will be graded using the “satisfactory/unsatisfactory” or, with a parents’/guardians’ request, using the traditional A - F grading system. Classes offered in the 3rd trimester began in March, 2020. They do not have a numerical grade from 1st trimester or 2nd trimester that can be applied to 3rd trimester. Accordingly, we are implementing a Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory grading provision for 3rd trimester. Teachers will still grade assignments and convert that grade to an A - F grade. Students who receive a letter grade from A through D for a class will have the grade converted to “S” for Satisfactory and receive credit for passing the class. Students who receive a F for a class will have the grade converted to an “U” for Unsatisfactory and will not receive credit for the class. This option only applies to 3rd trimester for the following middle school classes:

- Ms. Black - Art (grade 8)
- Ms. Mazur - PLTW: Flight & Space (grade 7)
- Mr. Murphy - PLTW - Automation & Robotics (grade 8)
- Ms. Racine - PLTW Comp Sci for Innovators & Makers CSIM (grade 7)
- Ms. Racine - PLTW App Creators (grade 8)
- Ms. Valente - Agriculture (grade 8)

For Middle School Families Only - Requesting a Traditional A - F Grade for Trimester Classes:

Parents/Guardians may request to continue with the existing A - F grading for the above classes. Parents/Guardians who take no action and proceed with the Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory option will have their children receive a “S” or “U” for the 3rd semester classes listed above.

If you want to request that your child’s middle school 3rd trimester grade for the classes listed above be based on the traditional A - F grading system, please click the following link to obtain the request form:

[Form to Request a Traditional A - F Grading System](#)

Final Exams:

In order to hold students harmless from the potential impact of COVID-19 on performance, final exams will **not** be administered for the 2019-2020 school year,

College and Career Pathway Requirements:

In order to hold students harmless from the potential impact of COVID-19 on performance, students who were unable to meet contact hour requirements for a work-based learning experience will be

held harmless. Similarly, students who were unable to complete a certification/college credit requirement will be held harmless for the purposes of meeting pathway endorsement requirements for graduation.

Academic Honesty:

Students are reminded of the importance of maintaining academic honesty while working in a virtual/remote setting. Academic dishonesty occurs when students obtain credit for work that is not their own or assisting others in obtaining credit for work that is not their own. This includes, but is not limited to, the copying of homework, the submission of test answers from sources other than those allowed, and plagiarizing the work of others by cutting and pasting information created by someone else and submitting it as your own original work. If words, pictures, or other media generated by others are included in a student's work he/she must properly cite the source of information.

Effective Dates for Hold Harmless and Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory Grading Periods:

The Hold Harmless and Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory grading provisions are retroactive to the 1st day of the 4th quarter and will be in effect for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year barring any new directive or requirement issued by an overseeing State or Federal agency.

Closing Thoughts:

Many colleges and universities have adopted satisfactory / unsatisfactory grading policies. This includes Harvard, Dartmouth, Stanford, the University of Rhode Island, Rhode Island College, and countless others throughout the country. When announcing the shift to an Emergency Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory grading system Harvard Dean Claudine Gay stated: "We of course remain committed to academic continuity, but we cannot proceed as if nothing has changed. Everything has changed."

Our district decided to move forward with a Hold Harmless provision because it affords students who may have declining performance the same mathematical protection as a pass/fail system would. The Hold Harmless system had the added benefit of recognizing higher performance for students whose performance may have increased as the year progressed. Moreover, retaining a traditional A – F grading system with a Hold Harmless provision allows high school students who need to maintain GPAs for academic and athletic scholarships to do so without infusing the ambiguity that a pass / fail system into the decision making process for external entities. Teachers will continue to use the CANVAS Learning Management System to house assignments and to grade the work that students submit. Final grades will be imported into ASPEN so that report cards and transcripts can be produced.

Thank you for your continued support and partnership as we all navigate the nuances of virtual / remote learning.

Sincerely,

Michael S. Barnes, Ph. D.
Superintendent of Foster-Glocester Regional Schools