

School officials unveil crisis learning grading system

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The Del Norte Unified School District unveiled its finalized crisis learning grading system to the board of trustees May 21. The new model emphasizes equity during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Tom Kissinger, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction, told trustees transitional kindergarten through eighth-grade levels students won't be graded based on their ability to master a standard.

Kissinger said report cards for students in transitional kindergarten through fifth grade will inform parents of one of three performance levels for their child - full participation and was engaged in distant learning, partial participation, or if there was insufficient evidence to measure a participation level.

Under the standards portion on the report card, teachers will mark "not reported."

For sixth through eighth graders in middle school, teachers will mark a pass or no-grade for each subject area, Kissinger said. These students will also get one of the three participation level indicators.

"No student is dinged on their ability to master a standard because it's very difficult to determine (if) all of our students are able to do that," Kissinger said. "But what we can tell is the extent students are able to participate in this crisis distance learning program."

Meanwhile, Del Norte High School will feature a pass-fail system rather than letter grades, which Kissinger said would ensure students' grades won't be affected because of their ability to access the curriculum.

Kissinger said the California State University and University of California systems, and several other colleges, have also adopted a pass-fail system rather than standard letter grades.

“There is a tremendous amount of variance in the state as to what an ‘A’ or a ‘B’ or a ‘C’ or a ‘D’ is or how do you get that,” Kissinger said.

At DNHS, Superintendent Jeff Harris explained that although students won’t receive letter grades on their report cards, in classes that require a C or better as a pre-requisite for another course, teachers will attest whether the student did C-level work. But the student’s report card will only indicate if they failed or passed that particular class, he added.

The board members unanimously approved DNUSD’s crisis learning grading system. Harris explained the board’s decision affects what parents and students will see on their report cards.

Harris pointed to the equity portion of the proposed crisis learning grading system, saying some districts have let students challenge a grade or pass a class through a test.

“I’ve heard of a large district in California where the parent and student will get to pick their grade for the class. We also heard of local districts that say you have whatever grade you had on the day prior to schools shutting down,” Harris said.

Harris said because students missed weeks of instruction, administrators didn’t want seniors at a disadvantage as they enter a CSU or a UC next year. He added that the grading system will also affect the underclassmen who want to participate in sports. Compounding the issue, the California Interscholastic Federation — the regulatory body for high school athletics — has not issued rules yet on their grading requirements for next year.

Kissinger circled back to Sunset High School’s grading system, saying it remain much the same as was before schools closed on March 16. Most students attending Sunset High School are making up credits they need to graduate, he said.

“Due to Sunset’s mission to help students get back on track to graduate on time, we began immediately to offer credit-earning opportunities for all students,” Kissinger said in his report.

Kissinger said Sunset staff have used Google Classroom and work packets and “have done everything they can” to make sure students have access to lessons.

“I can’t think of a time when I’ve seen staff, teachers, classified staff and administrators work so closely toward trying to figure something out on behalf of kids,” Kissinger said.