



Dear OES Upper School Students and Families:

Many students and families have recently asked how we will approach assessments, grading, and transcripts in the Upper School in light of remote learning. The purpose of this letter is to address those questions and to share some context for how we arrived at these decisions.

Grading during Remote Learning

- **Students will receive a traditional letter grade and brief comment for all courses during Quarter 3:** As was true last year, the grade will be accompanied by a brief comment that discusses students' strengths and performance to date. The comments will also speak to students' adjustments to remote learning. Note that Q3 grades do not appear on transcripts.
- **Work in all courses will be assessed on a PASS / FAIL basis during Quarter 4:** Remote learning is new for both students and teachers, and it creates unique challenges for many of our learners. To that end, and based on discussions with peer schools and the actions of a number of colleges and universities, we have decided to adopt PASS / FAIL standards in all courses for Quarter 4.
- **Students' transcripts will reflect letter grades for year-long courses and PASS / FAIL marks for semester-long courses in the spring:** For year-long courses, students' grades will primarily reflect their cumulative performance through Quarter 3. However, in order to acknowledge students' ongoing work and to encourage continued commitment to their studies, teachers will have the discretion to adjust a student's grade modestly upward based on that student's performance over the final quarter of the year. Because semester-long courses have been disproportionately affected by the onset of remote learning, students in those courses will receive PASS / FAIL marks at semester's end.

Rationale for this Approach

As you can imagine, these were difficult decisions. But they are grounded in three basic principles:

- Supporting students and faculty during a transition to an entirely new mode of learning and teaching;
- Acting in ways that are informed by, and consistent with, [OES's Mission, Identity, and Essential Competencies](#);
- Finally, considering what peer schools and universities are doing so as to not place our students at a disadvantage in college admissions.

OES is not alone in adopting changes to our grading and transcript policies. Recent National Association of Independent School (NAIS) data shows more than half of NAIS high schools have already moved to alternative grading approaches or are considering doing so. Colleges and universities have made similar transitions, including MIT, Harvard, and Smith College, among others. ([Here](#) is an excellent op-ed in the Chronicle of Higher Education on the topic.)

It is also important to note that Director of College Counseling Paula Sutton has been a part of these discussions from the beginning. Having spoken with colleges and peer schools in NAIS, Paula is confident that our approach to grading will not pose problems for our students in the college admission process. Indeed, a group of colleges has already sent messages to college counselors, high school students, and their families to reassure them that they will evaluate applications within the full context of the pandemic in mind. [Here](#), for example, is a communication from the University of Chicago that Paula recently received. We expect to hear from many more colleges and universities in the weeks and months ahead.

These are days of unprecedented challenges. But they also present extraordinary opportunities for us to learn and to use our “power for good.” Thank you for your ongoing support of OES.

Warmly,

Peter A. Kraft
Associate Head of School