

## **How to talk with your Wildcat about grades**

Things are different today. Today parents can have access to their student's grades 24/7. We could debate whether that is a good thing or not, but the fact that you are reading this tells me you have just reviewed your student's progress on PowerSchool and are taking a deep breath and asking yourself "Now what?" Whether your student has poor grades, is not performing up to potential or just had a brief lapse, the conversation about grades can be a tough one. Below are some helpful suggestions.

**Set clear expectations.** Before progress marks begin to roll in, have a conversation with your student about their schedule. What classes are they concerned about? What classes are they confident about? Work together to develop academic goals for the year or for each marking period. Learning to establish goals is an important life skill. Sometimes you meet your goals and sometimes you don't. Help them celebrate when goals are met and help them reflect when goals are not met. It is vitally important that student goals and parental expectations align and are realistic.

**Understand what the grade is saying.** Understanding a teacher's gradebook is not always easy. Is the assignment missing or late? Can they still make up the missed quiz? How long does it take to post a late assignment? Did the student really hand it in even though it is still marked as missing? These are just a few of the questions parents and students might ask as they are reviewing grades online. Hopefully the marks are clear and easy to understand, if not, do not hesitate to contact the teacher for clarification before you charge into a conversation with your student about their grades. Also remember that progress marking periods are cumulative and lead to a final semester grade. It is the semester grade that will be reflected on your student's transcript.

**Have a game plan.** Don't talk with your student when you are angry. Look for an opportunity to praise them on their accomplishments (remember to be descriptive), and then ask them how they did that. Perhaps trying a new way to approach a difficult class can lead to similar accomplishments. Monitor your own feelings. If you are angry or frustrated, set some time aside to collect yourself and develop your game plan and choice of words. This is a proactive (not a reactive) approach that also models how to communicate during difficult times.

**Separate the child from the grade.** Remember that grades do not define the child. Grades are only a small fraction of who they are and what they are capable of becoming. Help your child see that they are not their report card. It is important not to link your relationship with them, with their grades.

**Focus on learning and effort.** Focus less on grades. Developing a scholar takes time and practice. Some students figure it out quickly while others are late bloomers. If your student is an academic late bloomer, comment on what study skills they are doing well. Is their assignment notebook filled out? Is their bookbag organized? Are

they putting the appropriate time in to their studies? The grades will come if the effort and foundational skills are nurtured.

**Rewards and punishments are ineffective if the love of learning is your goal.** Allow natural consequences to lead the way. Maybe the natural consequence of lower grades is having a tutor on Saturday mornings. Paying students for good grades is teaching them that learning is not the goal, grades are.

**Be descriptive rather than evaluative. Choose your words carefully.** Evaluative words like “good job”, “excellent”, or “poor” tend to be judgemental and may not give your student useful information. Describe what you see. “I notice you went up/down in two classes.” or “Two teachers mentioned missing assignments.” Also remember that teenagers tend to hear HOW you say it and not WHAT you say. Describe what you see and stay calm.

**Listen more than talk.** Try to get your student to talk by asking open ended questions like “Were there any surprises on your report card?” or “Tell me about your grades in this class. What did you learn?” Avoid questions where the student can simply respond with a Yes or No answer. The more engagement and voice your student has (and the more you listen) the more they will take responsibility for their own learning. This takes patience!

**Focus on solution seeking.** Have academic accomplishments come easy for your student in elementary and middle school? Some students find they need to re-define their approach to studying and test taking. Explore the ways which they approach homework or studying for tests and quizzes. Sometimes this is a great time to collaborate on study skills with a teacher or with a tutor.

**Stay positive.** School and learning provides students with many challenges. Each challenge is an opportunity to help your student grow as a learner and as a developing adult. Remember students develop differently. When we see 9th graders in the hallways it is amazing to see the physical diversity: some are already fully grown while others still look like they should be in 6th grade! Their cognitive and academic development is also diverse, but not quite as visible. Some students seem to have innate learning skills while others struggle at first and blossom as learners later in life. That is why we need to stay positive and patiently observe the other advice noted above. That way we can nurture the love of learning and the development of skills that will serve them for years, even after they have received their last report card.

*On behalf of your LHS Learning Support Teams, we wish you the best as you converse with your students about their learning.*