

**Epping School District
Frequently Asked Questions
Related to
School Redesign and
Competency Based Education
January 2019**



District Mission

The mission of the Epping School District is to focus on the potential of every student and engage them to be passionate, confident learners who demonstrate competence and have the strength of character to reach their highest aspirations and thoughtfully contribute to a diverse and changing world.

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Please note: We recommend that you review the Epping [Competency Handbook](#) located on the Epping Website. This handbook was completed by the Competency Implementation Team in June of 2018.

Transition to Competency-Based Education

Question: What was wrong with the old [traditional] system?

Competency-based education (CBE) is best practice for students in the 21st century. The State of New Hampshire mandated (in 2009) that high schools must transition toward a system of reporting student learning according to competencies. As a public school system, Epping was obligated to fulfill the mandate by implementing a new competency-based structure which includes a new grading and reporting system.

Question: How has the district shared information about CBE?

Epping has been involved in the move toward Competency-Based Education since 2013. Information about the move toward CBE has been shared with the community through school board meetings, information at Open Houses (fall 2017), weekly emails (summer/fall 2018), CBE information nights (fall 2018), and the Work Study Practices rollout. A great place to learn more about CBE in Epping is by looking at the [Competency Handbook](#) which is located on the district website.

Question: Why wasn't any grade level "grandfathered in"/why was it a transition made across the board?

In a district this size, you cannot have cohorts of students being assessed and graded differently at different levels. It would be unethical to implement something that we know is "best-practice" for some students but not all.

Question: Why is there a CBE grading system when other parts of CBE (like learning at your own pace) aren't happening?

Competency-Based Education (CBE) is a complete transformation of every aspect of teaching, learning and assessment. This also transforms how we ask students to demonstrate what they know and can do. There is an emphasis on the process, or "journey" of learning.

Students have always learned at their own pace and when we used words like "behind" or "ahead" suggested that there was a problem with a child's learning. We continue to work on ways to support individualized learning every day for all students.

Curriculum

Question: Why was the curriculum changed?

The curriculum was not changed. Epping has taken the time to align all curriculum in all content areas in [vertical documents](#) spanning from grades K-12. Specific learning targets, based on national standards ([Common Core State Standards](#), [Next Generation Science Standards](#); [National Core Arts Standards](#)) linked to District Competencies for Learning have been developed in all content areas at all grade levels.

Question: Why aren't schools teaching us practical life skills (filing taxes, protecting environment, etc.)?

At ESD, students learn the foundational skills that would be applied to those kinds of life functions. Our priority is to provide an excellent education that helps students become “*Life and Career Ready*.” Mathematics, process skills, environmental sciences, recycling programs and a variety of other integrated life skills are taught throughout the learning progressions established in our curricula.

General Grading Questions

Question: How is this grading system different than the old one? How do the two systems compare?

The new grading system does not align with a traditional system of grading. For more information about grading, please see the [Competency Handbook](#).

Question: Why don't we use numbers in this new grading system?

Assigning a number value to student work does not describe the actual learning the student demonstrates. In a competency-based grading system, *Performance Indicators* (what students must do to demonstrate understanding) describe the learning targets very specifically, giving students and parents more detail about what students know and can do.

Question: Why is the grading not specific?

Grading in a competency-based system is *more* specific because teachers are providing students with “next steps for growth” in order to meet competency. This individualized, targeted feedback on assignments and rubrics gives students the ability to focus on what they need to know and be able to do to *meet competence*.

General Grading Questions continued

Question: How do teachers determine grades?

On *Summative Assessments* students are assessed on a predetermined set of criteria embedded in a rubric. Please visit the following link for detailed information on grading at EHS. [Epping High School Grading Tip Sheet](#)

Question: Why do teachers get to interpret grades any way they want?

Teachers have been provided and should be following a clear set of instructions related to assessing and grading student work. Should any student or parent have a concern related to a grade, they should first talk directly to the teacher, and then, if needed the student or parent should reach out to a member of the administrative team.

Question: Should teachers be adding Formatives in to Summatives?

No. *Formative* and *Summative Assessments* serve different purposes when evaluating student learning.

Question: Are Formative assessments calculated in the final grade?

No, *Formative Assessments* are not calculated in the final grade because *Formative Assessments* are designed to provide information to teachers and students about next steps for learning. Excluding *Formative Assessment* grades from the overall grade allows the *summative grade* to reflect the end result of instruction without the “penalty” aspect from the early stages of learning.

Question: Why do we see the Competencies (EHS) or Performance Indicators (EMS) but not the graded assignment?

PowerSchool shows you the grades earned for each *Competency* at EHS and each *Performance Indicator* at EMS for a given assignment. There is no overall score given for the assignment itself; only for the *competencies* or *Performance Indicators* being assessed on the assignment.

Question: How do I know if I passed?

When a student *Meets Competence* (MC) on an assessment, the student has demonstrated *all* of the identified necessary skills, content knowledge understandings outlined in the *Performance Indicators*.

Question: How will I know how I’m doing in school if we don’t have an overall grade?

Students receive detailed feedback regarding next steps for learning based on the rubrics for each *summative assessment*. The feedback includes the grades for each of the *Performance Indicators* at EES and EMS and the grades for each *Competency* at EHS.

General Grading Questions continued

Question: How do I see my overall grade?

At the high school level, you can see overall *Competency* grades by going to the PowerSchool Portal. There are no overall grades reported for students K-8 because students are assessed on *Performance Indicators*. Please see the [vertical documents](#) for more information.

Question: How can you tell the difference between two grades when one student does more work than another [and receives the same grade]?

Competency-based education reports out on academic achievement and the Work Study Practices (self-direction, collaboration, communication, innovation) separately. Students are assessed on knowledge and skills using a predetermined set of *Learning Targets* and *Performance Indicators*. Levels of academic performance are outlined in rubrics.

Question: How can you get an MC on late work?

A grade of MC reflects academic achievement and does not indicate the timing of completion. We are all in agreement that students should turn in work on time and be recognized for their efforts.

Question: What does a score of E mean and how is it earned?

An “E” or *Exemplary*, represents the application of the concepts in a new or extended way. Different kinds of tasks reflect varied levels of demonstration of understanding by students. *Exemplary* student work reflects a depth of knowledge that is highly complex. All Summative Assessments provide students with the opportunity to demonstrate *Exemplary* levels of understanding.

Question: Is AC failing?

“AC” or *Approaching Competence* indicates a point in the learning progression where the student has not yet been able to demonstrate what he/she should know or be able to do on a *Formative* or a *Summative Assessment*. If the student achieves an “AC” on a *Formative Assessment*, this will give the teacher and the student important information about what needs to be learned and practiced to *Meet Competence* on the *Summative Assessment*. When a student achieves an “AC” on a Summative Assessment, then he/she did not yet demonstrate all of the necessary skills and content understandings expected to *Meet Competence (MC)*. Students will be given the opportunity to relearn and reassess to demonstrate that they have met competence.

Epping High School Grading Questions

Question: Will colleges choose another student from a different school over me because I don't have a GPA?

A student's GPA is calculated at the end of every semester and will be reported out on the *Student Achievement Report*.

Question: How do I see my GPA?

At the High School level, quality points are assigned to each of our courses which will be computed using the *Competency Grades* values assigned by PowerSchool and the point value determined by the level of the course in which the student is enrolled. Higher level courses like Honors or AP will have higher point values than basic level courses. At the Elementary and Middle levels, a GPA is not calculated.

Question: What is your GPA if you have an MC or an E?

There are several factors that determine the answer to this question. As we settle into this new way of measuring student growth, we are hoping that students will see learning and achievement as more than a number on a piece of paper and that students will be able to talk, in depth, about what they know and how they will apply this knowledge. Please visit the following link for detailed information on grading at EHS. [Epping High School Grading Tip Sheet](#)

Question: How do Honors and AP classes affect grading with the weighting of classes?

Please see page 12 of the [Competency Handbook](#) for information about GPA weights for honors and AP classes.

Question: How do you get AP credit for college?

Advanced Placement courses have very specific requirements as determined by the College Board. The curriculum is clearly articulated and must be in line with any AP Course wherever it is taught. AP Credit is given when a student achieves a 4 or 5 on the common assessment (AP Exam) given to all students across the nation enrolled in that AP Course. Nothing has changed for any student taking an AP level course.

Question: How do colleges look at this grading compared to the old system? Are higher level colleges okay with CBE? Do high-achieving students have a chance of attending those schools?

Competency-Based Education (CBE) is not a new concept. College admissions officers process student information from around the world. Each institution has trained staff to process a variety of student information and portfolios from different schools to determine college readiness and determine if their university or college is a good fit for a particular student.

Epping High School Grading Questions continued

Question: Do international colleges accept this grading system?

Yes, all colleges and universities accept all grading systems from secondary schools all over the world.

Reporting

Question: How do I see specific grades?

Students and parents can access *Summative Assessment* information through PowerSchool. If parents/students are interested in more detailed information and have questions about student progress they are encouraged to contact teachers directly.

Question: Why can't we see our summative grades until the end of the semester?

You can see your *summative* grades by checking PowerSchool at any point in the semester. Please see the document [Viewing Competency Grades in PowerSchool](#).

Question: Why can't we get paper report cards?

Printed report cards are available to any parent or student. At the elementary and middle schools, simply contact the main office to request a paper copy. At the high school, contact the guidance office with your request.

Other

Question: Why are Work Study Practices (WSP) important?

“Soft Skills” or *Work Study Practices of Self-Direction, Collaboration, Communication and Innovation* are among the key skills that will ensure that our students are life, school and career ready. Tony Wagner, author of Most Likely to Succeed: Preparing Our Kids for the Innovation Era, spoke with hundreds of business leaders to determine what “career-ready” meant to them. Through his research, Wagner has found that the following skills are most desired: critical thinking and problem solving, collaboration, initiative, effective communication, adaptability, curiosity, and the ability to access and analyze information. No longer should content be the driving force behind educational policy decisions. Access to information has never been greater with the advent of the internet. Students, instead, need schools to foster dispositions. As Wagner explains: “Today’s students need to master seven survival skills to thrive in the new world of work. And these skills are the same ones that will enable students to become productive citizens who contribute to solving some of the most pressing issues we face in the 21st century,” (Wagner, T. [October, 2008]. “Rigor Redefined.” *Educational Leadership* (66) 2.

<http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/oct08/vol66/num02/Rigor-Redefined.aspx>)

Question: How does this system motivate students?

The topic of motivation is complex and traditional education only motivates a certain percentage of students. A traditional educational system allows students to graduate from high school without necessarily having the skills and knowledge to be able to attend college or earn a living. This has been a long-term, systemic problem with the traditional system. As we move forward, it appears that higher achieving students will be able to move through the competency system at a faster rate and may be able to take college classes in their junior/senior years of high school. Other motivating factors will include greater personalized learning opportunities and student voice and choice related to how they demonstrate competence.

Question: Can PowerSchool be fixed?

As we become aware of specific issues related to PowerSchool, our team will work with PowerSchool experts to resolve the issue. If you have a concern about an issue with PowerSchool, please contact Deb Dyer (ddyer@eppingsd.org).

Question: How do grades impact sports eligibility in the middle and high school?

At EHS student athletes need to be passing four core subjects with an MC to be eligible for athletics and extracurricular activities (*per NHIAA Eligibility Regulations, approved by Epping School Board*). For more detailed information please visit our website: [EHS Athletics](#)

At EMS athletes need to have completed all formative and summative work.

Vocabulary and Terminology

Competency - the desired knowledge, skills, and behaviors of a student graduating from a program (or completing a course).

Learning Target - frequently referred to as “I can” statements and communicate what skills and content knowledge students must demonstrate in order to meet competency. They represent the performance indicators.

Performance Indicator - considered the domains of knowledge and skills necessary for demonstrating mastery of Learning Targets.

Rubric - a guide listing specific criteria for grading or scoring academic papers, projects, or tests.

Formative Assessment - assessments that evaluate learning progress during the instructional process. Formative assessment information is used to guide instructional adjustments and practices, and support students in their learning progression.

Summative Assessment - assessments that evaluate learning achievement and are graded; summative assessments record a student’s level of competency at a specific point in time. Not all students need to take the summative assessments at the same point in time, but rather when they have demonstrated readiness to show their competency.

Performance Assessment - an assessment that consist of multi-step tasks that measure how well students can transfer skills and knowledge they have mastered to more complex problems. Performance assessments are useful to measure deeper thinking and application of acquired skills in novel situations. Measuring those skills is not often found in typical multiple choice or short answer assessments.

Student Achievement Report - the Student Achievement Report is sent quarterly to report student progress at a particular point in time.

Exemplary (E) - Student exceeds criteria for competence. Student applies all key concepts, and skills from performance indicators accurately and independently.

Meets Competence (MC) - Student demonstrates competence. Student applies key concepts and skills from performance indicators.

Approaching Competency (AC) - Student demonstrates partial competence. Student does not apply key concepts and skills from performance indicators consistently.

Novice (N) - Student does not demonstrate competence.

Insufficient Work Submitted (IWS) - Student did not submit a sufficient amount of work needed to determine competency.