

April 7, 2020

Re: Third Term Grades

Dear HHS Students and Parents:

I have received some communication this week about the recent decision to issue “credit/no credit” determinations instead of regular grades for third-term classes at Hingham High School. Together with their parents, some students who had achieved strong grades have expressed their opposition to the decision. I empathize with them and can appreciate the disappointment they’re feeling after working diligently to achieve high grades through the first six weeks of the term. As the father of two students in Hingham schools, I have experienced that same disappointment first-hand and have been called on to explain the decision at my own dinner table.

Needless to say, all school administrators have to make difficult (sometimes unpopular) decisions on a regular basis, and never more so than during times like this. Over the past several weeks, the other Hingham administrators and I have met daily to work through the complexities of school closure while creating a plan for remote learning. We have known from the start that it would be impossible to win complete support for all our decisions but we have been guided all along by a determination to serve the collective interests of Hingham students in the best way possible.

After examining the issue of third-term grades from multiple angles, we came to the conclusion that a policy of “credit/no credit” was the most pragmatic and equitable option for all students. The decision aligns with guidance from the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and it is consistent with the approach taken by many colleges and universities, as well as most neighboring high schools. Not everyone agrees with our decision, and I understand that, but I do hope you’ll appreciate our attempt to serve the greater good. Given that approximately one-third of the marking period remained when school closed on March 13th, we could not find a path to a fair determination of third-term grades. With innumerable assessments and other assignments still incomplete, and with students deprived of expected opportunities to solidify their academic standing, we did not think it would be fair to retroactively close grades as of March 12th, the last day when school was in session. Moreover, customizing third-term grades (i.e., allowing each of our 1,300 students to choose whether or not to keep regular letter grades in each of his/her classes) is not practically feasible. Above all, we wanted to be sure that students were held harmless for the unexpected and lengthy closure of school. As a result, no student’s GPA will improve as a consequence of third-term grades; significantly, though, no student’s GPA will suffer as a result of the present crisis.

Schools everywhere are grappling with the same issues, and they’re sometimes reaching different conclusions, but I believe we’re all asking the same basic question: “What is best for the students at our school?” Granted, the answers are not obvious, and it seems like none of the solutions are perfect, but we are nonetheless striving to make the best of an extremely difficult situation. The sense of loss felt by students who worked hard for high grades through the first six weeks of the term is real but it is exceeded by the sacrifices required of so many during a global pandemic. Under the circumstances, I continue to believe that Hingham schools have acted thoughtfully and deliberately, choosing the best of the available options. And someday, when we look back on this extraordinary time, in the unlikely event that we even think about grades at all, we’ll just be glad that school leaders did the best they could to serve the needs of the community as a whole.

My best wishes to you and your family. Please stay safe and well.

Sincerely,

*Rick Swanson
Principal
Hingham High School*