



New York City Department of Education
Regulatory Task Force Report on Academic Policy

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Regulatory Task Force on Academic Policy

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Background

The Regulatory Task Force on Academic Policy was formed in August 2015 to help ensure that schools implement State and City regulations with fidelity. Effective policy implementation supports the goal of preparing all students for college and career by ensuring that they have access to the academic programs to which they are entitled. The Task Force drives this work by shaping the expansion of oversight, training, and support strategies to build schools' capacity to understand and apply these policies. The Task Force also helps inform the development and revision of local academic policy to further support high quality academic programs across the New York City Department of Education (DOE). The DOE's Office of Academic Policy and Systems (OAPS) within the Division of Teaching and Learning oversees these policies.

In conducting the efforts described in this report, the DOE used its two main student data systems: ATS and STARS. Schools use ATS to manage student biographical data, enrollment, attendance, and grade promotion. Schools use STARS to produce official academic records, such as report cards and transcripts. All district DOE schools must enter and maintain accurate student data in these systems. OAPS uses data from ATS and STARS to conduct the oversight efforts described in this report.

OAPS has expanded its policy oversight and support strategies for 2015-16 to further reinforce high-quality policy implementation across the DOE. These strategies include the following components:

- **Oversight.** OAPS reviewed student data for alignment to academic policy in the areas of credit recovery and online learning. Findings were used to inform interventions at schools.
- **Support and intervention.** Dedicated content experts in Field Support Centers (FSCs) assist schools in implementing academic policy effectively.
- **Supervision.** Superintendents reinforce policy expectations and ensure that principals attend mandatory professional development.
- **Professional development for principals.** All principals must attend academic policy trainings.
- **Policy and systems assessment.** Based on findings from monitoring and intervention, OAPS issues revised guidance on key policies and procedures.

The first report of the Regulatory Task Force on Academic Policy, published in February 2016, describes the academic policy development and oversight strategies implemented by the DOE for the fall semester of the 2015-16 school year. This report expands upon the first report and describes the efforts conducted between February and August of 2016 to ensure that schools have a thorough understanding of academic policy expectations. The report also provides recommendations for the 2016-17 school year based on observations and feedback from schools, FSCs, superintendents, and central DOE stakeholders.

Oversight

For 2015-16, OAPS expanded efforts to monitor academic data in real time. The goal of this monitoring is to address policy misunderstandings before they result in negative outcomes for students. OAPS prepares and shares student-level reports with FSCs in order to target academic policy support, notify schools of instances where their practices may not align with academic policy, and identify areas in which schools need additional intervention.

Oversight conducted in the fall of 2015-16 focused on the areas of credit recovery and online learning. As of the February 2016 report, these oversight efforts identified 36 schools with potential gaps in the implementation of academic policies in these areas. Additional information gathered in the second semester of 2015-16 revealed that 26 of these 36 schools met the DOE's expectations for these programs, no longer offer these programs, or inaccurately appeared to have offered these programs due to data entry issues. The remaining 10 schools had one or more issues with their procedures and/or documentation that have been addressed through feedback and support from FSCs. Reviews conducted in the second semester confirmed the understanding that challenges pertaining to the implementation of credit recovery or online programs are generally procedural in nature and pertain to documentation and data entry.

Recommendations

For the oversight efforts described above, collecting information about student eligibility for participation in credit recovery proved challenging given that schools are expected to maintain this information on paper forms. In many cases, the delay in gathering pertinent information was due to the inefficiency associated with gathering and transmitting this information from schools to FSCs and OAPS. Additionally, maintaining information on paper-based documentation alone allowed for greater clerical error.

In light of the above, the Task Force recommends that the DOE standardize the collection of student eligibility information for credit recovery in STARS in 2016-17. Requiring schools to enter this information into STARS in a standardized format will support schools in aligning their practices to DOE policy and will minimize clarifying conversations between schools, FSCs, and OAPS. Utilizing STARS for credit recovery eligibility tracking will also enable the DOE to display pertinent information to schools to support them in determining whether credit recovery is an appropriate option for individual students.

Support and Intervention

In addition to conducting the targeted oversight described above, FSCs provide ongoing support to schools in all areas of academic policy. Each FSC has dedicated staff—academic policy and systems leads—who serve as content experts. FSCs respond to policy questions from school staff, support monitoring efforts, conduct trainings, and support schools in adjusting their practices to align to policy. Between February and August 2016, OAPS conducted two full-day trainings for academic policy and systems leads in FSCs. In addition, OAPS supported FSC leads on a daily basis through a dedicated academic policy helpdesk.

For the first time in 2015-16, schools with policy implementation challenges or discrepancies in student data completed targeted intervention plans with the support of their FSCs to ensure that they have

adequate procedures in place. As part of this process, OAPS prescribed a set of intervention standards tailored to the needs of schools based on concerns identified through data monitoring and other activities. The goal of these interventions was to support schools in understanding the relevant policies and prevent any challenges from recurring.

Throughout 2015-16, OAPS solicited feedback from FSCs about their experiences supporting schools in addressing a variety of policy implementation challenges. These discussions surfaced the following themes:

- FSCs and OAPS benefit from structured opportunities for problem-solving conversations about the implementation challenges at specific schools. These conversations provide an opportunity for FSCs to share best practices, report on challenges, and receive feedback on next steps for the schools they support.
- When schools have policy implementation challenges in multiple areas, support and intervention is most effective when the FSC holistically addresses these challenges at the school level. A holistic approach better enables the FSC and school to identify and address the root causes that may contribute to challenges in multiple areas.

Recommendations

The Task Force recommends continuing with the structures established with FSCs in 2015-16. Targeted, individualized conversations between FSCs and school staff to support them in improving their practices is an effective and appropriate strategy for avoiding policy issues.

To further enhance the effectiveness of these interventions, the Task Force recommends consolidating intervention tasks at the school level at the beginning of the 2016-17 school year rather than assigning them by topic at different times throughout the year. This adjustment will enable FSCs to have more holistic conversations with schools and more effectively address any patterns of concern.

In addition, OAPS should expand upon structures implemented in 2015-16 by discussing each FSC's progress with their schools several times throughout the semester. These discussions will provide OAPS with more timely information about ways to improve the resources and tools they produce to support academic policy implementation.

Supervision

Superintendents reinforce the expectation that principals and their staff adhere to State and City academic policies and understand the role of effective policy implementation in supporting students' college and career readiness. Superintendents' teams work in partnership with FSCs on an ongoing basis in cases where specific schools need intensive, targeted support improving their alignment to policy.

For the first time in 2015-16, all principals attended mandatory academic policy and systems professional development. This professional development is hosted by Superintendents and facilitated by FSCs. To reinforce the importance of this professional development, attendance at the mandatory trainings was tracked via the Compliance Checklist overseen by the DOE's Office of Compliance Services. High school

principals were required to attend four trainings, and elementary and middle school principals were required to attend one training.

Recommendations

The Task Force recommends continuing to require academic policy trainings for all principals in 2016-17 and tracking attendance on the Compliance Checklist. This training ensures that principals have the most current information on new and existing policies.

Given that principals received a comprehensive academic policy training series in 2015-16, the Task Force recommends differentiating the series for 2016-17 as follows:

- Returning high school principals should receive two academic policy trainings. These trainings should focus on policy updates and policy application based on common challenges identified in 2015-16.
- In addition to the above, new high school principals should receive a foundational academic policy training in the beginning of the school year.
- Elementary and middle school principals should receive one academic policy training. This training should focus on policy updates and policy application based on common challenges identified in 2015-16.

Policy and Systems Assessment

The academic policy oversight efforts described in this report assist OAPS in assessing whether schools need improved guidance on policies and procedures in order to implement academic policy effectively. Between September 2015 and January 2016, OAPS focused on clarifying the policy expectations in the areas of transcript updates and online courses. Between February 2016 and August 2016, OAPS focused on developing and issuing the DOE's first comprehensive guidance on grading policy.

Transcript Updates: Findings from Spring 2016

To support schools in updating student transcripts correctly, OAPS implemented systems enhancements to guide schools through the transcript update process in February 2016. All DOE schools are now required to use a standardized transcript update form with specific documentation. The STARS transcript update function aligns to the standardized form to facilitate accurate data entry.

Between February and June 2016, OAPS supported FSCs and schools in making transcript updates in alignment with the new, standardized procedures. The support process revealed additional questions and misunderstandings about the transcript update procedures. To ensure that schools have a comprehensive resource for performing the new transcript update process, OAPS developed and published a frequently asked questions document on transcript updates in August 2016. The 12-page document contains policy clarifications, illustrative examples, and detailed recommendations on school-based procedures; see [Appendix A](#) for an excerpt of this document. OAPS will continue to support the implementation of the standardized transcript update process and update policy guidance as required based on the needs of schools.

Policy Clarification and Support: Grading Policy

In spring 2016, OAPS prioritized developing a comprehensive resource on the expectations for developing and implementing school-based grading policies. While DOE guidance has required schools to maintain their own written grading policies since 2011, feedback from schools and FSCs demonstrated a need for more detailed guidance on the characteristics of a strong grading policy document.

To meet this need, OAPS published a grading policy checklist and FAQ in June 2016. This document provides schools with tools for assessing whether their own grading policies are rigorous, aligned to DOE expectations, and clearly documented for students and families. The document also addresses commonly asked questions and provides illustrative examples and rubrics to support schools in implementing strong grading practices. See [Appendix B](#) for an excerpt of the grading policy checklist. This comprehensive grading policy resource will better enable OAPS to support and monitor schools' grading policies in 2016-17 and beyond.

Recommendations

In 2016-17, the Task Force recommends that OAPS continue to maintain and update existing policy resources in the areas of transcript updates and grading policy as described above. In addition, OAPS should focus efforts on identifying opportunities to better align data systems to DOE policies. Specifically, the findings of the credit recovery monitoring described in [Oversight](#) above reveal an opportunity to standardize school-based practices and better identify areas in which schools need additional support.

Appendix A: Excerpt of Transcript Update FAQ



Transcript Updates: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

DOCUMENTATION

7. What documentation is required for each type of transcript update?

For each transcript update, schools must complete the [Transcript update form](#), including the principal's signature, and maintain supporting documentation that justifies the reason for completing the transcript update. Schools are required to maintain specific documents for each type of transcript update. For example, schools must maintain a copy of the teacher's gradebook when updating a student's transcript to correct for grade calculation/entry error. See the [appendix](#) for a complete list of the specific documentation required to support each type of transcript update.

8. Where and for how long must schools retain completed [Transcript update forms](#) and supporting documentation?

Schools must maintain Transcript update forms and supporting documentation permanently. Schools may choose to archive this documentation in a student's cumulative folder or with other academic records.

9. Can schools use one Transcript update form to make multiple changes to student records?

Schools may make multiple changes to student records with one Transcript update form only if all changes fall within the same reason and sub-reason and are for the same student. Schools may not make transcript updates for multiple students using one form.

Example: A student transfers to a NYCDOE high school from a school in Rochester, NY. The principal reviews the student's non-NYCDOE transcript and awards transfer credits for courses the student took at her previous school. The school can submit one Transcript update form for these changes as long as all course information is included with the appropriate documentation.

Non-example: An eleventh grade student transfers to a NYCDOE school from another state. The principal reviews the student's transcript and decides to award transfer credit. In addition, the principal would like to enter a new admit waiver for Global history & geography Regents. The school cannot submit one Transcript update form. Two separate forms must be submitted, one to add the transfer credit and one to add the new admit waiver.

10. Can schools check multiple reasons or sub-reasons on one [Transcript update form](#)?

No. Schools may only select one reason and sub-reason on the Transcript update form for each transcript update entered. To make changes to a student's transcript for more than one reason or sub-reason, schools must complete and maintain a separate Transcript update form with all necessary documentation for each change.

HISTORICAL DATA

11. When is it appropriate to remove a course or exam from a transcript?

Schools should only remove a course or exam on a student-by-student basis, and not for an entire class of students. For this reason, schools should consult their academic policy and systems lead before removing a course or exam from a student's transcript. Some examples and non-examples of appropriate uses of this type of transcript update are:

Example: A guidance counselor updated a student's transcript to reflect a [Department-approved alternative exam](#) (AP English literature) being used towards graduation. Not realizing that the transcript update was pending approval, the programmer entered a second update to the student's transcript for the same reason. The principal approved both requests. The school completes a third transcript to remove the duplicate instance.

Appendix A: Excerpt of Transcript Update FAQ (continued)



Transcript Updates: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

ADD A NEW COURSE	
Documentation required	Description of documentation
Transfer credit(s) from another school or program (2 types of documentation required)	
1. Official transcript from a student's previous school or institution (translated into English if in another language)	An official transcript should include the student's name and the school's name on official letterhead. It should also clearly indicate the courses and/or exams for which the student is receiving transfer credits. Schools are responsible for ensuring that transcripts in a language other than English are translated effectively such that transfer credit can be awarded appropriately. Schools have funds allocated specifically for translation services and may use school- or community-based translators; schools may also use the student's home country Embassy or Consulate for assistance. The NYCDOE Department of Translation does not translate student-specific documents, and it is never appropriate for students or their family members to complete the translation or cover the cost of translation. After translating, schools must keep a copy of the original transcript for the student's cumulative file. For more information, see the Transfer Credit FAQ . AND
2. Transfer credit equivalency form	The transfer credit equivalency form documents courses a student has taken outside of the NYCDOE and their credit equivalent as determined by the NYCDOE school. All fields must be completely filled out, with the appropriate information, and the form must be reviewed and signed by two different school staff members. Schools do not need to list all the credits they are updating on the bottom of the transcript update form itself; they can itemize the credits instead on the transfer credit equivalency form.
LOTE credit(s) for documented residence and school attendance in an "other-than-English-speaking" environment	
Record of student residency and school attendance	Schools should maintain a form of documentation in the student's file that demonstrates the student's residence and school attendance in an other-than-English-speaking environment. Examples of appropriate documentation include, but are not limited to, the student's transcript, report card, or letter of enrollment from the previous school. For more information on reviewing transcripts for transfer credits, see the Transfer Credit FAQ .
Credit-by-examination	
Documentation of completed project or oral exam	Documentation (e.g. rubric, copy of assignments) must demonstrate that the student successfully completed an oral exam or special project demonstrating proficiency of the subject matter developed in the course but not measured by the associated Regents exam.
Participation in PSAL or other school-based team or physical activity for PE credit, in accordance with New York State and City PE policy (2 types of documentation required)	
1. Student log of practice hours	The student log of practice hours must clearly demonstrate that the student maintained 90% attendance, excluding excused absences. For more information on earning PE credit through PSAL participation, see the PE FAQ . AND
2. Roster signed by coach	The roster must clearly indicate the student being awarded PE credits was a participant on the team. For more information, see the PE FAQ .
Service hours documenting student's progress toward the service seal	
Service hours worksheet	The Service Hours Worksheet must be filled out and document any service hours to be included in a student's progress toward the service seal .

Appendix B: Excerpt of Grading Policy Checklist

Your school must have a written grading policy that is transparent and available to students, families, and school staff. Schools must share this information about how students earn grades with parents and students at the beginning of the school year. Your grading policy document(s) must explain, at a minimum, how courses are graded, the scale of marks awarded, and when and how often students receive grades. Students cannot pass or fail their courses primarily based on non-mastery measures.

Within your school, you may establish grading policies at the school, department, grade, and/or course level. Schools are not required to use a specific format, but the minimum requirements must be addressed in one or more available documents. Grading policies should be tailored to your school's community, mission, and goals. As your school creates or reviews its existing grading policies, use this checklist to ensure that your grading policies are comprehensive and robust:

Timeline of When Students Receive Grades

- When and how will students and families receive grades?
- When and how can grades be changed after they have been finalized?

Scale of Marks Awarded

- What is the scale of marks used to award grades? (See the Elementary, Middle, and High School Academic Policy Guides for available grading scales)
- What are the range of marks that can be awarded?
 - What is the minimum grade a student must receive to pass a course? (Note: this must align to the DOE grading scales)
 - What is the lowest grade that a student can earn?
- Middle and high schools: how are GPA and class rank calculated? (Note: class rank is not required)

Implementation

- Who does the grading policy apply to (e.g. is your grading policy school-wide, grade-band specific)?
- Are there opportunities to discuss student progress with families (e.g. parent-teacher conferences)?
- When will the grading policy be reviewed and updated?

Other Considerations

- Which measures will be used to make promotion decisions for each grade level? How do grades relate to promotion decisions?
- In which format(s) and through which communication channel(s) will the grading policy be available to students and families?
- How will the grading policy be translated and disseminated to your school's community, as needed?
- What opportunities do teachers have to share their individual grading policies within and across teams? Are they reviewed annually or only when updated?

Appendix B: Excerpt of Grading Policy Checklist (continued)

- What is your system for ensuring that old grading policies and copies of teachers' gradebooks are maintained for record-keeping purposes?

How Students are Graded in Courses or Subjects

- What is the rubric or list of measures of performance that are factored into the final grade?
 - What are the measures of academic performance aligned to content and skills (e.g. class assignments, homework, assessments, projects) that are being factored into the final grade? Are they clearly defined for students and families?
 - What are the non-mastery based measures of performance (e.g. attendance, participation, adherence to the student code of conduct, etc.) that are being factored into the final grade? Are they clearly defined for students and families?
- How are final grades calculated?
- Are there courses where students are passing or failing solely because of factors like attendance, behavior, conduct, and participation? Are students passing or failing based on how well they demonstrate their mastery of the content and skills required in that subject?
- Does your school average marking period grades together to create a final course grade, or is the final marking period grade cumulative?
- Does your school provide personalized feedback to students in addition to grades? If so, how (e.g. use written narratives and/or comment codes in report cards)?
- What is the timeframe and manner in which students can submit make-up and late work? Are there different considerations if a student is submitting make-up work due to an absence versus non-completion?
- What marks can be awarded if there is not enough student work to determine mastery?
 - How and when can students earn special marks (NX, NL, NS) in your school?
 - Under what circumstances are those marks awarded?
 - When and how can those marks be updated with a new final grade?
- Elementary schools: if students do not receive grades in all classes, what are the courses or subjects in which students do receive grades?
- Middle and high schools: are Regents exams weighted in the final grade? If so, how? Note: Regents exams may only be weighted up to 33% of the final grade.