NYC Department of Education
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Regulatory Task Force Report on Academic Policy

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Regulatory Task Force on Academic Policy

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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. This report describes how OAPS uses cycles of professional development, oversight and review, support and intervention, and policy and systems assessment to improve schools' implementation of academic policy.

Professional Development

- OAPS provided Field Support Centers (FSCs) with professional development to support their understanding of key academic policy changes and build their capacity to help schools problem-solve around implementation challenges. This professional development included five full-day trainings, bi-weekly meetings, an online toolkit of resources, and access to a helpdesk through which OAPS provided assistance on specific questions and scenarios that arose within each FSC.
- OAPS continued to require all principals to complete academic policy trainings. These trainings were designed to ensure that principals have current information about key academic policies and any policy updates.
    - To build upon the training program implemented in 2015–16 and 2016–17, the content was differentiated as follows:
        - High school principals participated in two online trainings, specific to high school policies.
        - Middle school principals participated in one online training, specific to middle school policies.
        - Elementary school principals participated in one online training, specific to elementary school policies.
    - Based on feedback from principals, OAPS provided resource guides for all online training sessions. These guides provide an outline of the policy areas addressed in the training and as well as links to relevant resources. Principals can share these guides with assistant principals, guidance counselors, programmers, and other school staff to establish a shared understanding of key policies. See Appendix A for an excerpt from a training resource guide.
    - To provide flexibility and to facilitate knowledge transfer between principals and their staff, the trainings were implemented through an online platform. The platform required principals to view the content, which was shareable with other school staff upon completion.
    - As in previous years, completion was tracked through the DOE's Compliance Checklist.

Oversight

In 2017–18, OAPS reviewed student data for alignment to academic policy and identified schools for targeted outreach based on specific data patterns. In years prior, OAPS established data topics prior to the start of the school year and reviewed school and student data related to those topics throughout the year. In 2017–18, OAPS shifted toward a more flexible, real-time approach to identifying schools with potentially concerning data trends and incorporated new observations into oversight efforts during the school year.

- For each policy area selected for oversight, OAPS designed selection criteria to identify specific school behaviors that were observed throughout oversight efforts in previous school years and terms.
- Policy areas selected for oversight include:
  - High credit accumulation
  - Scheduling and grade entry patterns related to credit accumulation
  - Transcript updates due to annualization
  - Use of OAPS's online eligibility tool for credit recovery
- The schools selected using the selection criteria underwent a review process conducted by FSCs in order to gain insight into the school's practices. Through the review process, FSCs and OAPS evaluated documentation and other information provided by the school.
- To build the capacity of FSCs to review and evaluate schools' academic policy implementation, OAPS provided the FSCs with a robust overview document for each policy area. The document included an overview of the academic policy, a brief overview of the selection criteria, goals for the review process, and best practices for working with the identified schools to understand their practices.
- In cases where the review process revealed implementation challenges, these findings were used to design targeted interventions to improve schools' practices. See Appendix B for an example of a policy document used to provide training to schools.

Support and Intervention

In 2017–18, OAPS continued to expand upon structures to provide schools with individualized support and intervention in cases where there are potentially concerning patterns:

- For each school receiving support with academic policy implementation, OAPS provided FSCs with customized, school-specific workbooks. These workbooks described tasks for FSCs to complete with their schools and provided resources for each task, including training materials, policy documents, and reports. FSCs used the workbooks to guide school visits and discussions. Schools were also required to submit sample documentation to OAPS for evaluation and further support.
- As in previous years, intervention tasks were structured into two semester-long cycles so that FSCs could address challenges across multiple areas holistically. OAPS and FSCs discussed schools' progress at several checkpoints within each cycle and required schools to provide evidence of their implementation of and alignment to academic policy.
- This intervention work included new principal-facing documents shared by the FSC, which explained why the school was selected for intervention, to increase transparency and underscore potential concerns.
- In order to ensure that FSCs are using tools and reports provided by OAPS to holistically review their schools' academic policy issues, OAPS also developed a policy implementation checklist. The checklist is tool for FSCs to gauge the academic 'health' of a high school at various points in the school year to support conversations and school visits. It includes a list of resources FSCs should leverage prior to contacting or visiting a school coupled with procedural questions for facilitating conversation during school visits. See Appendix C for the checklist.

Policy and Systems Assessment

In 2017–18, OAPS identified opportunities to enhance student information systems to further reinforce key academic policies and support schools in maintaining high quality data. These include the following:

- The DOE revised its grading policy with respect to the ways in which schools may update student transcripts. Effective 2018-19, high schools are no longer permitted to change a student's final grades from a first-semester course based on passing the corresponding second-semester course. To support this policy change, OAPS developed a new checklist and toolkit to support grading policy shifts to help schools affected by the policy change regarding transcript updates. These targeted resources will help ensure that students' transcripts accurately represent their instructional experiences and that final grades and credits awarded on students' official transcripts reflect their level of mastery of course content at the specific point in time when they were awarded.
- OAPS made enhancements to the functions in ATS relating to submitting and approving Regents appeals. These enhancements ensured that the system aligns with new policies as well as make the functionality more user-friendly for both schools and superintendents. .
- OAPS made enhancements in STARS to ensure that schools enter valid course and exam marks in the system. The enhancements include providing schools with a lookup for valid marks that can be used for grade entry, as well as a system validation for all marks to ensure that schools are entering grades that align with our academic policy guides.

Recommendations for 2018–19

In 2018–19, OAPS should continue to expand upon the systems and structures established in 2017–18 in the following ways:

- **Expand support for implementing strong grading policies.** In 2017-18, OAPS created a comprehensive toolkit to support schools in reviewing their grading policies to ensure that students' grades accurately reflect their mastery of course content. In addition, OAPS's oversight focused on grade changes and specific grading patterns to identify schools that might benefit from additional support. To build upon this work, OAPS should expand its grading policy tools and supports to encompass additional schools, with an added focus on middle schools. Consistency and transparency in grading policy implementation is critical.
- **Continue to build the capacity of FSCs to review and evaluate schools' academic policy implementation through professional development and resources.** Regular touchpoints with individual FSCs to discuss progress, accomplishments, and challenges has been critical to OAPS's oversight, intervention, and support efforts. Specifically, providing FSCs with resources on how to facilitate conversations with school leaders has resulted in more productive problem-solving and has proactively identified misunderstanding of policies. OAPS should develop additional facilitation resources for FSCs in policy areas identified by oversight, monitoring, and FSC feedback.
- **Increase transparency of academic information for families.** While OAPS has focused on improving policy and process and the school level, it is also important to ensure that parents have access to timely information about relevant policies and students' completion of requirements. This transparency increases accountability and empowers students and families to ask informed questions about students' academic experiences. To this end,

OAPS should identify opportunities to increase the availability of information about grades, programming, and graduation through existing systems and touchpoints between schools and families.

APPENDIX A. ACADEMIC POLICY TRAINING RESOURCE GUIDE

Academic policy governs the programming, grading, promotion, and graduation requirements for students. These policies help ensure equity, access, and consistency across our school system. The Office of Academic Policy and Systems (OAPS) provides resources and training to help schools understand how to create strong academic programs for students that align with City and State requirements.

This resource guide is a general outline of the academic policy areas and related resources included in the Fall 2017 mandatory academic policy training for high school principals (Compliance Checklist CL01). This guide can be shared with other school staff to give an overview of the covered topics. If you have any questions about the academic policy areas or the related resources, please contact your academic policy & systems lead.

SUMMARY TABLE OF RELATED RESOURCES

The following table outlines the policy areas covered during the mandatory academic policy training as well as the related resources to which school staff can refer throughout the year. For guidance on additional policy areas, see the Resource Index on the New York City Department of Education Intranet, as well as the ATS and STARS Wiki pages.

Policy Area	Related Resources
Grading Policies and Teachers' Grade Books	• See pages 48–52 of the High School Academic Policy Guide. • Grading Policy • Grading Policy Checklist • Grading Policy Sample Excerpts • Grading Policy Toolkit
Course Content Documentation	• Reviewing Course Records and Documenting Course Content • Course Review Form • The State's ED-1 Records Retention and Disposition Schedule requires that all course curriculum and related records describing course of instruction and course content be retained by the school permanently, even after the teacher leaves the school.
Online Courses Documentation	• Online and Blended Courses • Reviewing Course Records and Documenting Course Content • Course Review Form • The State's ED-1 Records Retention and Disposition Schedule requires that all course curriculum and related records describing course of instruction and course content be retained by the school permanently, even after the teacher leaves the school.
Credit Recovery Documentation	• Credit Recovery • STARS Credit Recovery Eligibility Check Wiki page • Credit Recovery Approval Form • Credit Recovery Approved List of Online Vendors

Policy Area	Related Resources
Additional Links Included in the Training	• [Transcript Update Form](#) • [Learning Standards of New York State](#) • [Offsite Courses](#) • [Career Development and Occupation Studies (CDOS) Commencement Credential](#) • [Physical Education (PE)](#)

APPENDIX B. EXAMPLE POLICY TRAINING MATERIAL

Online Courses Policy Refresher

This document supplements existing resources on the New York City and State policies for awarding high school course credit, as outlined in the High School Academic Policy Guide and the Online and Blended Courses FAQ. This document provides a quick overview of the key issues related to online and blended courses. Please use this policy refresher and existing resources to ensure your online and blended courses are accurately programmed for the current term and future terms.

For additional support, contact your academic policy and systems lead.

> Online and blended courses are regular courses. The only substantive difference between online courses and traditional classroom courses is how instruction is delivered.

> Like in all courses, students must receive 54 hours of instruction per credit during the school year (45 hours per credit during the summer) for online and blended courses.

> Like in all courses, online and blended courses must be taught by a NYCDOE subject-certified teacher, who is responsible for course materials, monitoring the learning, and awarding grades.

> Like all courses, online and blended courses must be programmed in STARS according to the standardized course code directory. Online and blended courses must be designated in STARS using section properties.

Check your practice: Instructional time

- ☐ Department chairs, teachers, or other school staff members regularly evaluate online courses to ensure they meet all NYSED and NYCDOE requirements using the Course Review Form, especially before offering the course as a credit-bearing experience.

- ☐ In each of your online and blended courses, students are receiving 54 hours of instructional time per credit (or 45 hours over the summer). This time is documented in the form of a syllabus and attendance and login records.

- ☐ Students complete online and blended courses within one term and receive at least one interim mark during the term and a final grade at the end of that term. Just like in all courses, students may not complete online courses across multiple terms. Courses in your school—including online and blended courses—start at the beginning of the term and end at the end of the term.

- ☐ Students do not pace through an online or blended course in significantly less than 54 hours. Students do not complete courses in a few days or weeks. Courses are of comparable scope and rigor to the non-online courses offered in your school.
- ☐ Students are not pressured to complete an online or blended course in a condensed timeframe so that another student can use the digital platform.
- ☐ If students are completing an online or blended course too quickly, the teacher reassesses the course to determine if it is of the same scope and rigor as other courses offered by the high school.

Check your practice: Subject-certified teacher

- ☐ NYCDOE subject-certified teachers teach or oversee each online and blended course. The subject-certified teacher is scheduled in STARS as the teacher of record.
- ☐ The NYCDOE subject-certified teacher develops the syllabus that aligns to NYSED commencement level learning standards. The syllabus has identifying information (course title, teacher's name, year/term); the syllabus is not just a printout from the digital platform.
- ☐ The NYCDOE subject-certified teacher has regular and substantive interaction with students, and this interaction is documented. Documentation can include attendance records, meeting records, emails, assignments with feedback, or gradebooks.
- ☐ The NYCDOE subject-certified teacher monitors students' progress through the course and identifies if students are pacing through the course too quickly or too slowly. They ensure the course is worth a full credit and that students are receiving appropriate instruction.
- ☐ The NYCDOE subject-certified teacher provides feedback regarding student's mastery of course objectives, including awarding interim grades and a final grade in STARS at the end of the term.
- ☐ For courses that are a part of a sequence, the NYCDOE subject-certified teacher ensures that students do not receive credit for the last course in the sequence, if the students did not also pass the culminating Regents exam and have not already passed an exam that counts towards a diploma in that subject area.

Check your practice: Programming in STARS

- ☐ Students are programmed in STARS using the standardized High School Course Code Directory and are indicated as online courses by the "iLearn" or "Other Online" section property.
- ☐ Students are programmed in STARS for 5.5 hours of instruction per day, not including online learning completed off-site or outside the hours of the regular school day.
- ☐ Department chairs and/or teachers have an established protocol to determine which students are ready for and will benefit from taking online courses.

APPENDIX C. IMPLEMENTATION CHECKLIST

Part I: Tools to consult before a school visit	
Tool	**Key questions**
Master Schedule Summary and Master Schedule Report	☐ Based on what you see on the Master Schedule Summary, has the school chosen appropriate credit values for their term model? Have they sequenced their courses appropriately given their term model? ☐ Are courses accurately coded as described in the High School Course Code Directory, to reflect instructional content, sequence, delivery method, and term model? Are there specific courses with unusual 7th or 8th characters? Are there courses with unusual titles or spelling mistakes? Are there courses assigned credits that might not be worth credits? Are there individual courses with fractional credit values, any usually large or small number of students assigned, or unusual titles (e.g. 'Resource Room' or 'Peer Leadership,' or credit-bearing guidance courses)? ☐ Has the school allowed grades in each marking period, and final grades, in all their courses? ☐ Based on the Master Schedule, are all courses assigned a subject-certified teacher and a room number?
Completion reports	☐ Have you consulted the completion reports to see if the school lagged behind in key tasks? Be sure to review the reports on Programming & Scheduling, Grade Entry, Promotion, Appeals, and Graduation Entry, depending on the time of year. ☐ Have you checked the Special Education and ELL programming reports to see if these students are being appropriately served? For more information, consult the pages on the STARS wiki on Special Education and ELLs.
Progress to Graduation Tracker (PTGT) and **individual students' transcripts or schedules**	☐ Did you spot check the PTGT to see if any students, especially in upper grades, are particularly off track in credits and/or exams for graduation? You can then check their schedules and transcripts for closer inspection to identify the root cause, including any credit, programming, sequencing, titling, or grading anomalies. ☐ Do students appear to be appropriately served? How does the school address situations where the student passes the course but not the associated Regents exam? ☐ How do student typically earn elective credits?
Action items	☐ Have you reviewed the school's open STARS Action Items? What seem to be the most concerning issues? ☐ Are students scheduled for full instructional days (5.5 hours?) ☐ Are courses scheduled for sufficient instructional time (54 hours per credit)? ☐ Are students receiving minimum required ENL minutes? ☐ Are courses meeting for 54 hours per credit awarded?
Custom reports	☐ Have you reviewed key STARS Custom Reports for the current academic term to check for any unusual patterns? Access Custom Report 0.01 for a complete list of reports and descriptions. Consider 4.23 to spot check section properties in the current term and 2.09 to spot check transcript updates made recently.
History	☐ Has the school had any repeat concerns or notable findings in audits, data sharing, or resolution plans? Consult your R: drive folders to review the history of these work streams.

Part II: Policy questions to review at a school visit	
Topic	**Key questions**
Academic policy school staff	☐ Who are the designated staff members who perform academic policy work at the school? Do you have their contact information? ☐ How do these staff members get trained? Do they receive key updates announced in *Principals' Weekly*? Do they have links to the OAPS intranet page and other resources, including any updated versions of materials or forms?
Programming	☐ Has the school designated a programmer? Has that person been trained recently? ☐ Has the school developed a clear system for communicating which courses students should be scheduled for in the following term? How does the school ensure that students are scheduled for the correct courses each term?
Accreditation committee and course content	☐ Has the school established a course accreditation committee to regularly review existing courses and to evaluate newly proposed courses? Does the school use the Course Review Form? ☐ Does the school document instructional content and learning standards for all courses in syllabi or other documentation as described in this guidance on documenting course content? How are syllabi from previous years maintained? Do syllabi contain the key required information? Is there a standard syllabus template by department or across the school?
Grading policy	☐ Has the school created a transparent and thorough grading policy? Have you reviewed it against the grading policy toolkit? ☐ Does the school maintain a calendar for when teacher grades are due and when report cards are distributed to students and families? ☐ When and how is the grading policy shared with school staff, students, and families?
Transfer students	☐ Has the school established a process to intake new students, evaluate their records and award transfer credits as described in the Transfer Credit FAQ, and retain the right records? ☐ What steps does the school take to award credit if the student's prior transcript is unavailable? ☐ Does the school use the Transfer Credit Equivalency Form and the Transfer Student Entry Checklist to support this process?
Truant and discharged students	☐ Has the school established a process to contact truant students and their families? ☐ How does the school help students who are above compulsory age and not attending school persist toward meeting credit and/or exam requirements for graduation? What strategies are in place to persuade students to attend?
Documentation retention	☐ Are there designated school staff to collect, organize, and retain all mandatory documentation, including transfer student records, transcript update forms, gradebooks, grading policies, and other important, required documents? See the appendix of forms in the back of the High School Policy Guide for a list of required academic policy-related forms.
Alternative coursework	☐ Are online/blended courses, internships or other off-site courses, college courses, credit recovery, or other types of non-traditional courses offered? ☐ Are these courses scheduled in STARS and are they taught by subject-certified teachers? Are other key policies followed?
Students who have failed a course	☐ What options are available to students who fail a course? How does the school ensure that these students stay on track?
Transcript updates	☐ Who at the school may request transcript updates? Who is responsible for reviewing documentation and submitting and approving updates in STARS as described in the Transcript Update FAQ and on the form?

Graduation certification	☐ Are there enough designated staff members to review prospective graduates' transcripts? Are they recently trained? ☐ What is the process for principal sign-off of override codes, confirming correct discharge codes, verifying Safety Net eligibility, and retaining academic records? See the Certification Guide.