

# SWITZERLAND POINT MIDDLE SCHOOL

## A Roadmap to Understanding Your Child's Grades



### WHAT IS STANDARDS-BASED GRADING?

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Standards-based grading measures your child's mastery of the grade-level standards for a course, or how well your child understands the material in class. The class grade will be based on all of the evidence the teacher collects demonstrating mastery of essential standards taught and assessed throughout a unit of instruction.

A focus on learning: The goal of this approach is to provide the teacher, your child, and you as a parent with a true picture of the knowledge and skills mastered, and to encourage a dialogue about what instruction your child needs next. Teachers will assess your child's learning using a variety of formative and summative assessments, tools such as traditional paper-and-pencil tests, written papers, lab reports, or projects, but also informal assessments such as classroom discussions or teacher observations. Essentially, everything your child does in a standards-based classroom will provide teachers with evidence of his/her learning.

### WHAT ARE SPMS' GRADING PRACTICES?

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SPMS teachers report grades that are accurate, consistent, meaningful, and supportive of learning. As you sit with your child to review class progress using Home Access Center (HAC), here are some things to keep in mind:

- Teachers' gradebooks are developed to place emphasis on summative assessments (the results of all the hard work your child puts in to mastering course material throughout each quarter) over general assignments (the homework, class activities, and assignments that allow your child to practice and deepen new knowledge). As such, 80% of your child's grade will consist of summative assessments, while homework and class assignments will make up the remaining 20%.
- Teachers continually plan to assign coursework and assessments to gather data they use to make instructional decisions based on your child's learning and growth. They update gradebooks in eSchool Plus on a regular basis to provide both students and parents with timely feedback through HAC.
- A standards-based grading approach recognizes that because learning is a process that takes place over time, students should—and will—be allowed to retake assessments. If the new assessment scores show a higher level of mastery, the original grades will be replaced (up to 75%, which serves as the highest grade recorded for a retest).
- Scores of zero (displayed as "INC") are only used by SPMS teachers to indicate a student has not completed a test or assignment. This means the student has not taken advantage of the opportunity to demonstrate what level of mastery he/she is currently performing in regard to the standards assessed. Once a student has attempted the test/assignment, the lowest possible grade that could be assigned is a

50%. While a score of 50% is a failing grade, this score will not penalize a student's course grade in the way a much lower grade (of a 0%) would.

## WHAT DOES THIS LOOKS LIKE IN HAC?

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Here are some guidelines for interpreting the grading practices above when looking at your child's performance in HAC:

### Retest:

- A student who has taken a test again to demonstrate growth from the first assessment will receive a new score up to a 75%. To help differentiate a 75% on a retest from an original score of 75%, check to see if there is a decimal after the score. The number after the decimal indicates your child's score on the original assessment.
- For instance, if you see a score of **"75.56"**, your child scored a **56%** the first time the assessment was given.

### 49.99% vs. 50% vs. 0% vs. "INC":

- Scores of zero are only assigned if a student needs to make up a test/assignment. This score is used by the teacher when the student has not completed the necessary assessments/assignments to be given a grade for a standard due to absences or other factors. This will not display as **"0"** in HAC, however. You will see **"INC"** (for "incomplete") next to the assignment name where a score should be.
- In this case, the score is calculated as a zero in the student's grade to show the effect of not completing the assessment/assignment, and will significantly impact the class grade until an attempt to demonstrate mastery by completing the work is made. Once your child has completed the test/assignment, the 0% ("INC") is replaced by the score actually earned. Any zeros ("INC's") left in your child's grades at the end of the quarter will be replaced with scores of **49.99%** (indicating no attempt to complete the necessary assessments/assignments was made).
- If your child scores below a 50% on any test/assignment, check to see if there is a decimal after the score. The number after the decimal indicates your child's actual performance score.
- For instance, if you see a score of **"50.21"**, your child's actual performance score (demonstrating mastery of the standard(s) targeted) is a **21%**. This indicates your child is struggling in this area and will receive specialized support from the teacher.

## WHY THIS DECIMAL SYSTEM?

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Although it may seem confusing, when consistently applied across all SPMS classrooms, this grading system helps SPMS teachers, administrators, parents, and most importantly, students, easily compare their progress over time when checking course grades. Teachers are also better able to make instructional decisions to meet the needs of individual students in preparation for upcoming assessments in which students may encounter standards/concepts they struggled with previously.

## WHY IS 49.99% THE LOWEST POSSIBLE GRADE?

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SPMS teachers are your child's advocate in the classroom in support of learning and knowledge gained over time. Our teachers believe what students do not know at the beginning of a course or unit should not be held against

them at a later point in time. In our 100-point grading scale, a much larger range exists for failing grades (0-59—F) than for other grade categories (60-69—D; 70-79—C; 80-89—B; 90-100—A) if we were to allow for the recording of grades below a 49.99%. Our teachers and students recognize this system would make it much more difficult for a student to “recover” from a low grade. Much research on this practice notes that the use of zeros (and lower “F” grades) demotivates students rather than instilling responsibility (as many believe). As such, 49.99% will be the lowest possible grade students will be assigned for an assessment/assignment in any class.

The question that arises with this type of shift in grading practices is one of fairness and equity. Often, parents feel assigning 49.99% (or half credit) for work not completed or raising a lower failing grade to a 50% sends the wrong message about work ethic and lowers the performance range between many children who work hard in their classes to earn grades based on actual performance.

**Let’s examine the grading scenarios below as we consider fairness in grading practices and the impact of lower “F” grades on student performance:**

Main Idea Quiz	Supporting Details Quiz	Unit Test: Main Idea/Details	Summarization Quiz	Qtr. 1 Summative Assessment	AVG.
90	75.56	80	INC <small>(calculated as “0” in this grading system)</small>	95	<b>68.11</b>

**vs.**

Main Idea Quiz	Supporting Details Quiz	Unit Test: Main Idea/Details	Summarization Quiz	Qtr. 1 Summative Assessment	AVG.
90	75.56	80	49.99	95	<b>78.11</b>

Note that in the scenario above, assigning a score of “0” for one assessment vs. a 49.99% equates to a ten percentage point difference in the student’s average. Assigning a “0” for the missing assessment actually lowers a student (who was performing at a mid-B level on graded tasks) to a high-D. The bottom set of scores allows for a course average closer to the individual scores earned. In that scenario, the student’s overall grade better indicates the level of knowledge possessed.

On the “Summarization Quiz” in question above, the “49.99%” indicates this student essentially did not earn any credit because he/she did not attempt the assessment during the quarter. Please keep in mind our teachers understand how critical it is to continually monitor and assess student learning to provide timely feedback for student growth. Rarely will a student actually be in a position in which an opportunity to remediate/reassess a missing test/assignment is not taken advantage of before the end of a quarter. Remember too, the “75.56” score indicates this student was allowed to remediate/reassess the “Supporting Details Quiz” after receiving an original score of 56%. Such a low original score indicates the student’s teacher provided valuable and strategic intervention to address the learning gap.

#### **WHAT CAN STUDENTS DO TO RAISE THEIR GRADES IN A STANDARDS-BASED CLASS?**

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The goal in a standards-based class is ensuring that students master the essential standards for the class, so any efforts to raise your child’s grade will have the same goal. Your child should meet with the teacher to determine

which standards need improvement and work together to develop a plan on how to relearn the material and when to retest. If your child demonstrate a higher level of mastery on the reassessment, then the grade for that standard will be increased (up to 75%) and his/her grade will increase.

#### **HOW CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION ABOUT MY CHILD'S GRADE OR ABOUT STANDARDS-BASED GRADING?**

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Teachers should always be the first point of contact should you have questions or concerns regarding your child's performance in a class. SPMS teachers strive to keep you regularly informed of your child's progress through a variety of communication methods and will provide information about such methods when your child enrolls in their classes.