



Think. Learn. **Grow.**

November 1, 2017

This letter accompanies the official transcript of students from the Des Moines Public School system. The purpose of this letter is to give brief background as to the meaning of the grades and remarks seen on a given DMPS student's transcript in light of the fact that Des Moines schools have used standards-referenced grading and reporting practices since 2013-14. Providing this cover letter was suggested through a research study conducted in November 2013.

Des Moines Public Schools entered into a cycle of investigation, study, and implementation of standards-based learning in 2012-13. Each year since then, new cohorts of teachers have been trained in the new system of how to plan, instruct, assess, and assign letter grades in all content areas according to learning standards of the Iowa Core, Common Core, and national standards. In 2017-18, students in Grade 12 have now been learning and their evidence has been assessed against standards since they were in Grade 9. Teachers use best grading and reporting practices according to research and literature in the field.

Three things are primary when looking at the letter grades that exist on a DMPS student's transcript:

- 1) **The grades represent as pure an indication as possible of the academic learning of the student.** Since Grade 9, classroom behaviors such as work completion, seeking help and asking questions, working with other students and with adults, and participation have been noted through use of the DMPS Citizenship and Employability Skills Rubric. **Classroom behaviors are therefore not mixed in with, and do not distort, academic learning grades shown on the transcript.**
- 2) **Students are expected to learn and are held accountable for learning against rigorous standards, with our support.** Steps we take for this accountability: offering multiple opportunities to demonstrate learning; disallowing extra credit or bonus items; creating the conditions for students to do the academic work again when there are indications of plagiarism or other dishonesty (the behavior consequences are dealt with elsewhere); plan, instruct, and assess with accommodations and modifications for all learners in mind so that students *can* learn. For post-secondary success, we have worked to equip students with essential knowledge, work habits, skills, and character traits.
- 3) **Des Moines Public School teachers plan, instruct, and assess by using agreed-upon proficiency scales that have rigorous standards of learning embedded into the goal level (Level 3 of four levels).** The traditional 100-point grading scale is not in use by trained teachers, with some rare exceptions, as we move through our transition. Scores earned against the proficiency scales were converted to a letter grade at the very end of each semester. These letter grades were then placed into a student's official transcript.

Thank you very much for your consideration of this student's transcript as you make decisions. If you have questions about the information above, please do not hesitate to contact the people below for clarification.

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