To: SMUHSD Board of Trustees

From: Kevin Skelly, Superintendent
        Julia Kempkey, Assistant Superintendent
        Brian Simmons, Director of Curriculum and Assessment

Date: April 2, 2020

Re: Online Learning Practices and Grading During Emergencies

District staff propose that the Spring 2020 grading system shift to Credit/No Credit for all students. This recommendation is made after discussion with teacher leaders throughout the District, in consultation with superintendents of other districts, and informed by the experience of educators in other systems who have already shifted to Credit/No Credit. While not unanimous, almost every group consulted strongly supported this grade scheme for the duration of our national emergency. And virtually every school district consulted reports that they have already shifted to this grading system or plan to do so shortly.

To quote one of our principals, a Credit/No Credit system is the “least bad of the range of poor options.” The reasons for this change are many. First, there has been a significant disruption to the ordinary learning environment due to obstacles associated with the Shelter-In-Place directive. Students have varying levels of access to the curriculum due to home environments, family structures, and technological availability as well as changes to normal support structures available in the in-person educational environment. Second, the requirement to make a rapid shift to a virtual environment did not allow for teachers and staff to create a comparable educational experience for students. It would take much more time to create virtual assignments that can cover similar content and skills delivered in a physical environment. A third argument is that this grading system is appropriately aligned to the severity of the situation and will provide students and staff the flexibility to deal with the inevitable consequences of the current pandemic.

Finally, we have heard from many students and families that having the option of a letter grade increases investment in schoolwork, acknowledges outstanding achievement, and rewards student effort. This is true, and one of the reasons schools have letter grades! However, our present emergency environment has caused many families sudden and severe hardship. For students applying to colleges, their transcript is very important. Families are wondering how negative it may look if colleges know a student chose credit/no credit when receiving a grade was an option. Because of this, many students may feel forced to choose the grading option, even if the current situation presents an undue hardship on them.

As a District, we do not take this decision lightly and acknowledge its obvious shortcomings compared to traditional grades in traditional settings. We have consulted with post-secondary institutions, and we have confirmed that grades appearing on students’ transcripts during Spring 2020 will not impact students’ future educational aspirations. In particular, we would point you to the University of California’s COVID-19 Bulletin published on April 1, 2020, in which they indicate that they have, “[suspended] the letter grade requirement for A-G courses completed in winter/spring/summer 2020 for all students, including UC’s most recently admitted freshmen.” We have included some of the communications on the topic of the Spring 2020 grades from our other post-secondary education partners below and they are similar in approach.

Joint Message Joint statement from the California State Board of Education, California Department of Education, California State University, University of California, California Community Colleges and the Association of Independent California
Language for BP
Final Grades During County/State/Federal Emergencies
During times of emergencies, such as the global pandemic, fires, earthquakes, or other such disasters, the District may need to suddenly shift all instruction to a virtual setting. This level of disruption to the learning environment as well as the uncertainty of stable learning environments available to students, impacts school staff’s ability to deliver instruction to students that is comparable to what occurs under ordinary circumstances. As such, the District may be required to adopt a grading system to adjust to the situation.

Language for AR
Final Grades During County/State/Federal Emergencies
In the case of an emergency where a significant disruption to all students ability to access curriculum and teachers ability to deliver material, the District may choose a Credit/No Credit grading system.

Credit and No Credit Grading during County/State/ Federal Emergencies
Credit (C): Students who receive a Credit grade shall acquire the appropriate semester units of credit for the course. The grade shall not be counted in determining class rank, honors list, or membership in the California Scholarship Federation.

No Credit (NC): Students who receive a No Credit grade shall not receive credit for the course. This designation does not impact a students GPA.