



Hillsborough County
PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Preparing Students for Life



2025-2026 PARENT GUIDE

ELEMENTARY PROGRESS & PLACEMENT

GROUNDING IN STANDARDS. FOCUSED ON STUDENTS.

Introduction

Hillsborough County Public Schools values clear and consistent communication between home and school. Report cards are one of the most important ways we share how your child is progressing toward grade-level expectations.

This **Parent Guide to Elementary Grading & Report Cards** was created to help families understand the district's grading philosophy, what the marks on the report card mean, and how grades connect to your child's learning. It summarizes key information from state statutes and district guidelines.

While this guide highlights the most important information, it is not meant to answer every individual question. If you would like more detail, please contact your child's teacher or school administrator. They are your best resource for explaining your child's grades and the evidence behind them, as well as for providing support strategies to use at home.

Our shared goal is to ensure that grades accurately reflect your child's learning and that you, as a parent, have the information you need to partner with us in supporting their success.

Academic Grading Guidelines

Philosophy of Grading and Reporting

Hillsborough County Public Schools is committed to ensuring that grades clearly reflect your child's learning. In alignment with Florida Statute §1008.25 and current research on effective grading, report cards show how students are progressing toward mastery of grade-level Florida B.E.S.T. Standards.

Grades are determined by what students know and can do, not by effort, behavior, or compliance. Evidence of learning comes from a variety of sources—classroom work, teacher observations, projects, assessments, and performance tasks.

We believe:

- Each student is a unique learner with diverse experiences, needs, and developmental timelines.
- Student learning is ongoing and developmental; grades should reflect current levels of understanding, not past performance or task completion.
- Grades should reflect mastery of standards, not completion of assignments or accumulation of points.
- Assessment should be varied and ongoing, using multiple forms of evidence collected over time and across contexts.
- Clear, consistent communication between school and home builds trust, strengthens partnerships, and supports student growth.
- Grading practices should be transparent and equitable, free from bias, and designed to promote academic confidence and motivation.
- Grades shall not be used as rewards or punishments, but rather as a way to clearly communicate a student's academic progress and instructional needs.

Academic Progress Codes

Academic progress codes are used in the areas of ELA Reading, ELA Writing, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Art, Music, and Physical Education. These codes reflect a student's progress toward mastery of grade-level standards and are determined using multiple forms of evidence, such as formal and informal assessments, classwork, teacher observations, performance tasks, and student discussions.

Grades are not calculated by averaging scores but are instead based on a body of evidence gathered over the course of the grading period. The assigned code should represent what the student knows and is able to do by the end of the quarter, aligned to the taught benchmarks and standards.

K-2 Academic Progress Codes

The following codes are used to report academic progress for students in grades K–2:

Code	Descriptor	Definition
E	Excellent	Consistently demonstrates mastery and application of grade-level standards, concepts, and strategies taught during the grading period.
S	Satisfactory	Is progressing towards mastery and application of grade-level standards, concepts, and strategies taught during the grading period.
N	Needs Improvement/ More Time	Requires additional time or support to develop understanding of grade-level standards; targeted intervention may be needed. (Alert: Area of Concern for Promotion)
U	Unsatisfactory Progress	Has not yet demonstrated progress toward grade-level standards, concepts, and strategies taught during the grading period; targeted intervention is required. (Alert: Area of Concern for Promotion)

3-5 Academic Progress Codes

The following codes are used to report academic progress for students in grades 3-5:

Code	Descriptor	Definition
A	Excellent	Consistently demonstrates mastery and application of grade-level standards, concepts, and strategies taught during the grading period.
B	Good	Demonstrates mastery of grade-level standards, concepts, and strategies taught during the grading period with growing consistency.
C	Satisfactory	Is progressing towards mastery and application of grade-level standards, concepts, and strategies taught during the grading period.
D	Needs Improvement/ More Time	Requires additional time or support to develop understanding of grade-level standards; targeted intervention may be needed. (Alert: Area of Concern for Promotion)
F	Unsatisfactory Progress	Has not yet demonstrated progress toward grade-level standards, concepts, and strategies taught during the grading period; targeted intervention is required. (Alert: Area of Concern for Promotion)

Non-Participatory (NP) and Medically Excused (ME) Students

Students may be marked *Non-Participatory (NP)* when they are absent to the extent that there is not enough evidence to determine a level of academic progress.

When a student is medically excused from physical education with a physician's note, the PE specialist may also lack sufficient evidence to assign a progress code. In these cases, the mark *ME (Medically Excused)* is recorded on the report card to indicate the student's exemption from grading during that period.

Progress Alerts

In Hillsborough County Public Schools, a Progress Alert (SB 14600) is an interim reporting tool used to notify families when a student is not making satisfactory progress toward grade-level standards. Teachers may issue a Progress Alert when a student is at risk of receiving a grade of N, U, D, or F.

The alert is designed to:

- Inform parents of concerns before the end of the grading period
- Provide an opportunity to discuss interventions and supports
- Help families partner with teachers to address needs

Progress Alerts may also be used when a student's performance shows a downward trend, even if the final grade is not yet at risk.

Attendance and Behavior

Attendance and behavior are important components of a student's overall school experience but are not factored into academic grades. On the elementary report card, attendance and behavior appear on the left side and are reported separately from academic performance. Teachers may use this space to reflect conduct and work habits observed throughout the grading period, while academic grades should strictly reflect progress toward mastery of grade-level benchmarks.

2025-2026 Report Card Dates

Quarter	End of Grading Period*	Report Cards Viewable to Parents*
Q1	10/10/2025	10/27/2025
Q2	12/19/2025	01/20/2026
Q3	03/13/2026	04/06/2026
Q4	05/29/2026	06/08/2026

*All dates are tentative and subject to change.

Grading Students with Disabilities (SWDs)

Grades for students with disabilities reflect their progress toward grade-level standards, not their disability or current instructional level. This means that the same high expectations apply to all students, while accommodations outlined in the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) ensure access to the curriculum and opportunities to demonstrate learning.

Report card grades are determined by the general education teacher, with the required accommodations in place. These grades show how the student is progressing in relation to grade-level benchmarks. In addition to the report card, families also receive the **IEP Progress Report Insert** each quarter. This document is required by law and provides detailed information about how the student is progressing on their specific IEP goals and objectives.

A student's disability should never prevent them from receiving fair and equitable grades. Accommodations and supports are designed to give students access to instruction, and grades should reflect what the student is able to accomplish with those supports in place. This approach ensures that report cards remain a true representation of progress toward grade-level expectations, while also honoring the student's individual learning path.

Grading English Language Learners (ELLs)

Grades for English Language Learners (ELLs) reflect their progress toward grade-level standards. Teachers provide accommodations and supports that match each child's level of English proficiency so students can demonstrate what they know and understand. These supports may include strategies such as visuals, pre-taught vocabulary, sentence starters, or modified tasks that allow students to show their learning in meaningful ways.

Grades represent progress toward grade-level standards, while English proficiency is supported and tracked through other measures. This ensures that report cards communicate how the child is progressing in core subjects, while their growth in English language development is monitored separately and shared through additional progress reports and conversations.

For families, this means that report card grades give a clear picture of academic progress in content areas, while English language development continues to grow alongside subject learning.

How Parents Can Support

Parents play an important role in reinforcing learning at home and supporting their child's progress in school. Reviewing the report card together each quarter and celebrating areas of success helps build confidence and motivation. Paying attention to Progress Alerts ensures that challenges are addressed early, before they become barriers to learning. For students with IEPs or ELL plans, it is important to also review the inserts or additional reports that explain progress in those programs so you have a complete picture of growth.

Finally, by staying engaged and partnering with teachers and schools, families can help strengthen learning strategies at home and provide the encouragement children need to succeed.

Grade 3 Promotion Guidelines

What Parents Need to Know

Florida law requires that all students demonstrate reading proficiency by the end of 3rd grade. This is because strong reading skills are the foundation for success in later grades. To be promoted to grade 4, students must show that they can read at or above grade level.

To be promoted to grade 4, a student must score a Level 2 or higher on the statewide, standardized English Language Arts assessment required under s. 1008.22, F.S., for grade 3. If a student scores below this level, they may be retained in 3rd grade unless they qualify for a **Good Cause Exemption**.

Good Cause Exemptions

Good Cause Exemptions are special situations that allow students to be promoted even if they do not meet the statewide test requirement. These include:

1. Limited English proficient students who have had less than 2 years of instruction in an English for Speakers of Other Languages program based on the initial date of entry into a school in the United States.
2. Students with disabilities whose individual educational plan indicates that participation in the statewide assessment program is not appropriate, consistent with the requirements of s. 1008.212, F.S.
3. Students who demonstrate an acceptable level of performance on an alternative standardized reading or English Language Arts assessment (i-Ready, Amira, etc.) approved by the State Board of Education.
4. A student who demonstrates through a student portfolio that he or she is performing at least at Level 2 on the statewide, standardized English Language Arts assessment.
5. Students with disabilities who take the statewide, standardized English Language Arts assessment and who have an individual educational plan or a Section 504 plan that reflects that the student has received intensive instruction in reading or English Language Arts for more than two years but still demonstrates a deficiency and was previously retained in prekindergarten, kindergarten, grade 1, grade 2 or grade 3.
6. Students who have received intensive reading intervention for two or more years but still demonstrate a deficiency in reading and who were previously retained in kindergarten, grade 1, grade 2 or grade 3 for a total of two years. A student may not be retained more than once in grade 3. (s. 1008.25(5), F.S., and 1008.25(7), F.S.)

Promotion decisions in grade 3 are based on both test results and multiple ways of showing reading growth. If your child is not yet meeting grade-level expectations, the school will provide targeted reading interventions and keep you informed every step of the way.