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**Important Considerations when Determining Student Assessment and Marking/Grading Policies and Guidelines during the Covid-19 Pandemic
(for the Balance of the 2019-2020 Academic Year)**

The Canadian Assessment for Learning Network (CAfLN) is a non-profit organization that supports K to 12 and post-secondary educators. Our mission is to help implement and sustain sound assessment and grading practices that promote student learning in schools across Canada. As part of our mission to maximize learning through advocacy, relationships, and research, we would like to address the current exceptional circumstances facing our schools, and the equally exceptional measures that will be required to address student needs in an equitable way. Ministries of education and school boards are facing tremendous challenges as the world navigates a pandemic, not only to address immediate needs of educators, students, and families, but to prepare for the future challenges presented by interrupted and/ or drastically altered educational processes.

Assessment serves multiple purposes within any learning context: first, it elicits evidence of students' current skills and understanding in relation to specific learning goals; it then communicates students' strengths and needs to teachers and students to provide them with the information required to respond to those needs in specific and meaningful ways; and it allows teachers to verify the degree to which students have achieved the desired skills and understanding over time so that this information may be shared with stakeholders. In other words, assessment identifies students' needs, celebrates their strengths, documents learning as it progresses, and verifies and communicates levels of proficiency at the end of an instructional cycle. These roles are essential, regardless of whether learning occurs in classrooms or remotely.

In responding to the Covid-19 pandemic and a shifting educational landscape, CAfLN believes that the primary responsibilities must be to maintain equitable learning opportunities for all students and to communicate clearly with all stakeholders. Given the diversity of educational responses to the pandemic, it is important to be mindful of the foundational, research-based attributes of effective assessment, grading, and reporting. Ministries of Education across the country are currently developing guidelines and policies to address the challenge of determining end-of-year/end-of-course marks/grades in the event that students may be out of school for a considerable time and/or may not return to school before the end of June. While these directives are essential to guide teachers' practices in the immediate crisis, it is imperative that marking/grading and reporting decisions be made within the context of rich instruction, targeted and specific feedback, and opportunities for learners to continue to practice and grow for the remainder of the academic year. Without this context, it may be tempting to fall back on

simplistic and expeditious numerical mark/grade determination and lose the power of assessment as a foundation for learning.

When it is time to summarize assessment evidence and report results, we know that teachers want to communicate clear and accurate statements about student achievement, not only to reflect each learner's current levels of skill and understanding, but to support future decision-making at the next grade level or in post-secondary settings. In order to support ministries of education and school boards as they draft guidelines and policies to address marking/grading and reporting "end-of-year/course achievement", we would like to offer the following considerations:

Elementary and Middle Schools

No marks/grades, narrative reports only. This will serve to communicate important information to students, families and next year's teachers while maintaining a focus on learning.

High Schools

Given the exceptional circumstances facing high school teachers and students, a temporary solution is necessary in the area of grading and reporting. Guskey (2020) suggests:

The most efficient and equitable approach in secondary schools is for teachers to use existing information about each student to determine a mark/grade of Incomplete, Pass and Pass with Distinction based on evidence of achievement at the time classes were suspended.

All students who had provided insufficient evidence of achievement (therefore incomplete) at the time classes were suspended may be provided with the opportunity to provide sufficient evidence¹. If they don't provide the necessary evidence the final mark/grade for this year is Incomplete.

Students may be allowed to opt for pass/fail or the opportunity to earn "Pass with Distinction." This might involve teachers having a conference with these students to determine the necessary additional evidence and the success criteria, and following up to determine whether students have provided evidence of sufficient quality².

¹ All evidence submitted should contain a statement like this signed by the student;

"Academic Integrity means **honesty** and **responsibility** in scholarship. My signature below shows my commitment to and obligation that all of my academic work is from my own efforts unaided except where specified. _____ (initial here)" (Source: Crofton House School, Vancouver)

² We recognize when we provide the opportunity for "Pass with Distinction" it places equity of access and equity of learning in jeopardy. Some students will opt into deep and rich learning and some will opt out. Even worse, some won't have the option because access (technology, time, resources, supports, self-determination, confidence) will prevent it. Therefore, it is essential that when schools reopen all students have the opportunity to provide sufficient evidence to receive a Pass with Distinction.