2022-2023 Research Package
Topic 1: THW implement a pass/fail system in schools from grades K to 10

Background:
Feedback in various forms has long been a component of education in order to assess and improve student learning. Over the past century, many standardized forms of grading have been developed, including the 100-point, 4.0-point, and A-F scales in order to more clearly communicate the level of learning achieved, not only to students and parents, but also between institutions. While the utility of these grading systems has often been questioned, the shift to virtual learning in recent years has brought the issue to the forefront once again as schools at many levels moved to a pass/fail grading system to ease the burden on students, parents, and teachers who were affected to differing degrees by the pandemic. With this shift has also come questions about whether pass/fail grading should be permanently implemented, particularly at the K-10 levels when formal grades are not needed for university admissions.

Questions to think about:
The following questions are meant to help you approach the topic and to guide your research. Keep in mind how your answers might differ on proposition vs opposition.

What is the purpose of school?
There is no one right answer to this question but ideas may range from preparing children for the challenges of life, to learning how to acquire particular practical skills. Regardless of the answer, both proposition and opposition must determine which assessment system best supports these goals.

What does it mean to pass or fail?
Defining and modeling a pass/fail system is an important aspect of this debate for proposition and will depend, in part, on the goals of the education system. Learning feedback and consequences may include written feedback, average grade cutoffs, opportunities to repeat exams, learning a set proportion of the material, etc. This may also differ by grade, subject, school, etc. To avoid getting bogged down in definitions, remember to relate your points back to the question of what the purpose of school is.

What motivates students to succeed?
The drive to learn more and work harder may come from a variety of sources, including curiosity, parental pressure, competitiveness, future opportunities, test performance, etc. Whether any of these factors is positive or negative is up to you but the effect of different grading systems on student motivation and whether the results of those systems are indicators of success will help inform your debate.

Who does pass/fail grading impact?

The actors in this debate may include students, parents, teachers, and others, with each being uniquely affected by the implementation of pass/fail grading. The role each of these actors plays in the education system, the pros and cons of different assessment formats as they impact the people in this system, and the grading methods that best suit each actor are important to consider.

Links:

https://highschool.latimes.com/orange-county-school-of-the-arts/opinion-a-pass-fail-grading-system-should-be-implemented-earlier/

https://highschool.latimes.com/crean-lutheran/opinion-pass-fail-grades-are-motivation-at-its-lowest/

https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/06/learning/coronavirus-schools-grading.html