



HOMESTEAD HIGH SCHOOL

March 10, 2015

Dear Parent/Guardian,

As final exams for the second trimester have concluded but are still on everyone's mind, I want to take this opportunity to update you on the future of finals here at Homestead.

As you may be aware, conversations regarding the form and function of our current final exam structure have been occurring among HHS faculty and administration. These conversations came about as a result of our commitment to continuous improvement, which challenges us to review practices and procedures, ask why we do what we do, and consider whether or not those actions are in students' best interests and are aligned with our beliefs about teaching and learning.

During the analysis of final exams with our Leadership Team (which includes administrators, department chairs, and specialists for areas like IMC, gifted and talented, and literacy), the group identified the assets and challenges of our current system. Universally, building leaders agree that students benefit from having a culminating assessment experience in their classes. But, several aspects of our current final exams system are not designed to provide students with the most valuable and authentically rigorous learning experience possible.

Our improved system will include the following components:

- After completing the culminating assessment, regardless of its form, students will receive meaningful feedback from the teacher. They will see their grade and learn what they did well and how they can improve. To accommodate the timing for feedback, culminating assessments cannot occur at the very end of the trimester.
- There is no need for all culminating assessments across the school to be done on the same two days. In fact, this system encourages cramming and puts artificial stress and pressure on students, which can impede learning and retention. The timing of culminating assessments will not be constrained by a master calendar; still, planning will be mindful of the academic demands that students face across their class schedule.
- As many valid forms of assessment exist, teachers are not currently required to create an examination for a course; projects, presentations, and other performance-based assessments already serve as "final exams" in some cases. Paper-and-pencil tests, while still allowable in the new system, will not be the expected norm across courses.
- Culminating assessments do not need to occur in an on-demand format. Depending on the learning objectives being measured, students may be better served by an assessment completed outside of class, a paper, for example.
- Culminating assessments will focus on the essential understandings that students develop when completing a course and not on collections of details more appropriately assessed through measures like quizzes or unit tests.

With these parameters in place, the faculty and administration are finalizing a new system for culminating assessments that will begin in first trimester of the 2015-2016 school year. This new approach will replace “final exams” and “final exam days” as we know them.

This spring, additional information will be provided to you via letters like this, an FAQ document, in-person updates at events like PTSO meetings and parent principal chats, and an evening meeting (date and time to be determined).

When school starts in the fall, all teachers will describe the culminating assessment for each of their classes. Students will learn that information during the opening days of each trimester, and parents will receive it during classroom presentations at Curriculum Night. To kick off Curriculum Night, I will provide an overview of our new school-wide approach to culminating assessment. Details about that presentation and Curriculum Night in general will be shared in an August mailing.

In closing, I am proud and excited to share these developments with you. This work reflects our deep commitment to high-quality learning and an interest among our faculty to evolve for the good of our students.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at your convenience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'B. Bowers', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Brett Bowers
Principal