



# HOMESTEAD HIGH SCHOOL

March 16, 2015

Dear Parent/Guardian,

As principal of Homestead High School, I have the great honor of leading this fine institution. In that leadership role, I assume responsibility for our academic program, the culture of our school, and our students' satisfaction and success. At the same time, I am charged with upholding and strengthening confidence in our school as a learning institution of the highest quality.

Earlier this week, I provided you with a letter explaining the conceptual framework for changes to final exams at Homestead High School. Those changes were grounded in the belief that students should be held to the highest academic standard and that by making some adjustments to our current system, we can improve student learning.

Since that letter was distributed, I have received mixed feedback: parents expressing strong support and others expressing strong concern. As always, I appreciate all parent feedback. Only with an active parent partnership can I make informed decisions to benefit Homestead and our students.

Discussion about the future of final exams has extended across our community and even reached local media outlets, who have represented this issue as they deemed appropriate. As conversations have continued and expanded, the information in my letter has caused some to see Homestead as lowering its academic expectations or stepping back from its commitments as a college preparatory institution. Others have expressed concern that these academic changes were developed as a stress-reduction strategy that will ultimately leave Homestead graduates unprepared for the rigors of college and life.

Please know that improved student learning within a system of high expectations was the exclusive objective for the proposed changes—adjusting the calendar to give students the opportunity for feedback from their teachers after completing a final exam, giving a final presentation, or submitting a final paper. I applaud the Homestead faculty for their willingness to adjust our internal systems with the intention of reaching that outcome.

For the past several days, I have reflected on the messaging around our proposed changes to final exams as well as the feedback that I have received from parents. Further, I have consulted with Superintendent Dr. Demond Means and Assistant Superintendent Matt Joynt. Collectively, we have decided to halt discussions regarding modification to the final exam schedule at Homestead. **The plan shared this week has been repealed. The current final exam schedule at Homestead will remain in place.** Although I support

alterations to the current system, that work cannot come at the cost of parent confidence or community-wide trust in Homestead as a top-notch college preparatory institution.

Our faculty and administration will continue to collaborate regarding improvements to final exams, working to create the best possible measures of student learning. But, we will do so within the existing system. Regardless of their format (paper-and-pencil, culminating portfolio, presentation), final exams must prepare students for the rigors of college and career. They will continue to do so.

In closing, I regret the unproductive attention this topic received in the community this week. At Homestead, we strive to remain strategically focused on initiatives and communication that will advance our school mission, our school growth plan, and ultimately the district's strategic plan. Unfortunately, the proposed change communicated this week has drawn attention away from the meaningful work being done here. Looking forward, I assure you that we will rededicate ourselves to continuous improvement in a manner that strengthens community confidence and that produces best results for students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'B. Bowers', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Brett Bowers  
Principal