

Frequently Asked Questions Changing the Finals Schedule at DHS

Q: Why is DHS making this change this year?

A: DHS teachers, administrators and parent leaders have long believed it is in the best academic and emotional interest of high school students to have final exams and for the first semester to end before the winter break.

The DJUSD school year calendar typically has a semester end date of mid-to late-January for the entire school district and changing the entire calendar is still in the discussion stage. Therefore, other strategies have been under discussion at DHS and it has been decided that we will pilot a pre-winter break finals schedule this year to determine if DHS can positively impact the finals experience for all students, without necessitating other changes to the entire district calendar.

Q: What are the educational/academic reasons for this change?

A: DHS, like all schools has a responsibility to improve the academic success of all students and a long two-week winter break, just before the first semester ends impacts the academic success of most students at DHS. While the impact varies from student to student and class to class, most students do not perform at their peak on final exams after this long break. Students who struggle academically suffer the most when there is a long break between the content taught and the exam.

Q: What does “Academic Success” for all students mean?

A: Academic Success for all students is not only making sure our “A” students keep getting A’s. We have students who struggle to pass classes, struggle to maintain GPA’s that will keep them eligible to graduate, and struggle to keep them eligible to attend a Community College or a State University. Having final exams after a long break can make the difference between a pass/fail for these students. DHS teachers have consistently indicated that this break threatens the success of some of our students.

Here is a quote from one DHS teacher who offered to share his observations:

“Some students use the winter break to catch up, to get ahead and to study for finals, but for the majority of DHS students I notice a negative effect on their performance during finals. For most of my “A” students, the effect is fairly small, but for my “C” and “D” students (or for any student that needs more support in a particular class/subject), the effect is significant. I know I am not alone in this observation; after a two-week break, most teachers find they need to do at least some review of old material and the net effect is that the break widens the gap between my “A” students and my “C” and “D” students”.

Q: How will this help with the stress and emotional health of my student?

A: Students feel stress during their winter break. Whether they are studying or not, having finals looming impacts students' ability to unwind over break. Our seniors have the double-pressure of private college applications which are due in January. Thus, they are facing the pressure of doing well on finals that will appear on their college application transcript and writing their applications. Stress levels for DHS seniors are especially high during winter break, a time intended for rest and family.

Q: What is the finals schedule going to be?

A:

Monday December 17	Tuesday December 18	Wednesday December 19	Thursday December 20	Friday December 21
Regular Monday schedule	1 st 7:45 – 8:25	2nd Per Final 7:45 – 9:50	3rd Per Final 7:45 – 9:50	1st Per Final 7:45 – 9:50
	2 nd 8:31 – 9:11			
	3 rd 9:17 – 9:57			
	Break 9:57 – 10:01	Break 9:50 – 10:10	Break 9:50 – 10:10	Break 9:50 – 10:10
	4 th 10:07:10:52	4th Per Final 10:20 - 12:10	5th Per Final 10:20 - 12:10	6th Per Final 10:20 - 12:10
	5 th 10:58 – 11:38			
	6 th 11:44 – 12:29			
	Lunch 12:29 – 1:19			
7 th Per Final 1:25 – 3:25				

Q: What will the time between winter break and before the official end of the semester look like? What will my student be doing during that time?

A: Students will continue regular coursework. It may vary from course to course, but in all cases this time will be regular instructional time. In some cases it may be a short, self-contained unit or project or it may simply be the next chapter or unit that will then result in a regular test or assessment that could be combined with the students' final exam scores to provide for a full semester grade.

Q: Will the curriculum in semester classes be cut short by two weeks?

A: No. Students in Economics and U.S. Government, and all other semester classes, will complete the required curriculum after the break and any additional tests, project, papers, etc. will simply be combined with the final exam scores for the students' semester grade.

Q: Will this affect the material my student is taught in classes over the course of the whole academic year?

A: No. Most DHS courses are year-long. The timing of first semester final exams does not impact the amount of instructional material covered throughout the year and teachers can combine final exam scores with other assessments to determine an appropriate semester grade.

Q: How will split-site students be impacted?

A: DHS administrators have spoken to the Junior High Schools, Independent Study, and DaVinci administrators who will make any necessary accommodation for students who need to be at DHS for final exams.

Q: What if my family has a trip planned that will now be during finals week?

A: Whether final exams are being administered or not, this week of school is a regularly scheduled week. Regular rules around unexcused absences will be in place.

Q: What if my student is sick – will s/he have to wait until after break to make up the final?

A: Yes.

Q: How will DHS measure the effectiveness of this pilot?

A: A committee comprised of DHS students, staff and parent leaders has been organized and will meet in January to gather input from students, teachers and administrators about the outcome of this pilot. A survey tool will be developed and distributed to various stakeholder groups to gather wide-spread feedback and information. Any teacher, parent or student who wants to provide feedback after the completion of final exams will be given an opportunity to do so.