The Wildcat Cless Durant High School October 24, 2024

High school implements mandatory finals

Bv Kila Wink

Durant High School is taking on a new schedule for final exams this school year, according to Principal Joel Diederichs.

Before this year, as classes wrapped up a semester, teachers could pick if they wanted to have a cumulative final over material from the entire semester or a unit test on what the students were currently learning.

However, Mr. Diederichs has implemented a new method this year. All teachers are required to have a final test based on the curriculum from the whole semester.

Teachers who didn't have a final previous to this year are now required to have one, including physical education teachers.

A three-day period at the end of the semester will feature finals in all eight periods. The first two days are dedicated to the tests.

Day one will feature finals in periods one through four. Day two will feature finals in periods five through eight. The third

day of testing is anticipated to be a makeup test day. If students do not have finals to make up, they are allowed to stay home.

The principal said the new finals schedule will ensure that class work will continue through the last day of the semester.

"I just don't want them [teachers] in an environment where they stop taking grades way early," said Mr. Diederichs. "I want them to utilize all their time."

Mr. Diederichs had this same finals schedule in high school.

"If you decide to go on to college, you'll have a final schedule," he said.

Mr. Diederichs said these finals are given by a lot of schools around us, and he feels the schedule will have a positive impact on students and teachers.

"It gives them something to target for and something to prepare for," he said.

When Durant comes back from Christmas break, high school students will have two weeks to get ready for the first round of finals.

"So it gives us a good chance to prepare for it and then take the final," Mr. Diederichs said.

During the three-day final schedule, students will be given more freedom. For example, if students have a study hall period, they are able to go home to wait for the next test to begin, and if students finish a test early, they will be allowed to leave.

On the downside, if students had finals in the past, those tests may have been spread out over a longer period of time. Now, under the new schedule, students may have to take up to eight finals in two days.

Junior Ella Clark feels that the three-day finals schedule will be overwhelming.

"I think it will make it harder on me because if people are in two or more sports like I am right now, it's hard to find time to do study guides, let alone have multiple tests in one day," said Clark.

"I complain when I have one test, and I think it drains me, so to have possibly

four or more in one day, it will be exhausting."

On the staff side, Spanish teacher Mr. Jeff Trask said he is looking forward to the new finals schedule because the longer period will allow him to give a variety of tests in one sitting.

"It's actually almost perfect for me because I'll be able to get a listening, reading, and writing test in. I may even be able to get a speaking quiz in as well, or I might do that like the day before," he said.

Physical education teachers are now required to hold a final test, and Mr. Cody Wille said he will add a lesson to prepare for his gym final.

"My first few years teaching I was required to have a final in my classes, so this isn't something new to me," he said. "I don't see anything wrong with having a final in physical education classes."

Mr. Wille said he plans to have a written final, which he will be able to "tweak" from semester to semester.

Cell phone bans spreading in Iowa school districts

By Colby Gast

A former Durant High School principal is a part of a new wave of administrators restricting phone use in school districts in Iowa.

Mr. Tony Neumann, the principal at Durant High School from 2011 to 2016, is now the superintendent at the Iowa Falls and Alden school districts where a cell phone ban is in its second year at the high school level.



Neumann

the middle school has had a ban implemented for a few years, Mr. Neumann said the phones have become a real distraction for

While

the students in his high school.

"We collected various data points on both students and staff and found that the majority of high school students were disengaged from the learning over 15 percent of the time," said Mr. Neumann.

"We were still in a 4x4 block schedule and found students were more engaged with their phones than the teachers or homework."

Before the high school put in the

mandatory phone policy, it was left up to teachers to enforce their own no-phone policy.

However, this system was not successful as it wasn't enforced consistently and caused frustration for the teachers.

"Our high school principal was also dealing with more and more discipline problems that were directly related to cell phones," said Mr. Neumann.

"Students were filming/snapping each other during the school day, trying to take embarrassing photos/videos of each other, or calling each other out on social media, and this was becoming almost a weekly occurrence."

Phones not only caused distractions in class but anxiety within the student body, according to Mr. Neumann.

"Beyond the issues that cell phones caused directly with discipline, we were seeing an increase in students seeing our counselor or Student Success Coach due to anxiety caused by social media," Mr. Neumann said

Under the ban, students are expected to put their phones in their locker at the beginning of the day and leave them there until school ends.

Students are not allowed to have their cell phones during lunch either.

The school district follows a strict

policy if students are caught with a phone or refuse to give up their phone.

"If students are caught with their phone, it is taken to the office," said Mr. Neumann.

"If they refuse to give up their phone, they are sent home for the day."

After a second violation, parents must come to school to get the phone.

According to Mr. Neumann, over time, students and parents had a positive reaction to this policy.

"While students didn't like the rule at first, we have had a lot of positive comments about them not having their phones during the day," Mr. Neumann said.

The students can be seen interacting with each other more throughout the school day, especially during lunch, students are more engaged in class, office referrals are down, and fewer students are making requests to see the counselor due to social media posts.

Many other school districts in Iowa are slowly moving towards this policy.

"Many of our conference schools already had a similar policy," said Mr. Neu-

"We have also had a few schools reach out to us about our policy to copy it."

California recently joined a group of five other states that have banned or re-



Photo by Kila Wink

stricted cell phones in the classroom, according to an article on EdSource.org.

However, as of now, Durant doesn't intend to move towards a policy like this, according to Principal Joel Diederichs and Superintendent Joe Burnett.

In a *Chronicles* article in December, Mr. Diederichs said he briefly thought about a no cell phone policy and has been approached by different faculty members about it.

Yet, he does not plan on adopting a no cell phone policy for the high school at this time.

"I said that we'd look at that [no cell phone policy], but I left it at an individual teacher basis on their decision on it," said Mr. Diederichs.

Authorities reassure public after recent incident at school

By Allison Toft

Authorities have investigated an unspecified incident last month at Durant High School and assured the community there is no danger to students.

"The crisis team was notified of a possible incident at the school," said an email sent to parents September 12, a day after the incident. "The crisis team has investigated this incident and determined it to be non-credible."

Police Chief Orville Randolph and Superintendent Joe Burnett did not reveal any details of the incident.

However, Mr. Burnett said, "It's under control. We are always in touch with local law enforcement, and we would not come back to school if it was not safe."

Chief Randolph also said, "All I can say is Durant Community School District is a safe district. You're in a safe environment setting for learning."

After the incident September 11, the Durant Police Department had extra patrols at the school for two days.

"We had things in place at school that you probably didn't even notice we were doing," Chief Randolph said. "We were trying to do it casually. You might have noticed some extra officers, maybe, maybe not. We were trying to be discreet, and we let the school day carry on as normal within the building."

According to the *New York Times*, more than 700 children and teenagers were arrested nationwide for making violent

threats against schools in a three-week period after a school shooting at Apalachee High School in Georgia September 4.

Last month, Florida sheriff Mike Chitwood was fed up with school shooting threats, so he arrested an 11-year-old boy who made a school shooting threat and revealed the boy's identity, according to an article in the *Quad-City Times*.

Chief Randolph disagrees with that approach toward handling school threats and feels a juvenile's identity should remain confidential.

"You or I could do something silly," said Chief Randolph, "and we just had poor judgment for that moment...I don't want to label anybody over just a poor incident."

Chief Randolph, who is a SWAT

team negotiator, said he often has to deal with mental health issues as part of his job.

"We all have a different state of mental health, and to do something like that [reveal a juvenile's identity], are you resolving the problem or just shaming somebody into something?" Chief Randolph said.

School threats have been an issue for some time, but there is always an increase in the number of threats after an incident or shooting, and there is sometimes a reason for it

"Copycats. Maybe the political environment at the time," said Chief Randolph, who also blames social media.

"Social media is a blessing, but it also poses problems too. Because facts and See INCIDENT, page 3