



**Welcome Back to School: Spring Semester**

**February 3, 2015 for A and C Weeks**

**February 9, 2015 for B Week**

As we wrap up the most current Regents exams, I want to thank all the students who came to the school during Storm Juno and took their exams. This is a testament to your resilience (making it through the bad weather), responsibility (taking testing seriously and studying hard), and respect (for yourselves, your families, and your futures). And thanks to all the families who supported students. Congratulations to you all!

This semester will bring new challenges and successes. Our first issue is of course the cell phone policy. We have heard from a number of students and parents that “the mayor said we could have our phones in school.” This is not what the mayor said or meant. In the past, the Chancellor’s Cell Phone Policy was one of zero tolerance. Cell phones were NOT to be brought into the school building at all. Early on, as a Charter School, we set our own policy which was students would be allowed to bring their phones into the building, but had to check them in at the security desk. This WILL NOT CHANGE. The mayor’s point was that each school should be able to set their own cell phone policy. We have already done that, no cell phones past the security desk. Students who attend New Dawn must be willing to take on the responsibility of checking in their phones before entering the building. Students who refuse to do this will be sent home. In the past we allowed cell phones into the building and the amount of classroom disruption this caused was unprecedented and we will not go back to this. We hope our families will support us and work with your student in understanding why they must check in their cell phones. Please feel free to contact us and discuss the issue.

We implemented a new testing policy last semester. The gist of the new policy is that we no longer apologize or make excuses for testing students. This has always been the way of education and we take our responsibility for preparing students for graduation and college very seriously. All our students must pass at least five Regents exams to graduate and that must be part of our culture. Further, we constantly assess where our students are academically to ensure that we are teaching the correct lessons. For the first time, students took regular assessments and this is helping us strengthen our instruction program and preparing them for college. We will continue this into the spring semester.

A new grading policy was also implemented last semester which focused on what students learned rather than if they were in class or how they behaved in class. This new policy had one very unexpected outcome: some students thought they did not have to attend class because they were no longer being graded on behavior. Nothing could be further from the truth. Students who are not in class are not learning what they need to know so when assessments and projects came due, those students who did not attend class, failed. Therefore, this year, we are still not engaging in “emotional”



grading (i.e., how you behave in class), but grading on what the student has learned plus our three R's: responsibility, respect, and resilience. We will be sharing this grading policy with students so that they clearly understand what is expected of them.

Finally, we are in our third year of operation. What this means is that our renewal cycle starts this spring. We are asking any parent who is interested in sharing their thoughts about the school to let us know and come talk to representatives from our authorizing body, the New York State Education Department Board of Regents. This is clearly a big year for the school and the State is extremely interested in hearing parent perspectives. Your students are also going to be asked to meet with representatives as well.

So welcome back to New Dawn. We look forward to a wonderful semester, a huge graduating class, and a successful academic spring.

Dr. Asmussen