

# USA TODAY

## URBAN SCIENCE ACADEMY FAMILY NEWSLETTER

### Headmaster's Note

Dear USA Families:

It is hard to believe that the new school year is right around the corner. As you may recall, I was selected by Superintendent McDounough to serve as Interim Headmaster, effective on July 1<sup>st</sup>. I have been blessed to have worked at USA for the last nine years, initially as a Senior Curriculum Access Specialist beginning when the school opened in 2005 and for the past four years as an Assistant Headmaster. I have had the good fortune to work under two excellent headmasters. The mentorship they provided has prepared me to assume this new role and work collaboratively with the rest of our faculty and staff to build on our work at USA. Ultimately, my commitment to you is that the entire faculty and staff will continue to strive to do whatever it takes to "do right by your child." On behalf of our dedicated faculty and staff, I look forward to partnering with you to support this endeavor. Your partnership in this work is welcomed and essential to ensuring that all of our students ultimately leave us prepared for success in college and career.

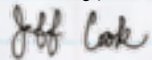
I am also thrilled to introduce several new staff to the USA family. They include Darlene Marcaono, who will serve as our Assistant Headmaster; Jacky Ismeus, who will serve as our Instructional Technology Support Specialist; Blanca Bermudez-Blanco who will serve as our Lower Academy Dean of Students; and Patricia Harding, our librarian. Please see page five of this newsletter to learn more about the newest additions to the USA faculty and staff.

A hallmark of USA is our faculty and staff's commitment to closely collaborate in an effort to make our great school even greater. With this in mind, the entire staff, along with student representatives, came together for two days in late June to revise essential policies, laying the foundation for a brand new USA Family and Student Handbook. This handbook will be distributed to and reviewed with students shortly after the start of the school year. It will also be posted on our website ([www.urbansci.com](http://www.urbansci.com)). When reading the USA Family and Student Handbook, you will note that significant revisions have been made to our grading/assessment and attendance policies. A brief overview of the revisions to these policies is included on page two and three of this newsletter.

I hope to meet you during our New Family Welcome Session on August 25<sup>th</sup> (8:00 - 9:30 AM) and/or during our Back to School Night on October 2<sup>nd</sup> (6:00 - 8:00 PM). In the meantime, please don't hesitate to reach out to me with any questions. I can be reached at 617-635-8930 and/or at [JCook@urbansci.net](mailto:JCook@urbansci.net).

Have a wonderful school year!

Sincerely,



Jeffrey S. Cook  
Interim Headmaster



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## Student Activities Fee

The School Site Council voted during their meeting in May to approve a \$10 Student Activity Fee. Every student will be expected to pay this fee by the end of September. Unfortunately, as schools across the country have encountered budget cuts Student Activity Fees have become the norm. At USA, Student Activity Fees will help to offset the cost of field trips and community wide celebrations. Please contact Mr. Cook at [JCook@urbansci.net](mailto:JCook@urbansci.net) should you have any questions or concerns about this new fee.



## Reminder about Humanities Summer Reading Assignments

Students who will be taking Humanities III or Humanities IV were assigned Summer Reading Assignments that are due on Thursday, September 4<sup>th</sup>. Students were given handouts describing these assignments in June. The handouts with directions for these assignments can also be found at [urbansci.com](http://urbansci.com).

# Attendance Policy

## Revised ~ Effective School Year 2014 - 2015



**Wanted: All Students in Every Class On Time Every Day!** Effective for this school year, USA's attendance policy has been revised to in part send the message that outstanding attendance is not only required but also expected, as we know that academic success and consistent attendance (90% or greater) go hand-in-hand.

### Attendance Policy:

Only absences caused by illness/injury (verified by a doctor) that prevent the student from attending school, a death in the immediate family or other significant personal or family crisis, medical or psychological appointments that cannot be scheduled at other times, court appearances, religious holy days, or college campus visits (verified by a college admissions official) may be excused. **Simply bringing a note from a parent/guardian - although appreciated - without accompanying documentation (e.g., a doctor's note) will not excuse an absence.** Official documentation of absences should be provided to Ms. Giblin in the main office. Students with more than three unexcused absences per term will receive a grade of NC if they are otherwise passing a class. A grade of NC will only be changed back to the letter grade earned if a student has less than 12 unexcused absences at the end of the year or passes the course's final exam.

\*Note that three unexcused tardies is equal to one unexcused absence.

### Attendance "Buy-Back" Policy:

Students with unexcused absences can "buy" them back by doing the following:

- 1) Being on time for **five** CONSECUTIVE days and having no behavioral issues. All teachers will sign-off on an "Attendance Buy-Back" form and meet with the student on the Friday of the end of the buy-back week to show the growth that has been shown by a student to show how well they do when they are in school/class consistently. Students who accomplish this feat will be able to "buy back" one unexcused absence.
- 2) Participating in the After-School Program

Teachers who work with you after school will sign off on an "Attendance Buy-Back" form. Students can "buy back" one unexcused absence for every three After-School Program days they attend.

## Fall Sports Info

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For all those interested in participating on a Raiders athletic team this fall, please contact the coach of the team you want to be a part of. Their contact info is below. While all sports besides football start in September, practice for football begins the last week of August.

### Football

Derek Wright, Head Coach  
[dwright3@boston.k12.ma.us](mailto:dwright3@boston.k12.ma.us)

Kirk Womack, Assistant Coach  
[kwomack@urbansci.net](mailto:kwomack@urbansci.net)

### Boys' Soccer

Paul McDonald, Coach  
[pmcdonald2@bostonpublicschools.org](mailto:pmcdonald2@bostonpublicschools.org)



### Cheerleading

Colleen Rackette, Coach  
[cmrackette@gmail.com](mailto:cmrackette@gmail.com)

### Girls' Soccer

Edner Cayemite, Coach  
[ecayemite@boston.k12.ma.us](mailto:ecayemite@boston.k12.ma.us)



### Girls' Volleyball

Modesto Gomes, Coach  
[mgomes@bostonpublicschools.org](mailto:mgomes@bostonpublicschools.org)

Note: Sign-up info for Boy's Soccer and Cheerleading will be available the first week of school.

## USA'S GRADING & ASSESSMENT POLICY: PERFORMANCE BASED LEARNING 2.0

### Overview:

The Urban Science Academy's faculty and staff are dedicated to preparing all students for success in college and the workforce through rigorous instruction and high academic and behavioral expectations, with a focus on fairness and equity. A hallmark of Urban Science Academy is the staff and faculty's commitment to collaborating, constantly improving practices in order to better support our students as they strive to meet our high expectations. It was in this spirit that beginning in the 2012-13 academic year the school implemented Performance-Based Grading (PBG). The change sought to better evaluate students' academic performances in a manner that was more accurate, fair, consistent, meaningful, and supportive of learning. With any new initiative, it is important to reflect on its strengths and weaknesses. Such reflection has occurred with the aid of focus groups and surveys that involved staff,

students, and families. It is with this reflection and feedback in mind that Performance Based Learning 2.0 (PBL 2.0) was developed. PBL 2.0 represents a significant revision to PBG and will be implemented effective in SY 2014-2015.

### Hallmarks of PBL 2.0

- Students will be holistically assessed with an emphasis placed on growth pertaining to scholarly habits, academic skills, and content area understanding.
- As a part of considering overall performance--in addition to being provided with feedback and grades on summative assessments (quizzes, tests, labs, debates, exhibitions, projects, essays)--students **will be provided with explicit feedback and grades on scholarly habits (homework, organization, preparedness, participation, active learning, note-taking, etc.)**. Since



Performance based learning continued...

students were not formally graded on their scholarly habits, many students wrongly perceived that the school did not value scholarly habits. Although this could not be further from the truth, PBL 2.0 has been designed to drive home the message to students that scholarly habit development is as important as their growth in academics.

- Opportunities for Re-Learning (Retakes): Retakes, which were a hallmark of PBG, will remain an integral component of PBL 2.0; albeit with significant changes described below. After all, we know that we learn most from our mistakes. A common sense "Retake" policy encourages students to embrace teacher feedback and learn from their

mistakes so they ultimately grow as learners.

### **Guidelines for Retakes**

**Students will be given a two-week period from the time an assignment is returned to complete retakes.** Students will only have the opportunity to retake assessments if they demonstrate effort on an initial summative assessment and fall short in an area(s)/learning target.

Prior to taking a retake, students will be **required** to do the following:

- meet with their teacher to review feedback and engage in re-learning.

- complete additional practice in the area/ learning target in which they struggled.
- schedule a date and time to retake the assessment.

Teachers will implement PBL 2.0 with much greater consistency. 9th Grade, 10th Grade, and in the Upper Academy (11th and 12th Grades) teachers have outlined exactly how PBL will be implemented across each grade level, including a breakdown of how grades will be weighed. Specific details about how grades will be weighed will be noted in the USA Student & Family Handbook as well as on the syllabus for each class.

## Supplies

Students will need a three-ring binder with lined paper. Depending on student preference, they can have a small three-ring binder for each course or one large three-ring binder (with dividers) that can accommodate handouts from all of their classes. In addition to binder(s), students will want to obtain an ample amount of folders, pencil, pens, and highlighters. Although, it is recommended that students have a graphing calculator and computer to keep at home it is not a requirement, as teachers will provide them when necessary for use during class. Lastly, agenda books will be provided by the school.

## Have you moved or changed your phone number?

Make sure you are receiving important information about your child's education and school-related events. If you need to update your address, phone number, and/or email, please contact:

Jane Giblin, Secretary

Call: (617) 635 - 8930

Email: [jgiblin@urbansci.net](mailto:jgiblin@urbansci.net)



## MEET OUR NEWEST USA FACULTY & STAFF



**Darlene Marcano**, our new Assistant Headmaster, is a proud graduate of the Boston Public School system and has served as an educator in Boston for 15 years. She is an alum of Brandeis University with an undergraduate degree

in African and African-American Studies and Classical Studies. She also has earned graduate degrees in Education from Suffolk University and Simmons College. Ms. Marcano began her career in public education as a substitute teacher in 1999 and has served as a humanities classroom teacher in middle and high school. During her tenure as a teacher, she has traveled to the African coast to study the slave trade through Boston Fund for Teachers and interned at the School of Engineering and Applied Sciences at Harvard University. She has brought these experiences to students and staff through the creation of integrated and engaging curricula. Ms. Marcano is eagerly awaiting her daughter's graduation from Boston Latin Academy in 2015.

**Patricia Harding** (not pictured) is USA's new librarian. Ms. Harding has been employed with the Boston Public Schools since 1987; largely in the area of Instructional Technology and Library Services. She looks forward to working with all students and staff to embed library/media services in all curricula areas. The library will be an information hub helping to create independent learners who can thrive in an information-based society. Any family member may feel free to contact me at [pharding@bostonpublicschools.org](mailto:pharding@bostonpublicschools.org) to discuss any specific needs, concerns, or suggestions.



**Blanca Bermudez Burgos**, our new Lower Academy Dead of Students, was born and raised in Boston, MA and is fluent in English and Spanish. She currently attends

UMass Boston and will be graduating with a bachelor's in Sociology with a focus on Urban Education. She has a background in the National Guard where she served as a Military Police for three short years and was honorably discharged when her son Lucas was born. She worked in the Probation Department for seven years, had her daughter Isabella and ventured out to Panama City. Blanca left one year later and worked for a non-profit in Boston helping women and families move up and out of poverty. She served as Chair, Co-Chair and Secretary for the Parent Council, served on the School Site Committee, Instructional Leadership Team and board member of the Friends of the Rafael Hernandez. She worked at Madison Park Technical High School in Roxbury where she worked closely with students, teachers, administration and families and also became certified as a mediator. As a Boston Public School graduate, she believes that every student deserves an excellent education, outstanding teachers and great leaders. She is a strong advocate for Restorative Justice where students build respect, take responsibility and strengthen relationships between their peers and the community. Ms. Burgos looks forward to working with the Urban Science Academy family and is eager to work with the students.



**Jacky Ismeus** is an Instructional Technology Support Specialist for the Urban Science Academy. Mr. Ismeus graduated from Northeastern University with a BS in Management Information Systems. Embracing his aptitude for technology, he continued his education by earning his MS in Computer Information Systems from Boston University, with a concentration in information security. After many years pursuing a technology career within diverse private healthcare and technology-based corporations, Mr. Ismeus realized he preferred to create impact working within an academic environment. Mr. Ismeus collaborates with colleagues to deliver technical support, as well as website and database design and maintenance. He also instructs a

grades 9-12 technical support curriculum to introduce students to the IT field. Mr. Ismeus loves reading, spending time with his family, and showcasing his ability as a Music DJ.

## Upcoming Events

Freshmen Student Orientation  
Mon., Aug 25 to Thurs., Aug 28  
8 AM to 11:45 AM

New Family Welcome Session  
Monday, Aug 25  
8 AM to 9:30 AM

First Day of School  
Thursday, Sept 4  
7:20 AM to 1:40 PM

USA After-School Programs  
Begins Monday, Sept 15  
2 PM to 3:30 PM  
every Mon., Wed., and Thurs.

Back to School Night &  
Parent Council Elections  
Thursday, Oct 2  
5:45 PM to 8 PM

College Night  
for ALL students & families  
Thursday, Oct 23  
5:45 PM to 8 PM



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### Our Vision

The Urban Science Academy strives to be a learning community built on trust, respect, resilience, and courage. We diligently dedicate ourselves to develop intellectual curiosity and academic excellence, independent thought and reflective thinking, passion and creativity. Assuming responsibility for our actions and realizing our full potential, we strive to find our place in the world and leave prepared for lifelong learning and real-world challenges.

High Expectations • High Support • Collaboration  
Commitment • Respect • Community

### URBAN SCIENCE ACADEMY

1205 VFW Parkway  
West Roxbury, MA 02132  
[www.urbansci.com](http://www.urbansci.com)