

A Note to Parents Regarding the Elementary Homework Statement

During the course of the 2008-2009 school year, the District #204 elementary school principals conducted an in-depth study on the topic of homework in order to guarantee that the district was current with best practices.

Several interesting results were found. They included:

- The focus on the purpose of homework should be student learning not compliance. Teachers know that certain learning skills require practice to perfect, and often homework is used for practice. Research confirms that mastering a skill requires focused practice (Marzano et. al, 2001.).
- Research does verify that a small amount of homework may be good for learning, but too much homework may be bad for learning. Up to a point, homework appears positive, but past the optimal amount, achievement either remains flat or declines. Curiously, the research about the appropriate amount of homework for different grade levels is already consistent with an informal guideline that many teachers already practice – the “ten minute” rule (Cooper, 2007.)
- All homework can be used to check for understanding if we convince students not to be threatened by grades. Grades are not necessary for learning to take place. Grades on homework often get in the way of learning, de-motivate students, and create power struggles between students and teachers and between students and parents (Guskey, 2003).
- The goal of assessment of learning should be to keep failure at a minimum and to maintain learner’s confidence – the opposite occurs when homework is graded. The most important question to ask about grading homework is “What is the effect on future learning?” (Stiggins, 2007.) Priority must be given to tasks that do not cause students to give up.
- All homework should receive feedback. Moving from grading to feedback encourages student ownership of learning. Allowing students to take control of their learning makes learning personal (Guskey and Anderson, 2008.)

As a result of these findings, the principals with input from the teachers revised the District #204 homework statement in order to confirm that reasonable time-limited homework is still important to the learning process. Although homework will not be graded, the practice it provides is key to the learning process. In addition, students will be accountable for homework completion per incentives, effort grades, narrative comments on report cards and progress reports, and parent/student/teacher conferences. The practice that homework provides is a key to the learning process, and experience shows that most students will not receive good grades if they do not practice. However, homework will not be graded and factored into the grades that a student receives on progress reports or report cards.

Student grades will be determined from the skills and learning that are demonstrated at school. Our teachers have and will continue to assess student performance and learning individually. Appropriate feedback for homework will be provided to ensure that students value the practice and participate in the learning activities associated with the classroom. We will revisit this conversation in each classroom during our fall curriculum night, held at the beginning of the school year. Each teacher will be able to provide you with a realistic understanding of what homework, assessment and grading will look like in the classroom.

INDIAN PRAIRIE UNIT DISTRICT 204
ELEMENTARY HOMEWORK STATEMENT

The following information supports District 204's Homework Policy 5100, current research, and the philosophy and practices of elementary school educators.

Please keep in mind as homework is assigned and completed that homework benefits student learning when it connects to, not replaces, direct instruction. It should be used for remediation, meaningful practice, and to expand concepts taught in the classroom.

The following specifics support positive, productive homework as a tool for learning:

- The "Ten Minute Rule" should be applied as a general rule for homework assignments; ten minutes multiplied by the grade level per night. (10x1 for first grade, 10x5 for fifth grade, etc.) These minutes represent a total expectation from all teachers with which a child works but do not include independent reading. The time requirements and the frequency of homework will vary according to each student's abilities, grade level, and the subject matter; however, if a child is consistently devoting time beyond the "Ten Minute Rule", parents should contact the classroom teacher. Workload adjustments, time management improvements, and/or motivation strategies are examples of ways to address such issues.
- Projects assigned as homework should be included in the "Ten Minute Rule."
- Nightly study to include homework assignments should occur on weeknights only. Weekends and vacation periods will be avoided for specific assignments unless students are making up work previously assigned. Independent reading is encouraged on a routine basis, including over the weekend and during vacation periods.
- Once homework is assigned the teacher is responsible for appropriate follow through until the assignment is completed with feedback offered in a timely fashion.
- It is appropriate for parents to answer occasional questions or provide guidance regarding an assignment. It is not appropriate for parents to do most of the assignment for their child. It is not appropriate for an assignment to require a parent to be the primary instructor. If parents feel that their child is particularly struggling with an assignment or is confused, parents should contact the classroom teacher.

Make Up Work:

- Make up work is determined by the teacher involved. Considerations include length of absence and nature of absence.
- When a student has been absent for three or more days, teachers will provide homework as appropriate given adequate time to prepare. A teacher might advise alternative assignments such as keeping a journal and assigning some reading when appropriate. Parents are asked to keep in mind that much of what happens in class (direct instruction, discussions, activities, informal assessing, group work, etc.) cannot be made up by sending paper/pencil work home.
- Upon return from an absence, students will submit make-up work in a timely fashion, generally within one to two days for every day absent.

Grading:

Assessment of student learning should occur in conjunction with instruction. Grades for that student learning should be based solely on academic achievement that takes place during instructional time. Therefore, although it is appropriate to provide feedback to students on their quality and completion of homework, their effort, behavior, and attendance, this feedback should be kept separate from that provided on academic achievement.

Homework Tips for Parents

Facilitating the learning of your child is the primary focus of the District #204 elementary staff. As a result, we understand the importance of an ongoing partnership with our parents and students as they attempt schoolwork at home. The following guidelines and tips are offered to assist you and your child to be successful (Vatterot, 2009) (Pandu, 2005) :

Parents are encouraged to

- Ask your children what they are studying in school.
- Ask your child to show you homework assignments.
- Assist your child in organizing homework materials.
- Help your child formulate a plan for completing homework.
- Provide an appropriate space for your child to do homework.

Parents may if they wish.....

- Help your child interpret assignment directions.
- Proof read your child's work, pointing out errors.
- Read aloud required reading to your child.
- Give practice quizzes to your child to help prepare for tests.
- Help your child brainstorm ideas for papers or projects.
- Praise your child for completing homework.

Parents should not.....

- Attempt to teach your child concepts or skills the child is unfamiliar with.
- Complete assignments for your child.
- Allow your child to sacrifice sleep to complete homework.

Contact the teacher if.....

- Your child refuses to do the assignment
- Instructions for the assignment are unclear
- Your child can't get organized to finish the assignment
- You can't provide the materials or supplies necessary to complete the assignment
- Neither you nor your child understand the purpose of the assignment