

## EDUCATION: PROGRAMS

## Policy 513.3-G (previously 603.3-G)

### Homework

The following district homework guidelines are intended to contribute to clarity and consistency in homework practices in order to improve student learning. However, since the topic has both structural and dynamic complexity resulting from the diversity of students, families and classrooms, effective practice cannot be reduced entirely to standard procedures or simple rules. These guidelines need to be interpreted in the context of each school, classroom and family. They provide clear directions which the Board expects staff to follow, but they are not intended to restrict professional autonomy as defined in the Collective Agreement or to limit the inherent rights and responsibilities of parents. Application of the guidelines in the interests of a particular student requires empathy, judgment and responsibility from all concerned.

Homework is most effective when it is an integral part of the overall instructional design for a class. The three principles of learning should underlie this design.

- Learning requires the active participation of the student.
- People learn in a variety of ways and at different rates.
- Learning is both an individual and a group process.

It is important that students clearly understand what they are learning, why they are learning it, how it is to be learned and their role in the learning process. This is true of class work as well as homework. Thus, when homework is assigned, its purpose should be explained in relation to class work and the benefits for the student.

#### **Purposes**

Homework may serve different purposes, including:

- development of habits and dispositions,
- consolidation of understandings and skills through independent practice,
- application and extension of understandings and skills,
- research,
- review for an upcoming class or test,
- encouraging parents to talk to their child about schoolwork, or
- giving parents an opportunity to see what their child is doing in school.

Parents should not expect teachers to assign homework simply to keep children busy or to limit their TV time. Homework cannot replace parenting in this regard.

Homework should never be assigned as a punishment.

At all ages, but particularly for younger students, homework should be designed to give parents an insight into what is being taught in class, what the child is learning, and how the child feels about him/herself as a learner.

The human and social development of students is a responsibility shared by the home and the school. Homework is only one of the many ways to help children develop confidence,

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motivation, initiative, diligence, persistence, responsibility, teamwork and problem solving abilities.

The use of homework to develop such abilities, habits and dispositions should be complementary to family and community activities. These goals can also be supported through family discussions, household chores, hobbies, community or religious activities, recreation or athletics, or the fine arts. It is important for children, particularly young children, to have unstructured time for creative play, which aids in the development of curiosity, creativity and cooperation.

## **Forms**

What is commonly referred to as "homework" actually takes several different forms. School work done at home may involve:

- completion of class work;
- homework - required activities intended to be done at home; or
- home study - optional activities intended to be done at home or self-selected study activities.

Homework itself may also take many forms, including:

- problems, worksheets and drills,
- reading, writing, thinking and discussing,
- research and projects, or
- studying for quizzes and tests.

Homework should take a form appropriate to the age and abilities of the student.

## **Homework in the Primary Grades (K-3)**

Homework in the primary grades might better be thought of as "home support" or "home connection" because the involvement of a parent or caregiver is so important to its success. The principal focus is to develop literacy, numeracy, study skills, time and resource management, curiosity, self-confidence and a disposition towards learning through enjoyable activities which can be completed successfully. It is helpful if homework encourages conversation between parents and their children about what is being learned and provides a way for parents to conveniently monitor what is being done at school and what their child is learning.

Reading is a basic skill which enables other learning. Beginning in Kindergarten, parents should establish a regular home-reading program which involves reading to and with the child. Teachers can provide guidance and assistance to parents in this regard. The program should be regular, ideally daily, but should not become onerous or frustrating for parents or students. Parents can also support their child's learning and development by talking to them about their community, working through family issues rationally in a way which develops the child's reasoning and sense of personal responsibility and initiative, playing card and board games that involve number sense and sequence, counting while setting the table, measuring while baking, and other everyday activities which encourage and allow the child to practice thinking and communicating.

Beginning in Grade 1, additional forms of homework may be a useful supplement to the home reading program.

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Math drills and spelling lists are traditional forms of homework which are popular with some parents, but research suggests that despite their appeal they are of dubious academic value for students in early primary, although they probably also do no harm in moderation.

All things considered, homework for students of this age may be better conceived as observations in the home, discussions with adults, drawing to express ideas, collecting information from newspapers or magazines, visiting the library and other such activities which can be used to promote thinking and learning. In Grades 2 and 3, limited amounts of individual memory and practice activities become increasingly more appropriate.

Regular, structured communication between home and school is essential in order for parents to know how they can participate in homework activities to support their child's learning, and provide the teacher with feedback about the child's experiences. This may take the form of a sheet attached to a home-reading program envelope, parent initials in a student journal, or a special "back-and-forth" book, but should be informal in nature and interpreted by the child as supportive rather than supervisory. All homework should be looked at by both parents and teachers in order for both to know when the child may need assistance.

## **Homework in the Intermediate Grades (4-7)**

In the intermediate grades homework should continue to be designed to support students in developing study skills and habits. It may also begin to more regularly include formal worksheets and assignments which provide independent practice of skills taught and practiced with guidance in the classroom.

Project work and independent research activities may be introduced in the intermediate grades. Students require specific guidance to assist them with the time management, organization and research skills required to complete projects successfully. It is also important to be explicit about content and format expectations, time lines and evaluation criteria.

Intermediate students benefit from learning to use a daily planner. It is important for teachers to provide explicit instruction and support to assist students in learning how to use their planner and develop the habit of doing so with increasing independence. Parents can support students by checking the planner, providing space and encouragement, directing their child to information sources, asking questions which will stimulate the child's thinking, and checking (but not correcting) the child's work. Students are responsible for asking questions to ensure that they fully understand what they are being asked to do, and for seeking assistance from the teacher when they experience difficulties.

All homework should be checked for completion by the teacher. Peer and self-assessment strategies may be used in combination with periodic assessment by the teacher. Students should also have regular opportunities to provide feedback on their learning experiences in order to assist teachers in adjusting the level of challenge to match the student's individual needs and abilities.

## **Homework in the Secondary Grades (8-12)**

Because students have several different teachers in the secondary grades, it is very helpful to them if there is a mechanism in the school for decreasing the likelihood that homework assigned by different teachers will accumulate or coincide excessively for individual students. In particular, it is helpful if teachers attempt to coordinate major projects and examinations as much as is reasonably possible.

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Secondary students are responsible for ensuring that they understand what has been assigned and when it is due, and for asking for help when they experience difficulty. They will require a daily planner, and continue to need direct instruction and support in time management and organization of homework.

Students are required to complete a Student Learning Plan (SLP) for the graduation years by the end of Grade 10. To assist them in this planning, they receive advice and support from teachers in identifying their interests and career goals, and the courses they require in order to prepare themselves for a range of potential futures. Parents should be involved in this process and "sign-off" the student's course selections for Grades 11 and 12 on the SLP. It is important that parents and students work together to select appropriate courses which are challenging but within the student's capability. Harmful stress can result from the combined effect of class work and homework in courses which do not interest, or are beyond the reasonable capacity of, the student.

In general, students need to do more regular review and home study in addition to their assigned homework in Grades 11 and 12, but the amount and type of homework varies greatly depending upon the course load students choose.

## **Roles**

The teacher's role in homework is to:

- provide interesting and challenging homework which is integrated into the instructional plan for the class and appropriate for the varying abilities and circumstances of the students;
- provide a balance of open-ended, creative and practice activities;
- give clear, explicit instructions and feedback;
- take a consistent approach to homework and explain that approach to students and parents; and
- teach the necessary skills required to complete homework assignments.

Work to be done at home should not require any expense or the use of any special resources or equipment beyond basic stationery, except that students may be asked, at an appropriate age and given an appropriate time, to use free publicly-accessible resources. If specialized equipment such as a computer or video camera is required, the teacher should organize class groupings to ensure that no student is embarrassed or excluded by virtue of not having access to the equipment.

The partnership takes different forms for students of different ages, but parents of students of all ages have an important supportive role to play in homework.

Sometimes, for a variety of reasons, parent support is not available. Thus, it is important for schools to consider ways to support some students through before or after school homework assistance, buddying, using older students as tutors or other methods.

The parent's role in homework, parts of which may also be provided by a sibling or by another caregiver, varies somewhat with the age of the child. Generally, it is to:

- establish a regular time and place for work to be done at home;
- provide required supplies (e.g., pencils, stationery, dictionary);
- create an encouraging and supportive climate for the child in the home;

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- check the student planner and assignment sheets and help their child understands the tasks;
- help their child to plan their time to complete assignments in manageable stages and allow time for recreation and family events; and
- communicate directly with the teacher when necessary.
- It is also helpful if parents are able to:
  - help their child by prompting them with questions which guide or extend their thinking; and
  - proofread for grammar, spelling and organization (but not by making changes for the child).

It is important for parents to demonstrate a supportive and encouraging interest in their child's work, but parents must never complete homework for their children. This undermines the very purpose of homework. It is helpful if parents provide a model of intellectual curiosity and lifelong learning. For example, parents may want to spend time reading or completing family paperwork while their child is doing school work.

Parents, guided by an understanding of the developmental needs of their particular child at various ages and their own values and purposes, are responsible for ensuring a healthy, supportive home life. This includes working with the school to ensure that students are successful at, and positively disposed towards, homework. It also includes ensuring that students are not so heavily committed to out-of-school activities that they are stressed or fatigued. At all ages, regular exercise and adequate sleep are important for health and to prepare the student for learning.

The student's role in homework is to:

- understand what is expected and ask questions to clarify expectations when necessary;
- contact the teacher to find out about homework assigned during the student's absence;
- complete homework tasks to the best of his/her ability;
- ask for help from the teacher when necessary; and
- submit homework on time.

It is important for students, with the assistance of parents, to avoid excessive commitments outside of school which may not leave time for homework, and to get sufficient sleep and exercise so that they have the energy and attention required to complete tasks to the best of their ability.

## **Unintended Effects**

Besides the many potentially positive effects of homework, there is also the danger of negative effects if it is poorly designed or used without careful attention to the characteristics, needs and circumstances of the individual student.

Negative effects may include:

- a loss of interest in learning,
- excessive emotional stress and/or physical fatigue,
- damage to parent-child and teacher-student relationships,
- denial of access to more beneficial recreational and community activities, and
- confusion of instructional techniques between home and school.

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It is important for parents and teachers to monitor students' experience of homework with these potential negative effects in mind and to communicate with each other if they appear. Students should also be alerted to these pitfalls and encouraged to share their concerns and experiences with parents and teachers in order to ensure that homework is a supportive experience.

## **Time Requirements**

The total amount of time which a student is required to spend completing class work or homework - or chooses to spend - should not compromise other important aspects of a student's life such as family activities, community and recreational activities, and rest and relaxation. If a parent or student feels that excessive amounts of time are being spent on homework, that should be discussed with the teacher to determine whether the homework can be adapted for the student or additional assistance provided with the course work or with study skills.

Students, and families, should be given as much opportunity as possible to schedule homework to accommodate their individual needs. Thus, it is helpful for homework to be assigned with some flexibility as to when it is completed, perhaps as weekly tasks in primary, and allowing more than one day for completion in later grades, when that is possible. This may also encourage development of planning and goal setting skills more effectively than daily requirements.

Because students vary in their needs, abilities, interests, involvements, and family priorities, the amount of time which a student can be expected to spend on completion of class work, homework and home study will also vary. The following maximum guidelines are offered with this basic understanding in mind, and on the assumption that parents and teachers will work together to determine what is appropriate for each student, particularly in the elementary grades.

A primary home reading program should not require more than 15 minutes per day on average, although some students may well choose to spend more time reading for pleasure. When other forms of homework are added beginning in Grade 1, that should be done gradually, one or two days a week at first. The total time required should not increase beyond 15 minutes per day initially, but as students are able to accept the responsibility it may increase, until, by the end of Grade 3, the maximum time a student spends to complete class work and homework reaches an average of 30 minutes on any one day, three or four days a week.

Some parents will want their children to have more homework at an earlier age than others. Teachers can provide these parents with advice about appropriate homework activities and assist where reasonably possible, but they are not required to provide individual homework or to exceed the preceding guidelines in order to satisfy individual parent requests.

Parents who want more homework may also consider encouraging their children to do crossword puzzles, scrabble, math games, lego, building models, cooking and other self-selected activities which require thinking and the application of basic academic skills while promoting persistence and attention to detail.

In the intermediate grades homework and completion of class work should initially not exceed 30 minutes per day, three or four days a week on average for most students. This may increase to a maximum of 45 minutes three or four days a week on average in Grade

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6, and 60 minutes some nights by the end of Grade 7. The transition from primary to intermediate grades involves different forms and quantities of homework. Teachers and parents should work together to support students through this transition, which should not be abrupt. Students will require very direct and specific assistance as they learn how to manage their time and develop the skills of working and learning independently. Most students in Grade 8 and 9 should not have to spend more than 75 minutes per night on any regular basis in order to complete class work and homework. This may increase to 90 minutes per night in Grade 10. Occasionally more time may be required, but this should be infrequent.

The amount of work which a student must do at home in Grades 11 and 12 depends upon the student's course selection and abilities. Because of the wide variation in students and programs, no uniform guideline for maximum time to be spent on completion of class work, homework and home study is possible. However, no student should be subjected to an unhealthy combination of school work and other activities and responsibilities, such as a job or competitive athletics. For both physical and mental health reasons, parents need to monitor the combined effects of homework and other involvements, and teachers need to be sensitive to the experience of their students.

Occasional homework "binges" will occur in the later secondary grades and are not necessarily harmful if they are not too frequent. However, it is important that students also have sufficient time for personal interests, friendships, and adequate rest and relaxation. Stress can be extreme and unhealthy if care is not taken to balance a student's activities and commitments. Notwithstanding the higher degree of independence and personal responsibility which it is reasonable to expect of students in the secondary grades, it should not be assumed that the student is solely responsible for managing the demands of class work and homework. Individual teachers should take into account the demands students face in other courses and coordinate exam schedules and major assignments as much as possible to minimize overload on students. While the coincidence of exams and assignments cannot be entirely prevented, it may be possible to minimize through cooperation between teachers and it is important to be supportive of students who find themselves in this situation. Parents should be aware of what their children are experiencing, and students should let teachers and parents know when they are overloaded or need assistance.

Homework, including projects, should not interfere with the winter, spring or summer holidays.

The natural consequence of a student not completing an assigned project on time, or needing to review material which has not been adequately learned, may be that work must be done during a holiday period, but homework should not be assigned with this intention.

## **Homework in French Immersion**

A French Immersion student should not have significantly more homework than other students at the same grade level. However, starting in Grade 3, all Immersion students have both French and English language arts, and some students find that having the two language arts components is challenging.

The study of two languages does require additional time and commitment in Late French Immersion, which students may experience particularly strongly during the initial months of Grade 6. It is helpful for students in Late French Immersion to share phone numbers so that they can call each other for assistance and to see the teacher as soon as they

encounter difficulty.

Parents can help their children with homework assignments in French Immersion by discussing the assignment in English, having the child translate where necessary. It is very helpful to have a picture dictionary for the early years and a good English/French dictionary thereafter. Because fluency precedes accuracy in the learning of a language, parents who speak French should not be unduly concerned with perfection in the child's early attempts to speak French. As fluency increases, it is appropriate to pay more attention to accuracy and to provide supportive feedback about grammar and pronunciation.

## **Communication**

Parents and teachers share the responsibility for ensuring that homework has beneficial rather than harmful effects. This requires a well-understood mechanism for ongoing communication between the home and school. Parents need to know what is being studied, what is to be done at home, and their role in supporting their child's learning. Teachers need to know how a student responds to homework and any difficulties which are experienced, whether due to the homework itself, or the student's attitudes towards it, or a combination of these factors.

Both class work and homework should take into account the varying abilities, characteristics, learning styles and learning rates of students. Students who are not proficient learners, whether due to intellectual capacity or other factors, should not be penalized by having to complete class work at home in addition to assigned homework if that is not reasonably possible. Teachers should work closely with parents to sort out the reasons for children not completing class work or taking longer than expected to complete homework, and strategies for addressing these problems.

Students should have regular, structured opportunities to provide feedback to both parents and teachers on their learning experiences, both class work and homework.

## **Monitoring of Homework**

All homework should be monitored for completion and students should receive feedback, but not all homework need be formally marked by the teacher. Although some homework may be used for evaluation purposes, the emphasis in homework should be on learning, on teacher assessment and self-assessment of the student's thinking, and on providing feedback to assist the student.

Homework completion and effort can be expected to have an effect on a student's learning, but work habits and effort should be considered separately from evaluation of the student's learning, unless there are directly relevant learning objectives in the IRP for the subject. Letter grades are defined in Ministry policy to describe achievement in relation to intended learning outcomes for the grade or subject and grade. Work habits and effort are to be reported in structured written comments or reported with letter grades such as G, S and N separately from academic results.

## **Assignments for Students on Extended Absences**

If parents choose to take a student out of school for an extended period of several weeks or more, the many daily classroom activities they miss cannot be duplicated through worksheets or assignments. The student may well have other cultural or travel experiences during such an absence which contribute to overall development, but it is unavoidable that school work will suffer.



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The request for assignments to cover extended absences is more appropriately understood as a request for an individual program for the period of absence than as homework. Teachers are not obligated to provide assignments for extended absences or to mark work which is submitted upon the student's return. On the other hand, it is illogical and unfair to penalize students for work not submitted during such an absence. Schools may choose not to loan textbooks or other materials for such extended periods. Moreover, the school may not be able to guarantee that the student will be able to return to the same class, or even to the school, if the absence is extended beyond a reasonable period because another student may arrive and require the place.

[Parent Involvement in Homework.pdf](#)