

Franklin Public Schools

Homework

Fall 2017

By Dr. Joyce Edwards, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning



One of the hallmarks of the school experience for students has always been homework. Many of us remember our own school days with either a fondness or extreme distaste for these assignments. Our schools have changed in the 21st Century to prepare students for jobs that do not yet exist and for a world that we as adults can only imagine. As a result, we have had to adapt our approaches to curriculum and instruction to be more relevant and rigorous. We must mirror the needs and wishes in our community while we meet the challenges involved to ensure that all of our students meet their full potential while in our PS-12 school environment. This is consistent with our second district-wide goal on our District Improvement Plan which states, “To ensure that all students are supported and challenged to reach their full potential, the Franklin Public Schools will align curriculum, best instructional practices, and varied assessment opportunities to personalize learning and meet individual needs.” We further elaborate as to how we will address this goal in terms of homework by noting that we will, “Create an educator/administrator study group to examine research and best practices with regard to homework and make recommendations for K-12 homework practices and alignment with Franklin School Committee policy.”

As some of you may know, the School Committee recently revised its policy regarding homework. The policy is included below, but a major focus within the policy is the recognition of the “whole child.” This is consistent with the first district-wide goal in the District Improvement Plan which reads, “To help students develop connections to school, support positive behaviors and increase academic achievement, the Franklin Public Schools will enhance programs and practices to enable all students to acquire the knowledge, attitudes and skills associated with the core competencies for social emotional learning.” The homework policy change was the result of feedback obtained via surveys and forums the School Committee and the FPS administration conducted last year with teachers, administrators, and families. Based on that feedback, the policy was implemented and we now will align our practices accordingly.

Some of the themes that drove the change include the recognition of the value of homework as well as an acknowledgement of the potential impact of homework-related stress

on our students. Additionally, we recognize that homework also presents challenges for families and that not all students have the same types of support structures available to them at home. To this end, we have committed to studying our homework practices across the district to ensure alignment with the School Committee policy. This will provide educators and administrators the opportunity to review recent research regarding homework so we can learn about current educational thinking and best practices in the field. We will then determine if changes to our practices need to be made and if so, what those changes may look like at each of the levels: elementary school, middle school, and high school. The School Committee has also indicated a willingness to revisit the policy as a possible outcome to work that is being done by the educators this year. Please know that reading and math facts will always be considered appropriate homework assignments for students, especially at the elementary level.

We have formed a study group composed of almost 30 teachers and administrators to begin working on homework. The work will extend to all of our schools, subjects, and grades as we proceed through a carefully designed and thoughtful learning and review process. The core text that we are using to guide our work is called *Rethinking Homework* by Cathy Vatterott. The group will spend a couple of work sessions analyzing this book and other pertinent articles on the topic of homework. We will also undertake to determine what the current homework practices across the district are. We will certainly be looking for teacher feedback on this, but also plan to incorporate both the family and student voices in this part of our work.

Our ultimate goal is to work with teachers and the community to understand what homework practices may be ideal for our students at each level and to implement those best practices with consistency across grades, subjects, and schools. It is important to note that consistency does not always mean that the homework every night will be identical for all students. There are many variables in each classroom and teachers will have the flexibility to address the needs of all students, within the guidelines that are set. This is a long term project, but our goal is to incorporate any new practices and guidelines into student handbooks for next fall. Please stay tuned for more information on this important topic as we proceed through the year, especially as we solicit input from families and students.

Homework Policy

The Franklin Public Schools recognize that meaningful and purposeful homework assists a student in the reinforcement and extension of learning and provides an opportunity for families to better understand the academic work of children at their grade level.

The Franklin Public Schools are committed to the education of the “whole child” and recognize that students are active in many areas of daily life such as extra-curricular offerings, athletics, artistic and cultural endeavors, and participation in family routines and events. These pursuits help to develop students with strong social-emotional skills and will further instill a love of learning about topics of personal interest. Homework practices that are implemented in classrooms should both recognize the value of homework and maintain a developmentally appropriate balance between homework and other life activities.

As such, homework assignments should be:

- Appropriate in time and frequency for the developmental stage of the child
- Meaningful, relevant and aligned with work in the classroom
- Have a clearly articulated purpose, educational objective and learning expectations
- Personalized to meet the needs of the learner
- Structured to provide students with feedback that leads to improved learning
- Consistent, to a reasonable degree, across grade levels and among classrooms
- Aligned with current research on best practice as well as school and District policies

Professional staff in grades 6-12 are encouraged to consult with each other to the extent possible regarding planning of homework and projects to strive for a manageable workload for students.

Homework should be used only as a learning tool, may not be used for punishment, and students should not lose privileges, including recess, for not completing homework.

Adopted by School Committee: 7/18/17

