



Shrewsbury Public Schools

Joint School Councils Meeting Agenda

October 23, 2019

6:30 pm – Bent Presentation Room at SHS

- 6:30 Welcome, Introductions & Overview Dr. Joseph Sawyer
- 6:45 Redistricting Mr. Patrick Collins
- Members will hear a brief informational update
- 7:00 Overview: On Homework Mrs. Amy Clouter
Attendees will hear an overview of the homework policy revision process, including the specific questions we hope to discuss.
- 7:10 **Small group session 1: Mixed Groups**
We'll form small groups to read and discuss an article that summarizes the research on homework. Groups will have 15 minutes to answer the question: *What role should homework play in the lives of students today?*
- 7:25 **Small group session 2: School Groups**
Groups will have 20 minutes to review data and discuss and prioritize the components they feel are most important for consideration in our revised policy.
Example: *"To be effective at our level, we feel that Shrewsbury's new policy should include..."*
- 7:45 Gallery Walk / Revisions
After seeing others' work, groups will get a sticker to prioritize any phrases or ideas that were sparked by others' work.
- 7:55 Closing Remarks Dr. Joseph Sawyer
- 8:00 Adjourn

The Shrewsbury Public Schools, in partnership with the community, will provide students with the skills and knowledge for the 21st century, an appreciation of our democratic tradition, and the desire to continue to learn throughout life.

SHREWSBURY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

SINGLE POLICY	HOMEWORK POLICY GRADES 1-8	523
<p>Homework Policy Grades 1-8</p>	<p><u>Context</u></p> <p>The homework policy of the Shrewsbury Public Schools derives from the work of a study committee over two years (2000-2002). During that period, the committee reviewed the literature on homework, surveyed teachers, parents, and students, and engaged faculties and parent groups in discussions on the topic. During the course of the study, it became apparent that teachers and parents supported homework as an important part of the educational process. It was also clear that there was insufficient consensus on the purposes and implementation of homework in the district.</p> <p>There are many learning activities in the life of a student in addition to homework. School activities, athletic and cultural events, and other personal interests are all important in the growth and development of children. The homework policy of the Shrewsbury Schools is provided as a guide to balance homework with the realities of family life in the 21st century.</p> <p>The most effective implementation of the homework policy will occur when teachers, parents, and students appreciate the importance of good communication among those involved. The mission of the Shrewsbury Public Schools urges that the schools work “in partnership with the community.” Such a partnership is particularly important in the area of homework.</p> <p>The homework policy deals solely with grades one through eight. Information about homework at the high school level is contained in the high school planner/handbook.</p> <p>In kindergarten, homework is sometimes offered as enrichment. While there is no formal kindergarten homework, families should read daily with their child to foster language and literacy skills.</p> <p><u>Policy – Grade One through Grade 8</u></p> <p>Homework is defined as written or non-written tasks that are assigned by teachers to be completed by students outside of the classroom. The purposes of homework in the Shrewsbury Schools are to practice newly taught skills, review previously mastered skills, develop independent study habits, and extend and enrich the curriculum. Homework should be related to the curriculum of the school and promote an understanding of the importance of lifelong learning. Additional academic homework will not be used as a behavior management tool or as a form of punishment. Finally, homework should not be done by parents.</p>	

Homework may be given four nights per week in grades 1-4 and should not be assigned on weekends. Homework may be assigned on Fridays in grades 5-8. Reading assignments are to be incorporated into the time allotments at each grade level. Because reading is crucial to academic success, voluntary reading beyond homework guidelines is encouraged. Long-term projects should be assigned at least two weekends before the work is due.

Homework guidelines for some students with special needs may be determined by the student's educational plan and should be specifically related to the student's learning profile. The modifications in an educational plan supersede the general guidelines listed here.

Time Allocations per Grade Level

The guidelines below provide the appropriate time limits that children at each grade level should devote to homework each night. Parents are encouraged to speak with their children's teachers if homework time is routinely exceeding the guidelines.

Grade 1	15 minutes	Monday - Thursday
Grade 2	20 minutes	Monday - Thursday
Grade 3	30 minutes	Monday - Thursday
Grade 4	40 minutes	Monday - Thursday
Grade 5	50 minutes	Monday - Friday
Grades 6-8 - Friday	60-90 minutes	Monday

Students' Roles and Responsibilities

- Get the assignment and be able to ask for help if the assignment is not clear.
- Copy all assignments into planner (grades 4-8), carefully recording due dates, and important information.
- Set a time each day to do homework.
- Check work and, if possible, explain it to an adult.
- Maintain the highest quality work on homework assignments.
- Take home all necessary resources, such as packets, textbooks, notes and study guides to accurately complete homework.
- Bring the completed homework back to school when it is due.
- Be responsible for getting assignments when absent from school.
- Be responsible for taking care of, and returning, any borrowed resource materials.

Parents' Role and Responsibilities

- Promote a positive attitude toward homework as part of the learning process.
- Understand and reinforce expectations for the quality of student work.
- Provide structure, a place, and tools needed to help the child organize

for the completion of homework.

- Be available to provide supervision, but do not do the assignment for the child.
- Have an understanding of the amount of assistance appropriate for homework assignments.
- Communicate often with the student and his/her teacher, giving feedback to the teacher when there is a homework concern.
- Learn strategies/techniques for helping the student through opportunities such as parent homework clinics.

Teachers' Role and Responsibilities

- Identify the purpose of homework assignments for parents and students.
- Establish objectives and guidelines for special projects, including any expectations for parent participation.
- Follow the guidelines for the amount of time designated for homework including special projects.
- Communicate expectations to students.
- Post all assignments and provide time for students to record them.
- Model homework strategies and provide models as appropriate throughout the school year.
- Review homework and return it in a timely manner.
- Establish a system for recording and reporting homework.
- Ensure that resources and materials required for homework projects are easily obtained by the student.
- Provide ways for parents to communicate with teachers about homework.
- Notify parents regarding homework problems and missing assignments.
- Assign long term projects so that the completion time includes more than one weekend, and is not limited to a school vacation period.
- Discuss homework practice with colleagues and provide guidelines for the type of homework at each grade level in each school.

Administrators' Role and Responsibilities

- Ensure that homework is consistent with the educational goals of the Shrewsbury Public Schools.
- Facilitate communication between classroom and specialist teachers concerning homework.
- Monitor and support the teachers in the implementation of the homework guidelines.
- Encourage teachers to use homework as a tool to reinforce learning.
- Be aware of the assignment of major projects and their impact on the student's overall educational program.
- Support the need for balance among the many learning activities in the life of a student besides homework.
- Facilitate the communication process between the school and home,

Adopted
6/19/02

Homework Guidelines

Homework is defined as preparation for class carried out independently by the student. It is important for all students to do regular homework as well as special projects. The ability to work successfully without supervision is valuable for intellectual development. Student, teacher, parent, and administrative responsibilities regarding homework follow.

Student Responsibilities

Students need to be aware that keeping up with assignments is often crucial for success in their courses. Reflection, practice, and synthesis of classroom material are essential for growth. Students must take it upon themselves to fully understand each teacher's expectations, with respect to assignments, at the beginning of a course and proceed to use assignments as a tool to increase understanding and progress.

Students should:

- familiarize themselves with each course syllabus.
- expect homework each night.
- plan homework time.
- use planner to organize assignments.
- turn homework and assignments in on time.
- not let field trips excuse not doing homework.
- thoughtfully do their own work and not copy assignments.
- reassess returned assignments and note all feedback.
- makeup all assignments missed.

Teacher Responsibilities

Teachers need to be thoughtful about both the quantity and quality of homework assigned. If something is deemed worthy enough to be assigned, the end result should, consequently, be valued. This may take the form of questions addressed in class the following day, class discussion, or collected homework for which the teacher provides written feedback.

Teachers should:

- delineate homework policy and grading weights in course syllabus.
- give specific oral or written feedback and return collected homework in a timely fashion.
- use homework as a tool to assess student understanding.
- post assignments in classrooms to encourage student planning.
- allow adequate time for all assignments.

Parent Responsibilities

Parents have a special responsibility to ensure that students prioritize schoolwork and complete homework and other assignments. Additionally, parents maintain a vital

connection between home and school by contacting teachers, counselors, and administrators when their student is experiencing difficulty with assignments.

Parents should:

- read course syllabi to learn about course requirements, individual teacher's grading of homework and frequency of assignments.
- provide appropriate time, materials, and space.
- contact teachers with questions and concerns.
- contact school when student has been absent three days or more to get homework assignments.
- ensure a balance between schoolwork and other activities.

Administrative Responsibilities

The high school administration, including the principal, assistant principals, and department directors, are responsible for ensuring that all schoolwork, assignments, and homework reflect and are consistent with the educational goals of the high school's mission and expectations for student learning.

The administration should:

- encourage teachers to use homework as a tool to reinforce learning.
- oversee assignment of major projects with regard to impact on the total curriculum.
- emphasize that learning extends beyond the school day and that thoughtful homework is an integral part of learning.
- encourage teachers to use technology, i.e., the high school's web page, email, and voice mail system, to promote homework help and information.
- monitor the implementation of homework guidelines.

Rationale or Guiding Principles

This component answers the question: What is the benefit of homework?

Definition

This component answers the question: *What do we consider homework to be?*

Statement of Purpose

This component identifies the *different types / purposes of homework*

Statement of Roles and Responsibilities

This component spells out the *responsibilities for teachers, students and parents* in the homework process.

Amount of homework / Time Allocation

This component depicts the *amount of time students in each grade or grade span are expected to devote to homework*. Policy statements can be specific or broad. Most include a ceiling and/or guidance to students on maximum times recommended.

Weighting of Homework

This component outlines *whether homework will "count" as a grade, where parents can see this information and/or establishes limits on how much homework is weighed*.

Weekends / Holidays

This component identifies *times when homework may and may not be assigned*.

Support

This component explains *how the district will support students that do not have sufficient supplies and/or supervision to complete homework*.

As you read the article, you may use this sheet to keep track of your thoughts.



AGREE

What do you **agree** with in the text?



ARGUE

What do you want to **argue** with in the text?



ASPIRE

What parts of the article do you **aspire** to?



What role should homework play in the lives of students today?

INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION:



Is Homework Working?

Homework should be independent practice for the student, Ms. Mangione asserts. It should not be graded, and it should not require the parents' help to complete.

By Lisa Mangione

BY NOW, I've grown familiar with the prelude. "I have a teacher question for you," my friend asks me on a fairly routine basis. Invariably, there is a parent/teacher meeting pending, and she fears it might get ugly. Her son has gotten another less-than-stellar grade on a homework assignment that ate an entire weekend and required the assistance of two adults with advanced degrees.

The latest assignment is just one of many that have taken their toll on my friend's family. In fact, she attributes the case of shingles she developed last year to a "Welcome to the New World" brochure that had to be typed and tri-folded (no cutting and pasting allowed). Despite repeated efforts to learn the intricacies of desktop publishing software, she and her son were unable to master the formatting. At 11:30 p.m., they admitted defeat and decided to submit the information typed, but in paragraph form, bracing themselves for the hit. Surprisingly, they still couldn't make this assignment go away. Deemed unacceptable by the teacher, it was handed back to the student, who was forced to outsource it to yet another adult.

Contemplating her case for the fateful meeting, my friend wonders aloud, "Am I being unreasonable?" In the depth of her sighs, I hear both outrage and defeat.

As a special education teacher (now termed "consultant teacher"), I do not routinely dole out grades, but I collaborate with my colleagues (the "general education" teachers) to design, facilitate, and evaluate instruc-

tion that is fair and appropriate for the students in question. Regardless of the assignment, I can ask my colleagues: What is the curricular goal? What is it you want them to know and understand? If the goal is to demonstrate an understanding of the reasons why immigrants came to America, then *how* that understanding is assessed can take myriad forms. A brochure? Sure! But *designing* the brochure should not become more important than the point of the brochure, as seemed to be the case with my friend's son.

For many teachers reading this, that idea does not come as a revelation. Many of us have received enough hours of professional development to earn another degree: asking "essential questions," adhering to "backwards design," and focusing on "process over product" are all part of our repertoire. We get it already.

Or do we? The more conversations I have with friends and relatives who are panicked and confused over the homework that their children receive (and are incapable of completing on their own), the more outraged I become. As a new parent, I wonder what position I'll take when my own daughter has a doozy of an assignment. Do I let her tackle it independently, even if it means she will stumble occasionally? Or will I succumb to the pressure of ensuring that she gets "good grades," even if those grades scarcely reflect any real understanding?

The heart of the matter is this: Is this a parenting issue, or a school policy issue? In my own experience, my father, a veteran teacher, never once hovered over me as I did my homework (that is, when I did it). Admittedly, I was not always as dutiful and tenacious about it as he would have liked, but that was *my* work, and the grades were reflective of *my* output, not his. (I think it may have been the best parenting lesson I could have received.)

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And what about those students who will not get help with their homework, simply because the adults at home are unable or unwilling to help? Should those students be penalized for a home environment that doesn't enforce — or, more accurately, *ensure* — that their grades stay “in the black”?

If the responsibility rests with the source, would that be the school or the individual teacher? After all, homework is generally assigned and graded at the discretion of each teacher. In that regard, I still defer to the advice my father gave me when I was baffled over assigning and grading homework during my first year of teaching: “Homework should be independent practice,” he said. And then — using a sports metaphor I could actually understand — he compared homework to the practice that athletes endure: they may mess up, but that's the point of practice. “After all,” he continued, “it only counts in the game.”

My father's position was that homework should be used to reinforce what was already modeled and taught. It should be met with guidance, never graded. Of course, that would require that it actually be done, which is why so many teachers feel it *must* be graded. How else, they argue, can you see that students do it? If that policy worked (using grades as both positive and negative reinforcers), then this entire discussion would be moot; grading would solve everything. Then again, if grades were not used as leverage and homework assignments solely provided an opportunity for reinforcement of newly learned concepts, then the quality of student performance would be tied to their efforts in practice. (They just better not miss practice.)

To be fair, not all teachers grade homework, and of those who do, not all of them necessarily grade it harshly. But the range of what constitutes a reasonable assignment is so far-reaching that “homework” is an entirely different animal from school to school, class to class, teacher to teacher, ranging from rote memorization of spelling words to long-term projects that encompass an entire unit of study. Given so broad a range, how can the grades be considered valid? What do they mean, anyway? A grade of 75 in Ms. Stickler's class — even if backed up by a rubric — is still likely to have a subjective slant. More important, if the work behind the scenes was actually the work of little elves (make that big parental elves), then the grade — on which so much hinges — has even less connection to the student's understanding.

Still, even if grades were removed from the equation, it is doubtful that homework would suddenly become attractive to most students. Unfortunately, the students who most need the practice and discipline of

self-guided assignments are the ones who just never do them. The fact that we continually penalize these students baffles me. During the school day, they are the ones for whom you stand on your head, devise rewards, and do whatever works — all in a futile attempt to motivate them. Still, we expect these same kids to skip home, plop down at a kitchen table (where I assume a wholesome snack of milk and cookies is waiting), and spend an additional two or three hours poring over what they refused to do earlier. Interesting logic. We may think that grading homework sends a message that it isn't optional, but the fact is, the students who are most at risk will almost always opt out.

So, if the kids who really need the practice aren't attempting the homework and are getting little support at home, and the ones who do complete it are often getting too much support, is homework working for anybody?

While the debate over homework isn't new, it has resurfaced with some recent findings that there is a negative correlation between the time spent on homework and student achievement. In other words, there is a point of diminishing returns. According to Duke University professor Harris Cooper's research, elementary students get no academic benefit (other than reading practice), while middle and high school students see no gains beyond one-and-a-half to two hours per night.¹ Arguably, the efficacy is not related exclusively to quantity but depends on quality. The real issue is, what are the kids spending that hour or two doing?

Cooper himself does not advocate banning homework altogether, even at the elementary level, but he does call for specific guidelines for school districts, teachers, and teacher training programs. And despite recommending a mix of “mandatory” and “voluntary” assignments, homework, he says, should not be graded. (Mandatory assignments that are missed would result in remediation, not a failing grade.) In addition, Cooper insists that parent involvement be minimal and geared mostly toward creating an “optimal environment for self-study.”²

I can't help but feel satisfied when I read Cooper's recommendations. The country's foremost researcher on the subject of homework confirms my own view. But can I really take credit for it? After all, I did have to ask my dad for help.

1. Valerie Strauss, “As Homework Grows, So Do Arguments Against It,” *Washington Post*, 12 September 2006, p. A-4; see also Alfie Kohn, “Abusing Research: The Study of Homework and Other Examples,” *Phi Delta Kappan*, September 2006, pp. 8-22.

2. Harris Cooper, “Homework Research and Policy: A Review of the Literature,” available at <http://cehd.umn.edu/carei/reports/Rpractice/Summer94/homework.html>. 