



Shrewsbury Public Schools

Amy Clouter

Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment

To: Jason Palitsch and Erin Boucher, Members of the Policy Subcommittee

From: Amy Clouter

Re: Proposed Updated Shrewsbury Public Schools Homework Policy

Date: March 27, 2023

I. Summary

A district policy is a reflection of shared needs and aspirations. As such, it takes considerable time and effort to craft a good one. Shrewsbury's initial homework policy, which applies to students and educators in grades 1-8, was enacted in 2002 after two years of sustained study. The same spirit of thoughtful consideration went into updating the policy to reflect current research and emerging needs.

II. Context

A comprehensive review of Shrewsbury's homework policy and practices originated with the adoption of the 2018-2022 district goals. The effort to revisit and update the 2002 homework policy began in earnest in the spring of 2019 when the district elicited feedback from students, families and staff about homework practices using ThoughtExchange, an online survey tool.

At a joint meeting of all School Councils (which consist of parents/caregivers, educators, and administrators) in October of the same year, stakeholders analyzed district survey results. Each school group reflected on the data shared by their community. A comparison of these [notes](#) revealed common values as well as shared hopes.

Results from the survey were reviewed by expert [Dr. Cathy Vatterott](#), professor emeritus of education at the University of Missouri–St. Louis, to better understand the feedback in the context of the latest research on homework. Ms. Vatterott consulted with district leaders with the goal of aligning homework practices accordingly. Just as importantly, these findings were carefully considered by members of the SPS Homework Committee, a group composed of SPS educators, administrators and families. Specifically, these community stakeholders suggested that a revised homework policy should include five components:

1. A statement of purpose (Students should be assigned meaningful tasks and given chances to practice executive functioning skills.)
2. Guidance regarding assigning homework during weekends and holidays
3. Flexibility for educators regarding type of assignments and for families regarding how due dates are established at different age-levels (e.g., daily vs. weekly)
4. Choice/options (Including enrichment calendar ideas, opportunities to connect or apply learning outdoors / beyond assigned tasks for students and families and allowing students choice of homework task)
5. A recognition of the importance of balancing homework responsibilities with family life / other interests

Subsequently, district leaders and representatives on the Homework Committee held several meetings with the purpose of reviewing current research and revising the existing district policy. After engaging in prolonged learning, self-study and discussion of current best practices in the field, representatives from each grade span agreed that Shrewsbury’s updated policy should apply to students at all levels and that the policy itself should also include a mix of “old” and new components. Many sections of the original homework policy (2002) were found to be helpful, and additional sections were also proposed. The committee agreed that a new policy should include a rationale for why the district supports homework, a definition of homework,

information about the purpose of homework, and the roles and responsibilities that each stakeholder has with regard to homework. The Committee was beginning to draft an updated document in March of 2020 when the pandemic hit.

III. Post-Pandemic Progress

Districtwide discussions about the homework policy resumed in 2022 with the return of in-person learning. With existing time allocations in place, the focus of this next phase centered on including students in grades 9-12 in the policy. Educators at SHS considered various solutions to address student workload, a key factor students reported in their experience of stress.

In the absence of an updated policy, educators suggested that clarity of terms and implementation guidelines would be helpful to students and families , including information about support for students and families struggling with homework. The latest proposed draft includes input solicited at faculty meetings, PTO and/or School Council forums, and Faculty Advisory groups when implementation of these homework guidelines by level was discussed. In March of this year a final homework survey was sent to faculty and district administrators at each level. The proposed policy language included in the proposed draft of the updated policy was created to reflect the initial recommendations of the Homework Committee as well as lessons learned from implementing updated homework guidelines at each level.

I look forward to further discussion of the proposed draft, linked [here](#).

IV. Appendix

Research Regarding “Best Practices” on Homework

Alleman, J., Ley, R., Knighton, B., Botwinski, B., & Middlestead, S. (2010, September) [Homework Done Right](#) *Educational Leadership* p 1-5

Cushman, K. (2010, September) [Show Us What Homework’s For](#) *Educational Leadership* p. 74-78

Marzano, R. & Pickering, D. (2007, March) [Special Topic: The Case for and Against Homework](#), *Educational Leadership* p 74-79

Terada, Y. (2018, February 23). [What’s the Right Amount of Homework?](#) Edutopia

Vatterott, C. (2011, November) [Making Homework Central to Learning](#) *Educational Leadership* p 60-64

[A Selection of Homework Policies from Area Districts](#)