Homework Guidelines

Definition

Homework can be defined as " tasks assigned to students by school teachers that are intended to be carried out during non-school hours for the purpose of deepening understanding and reinforcing classroom learning or preparing students for upcoming lessons or classes" (Harris-Cooper, 2007).

There are four types of commonly assigned homework, each having different intended outcomes:

Type	Definition	Intended Outcome	Application
Completion	Any work assigned during the school day not completed in class	Helps students keep up to date with the classroom program	The classroom program should be differentiated if a student has completion homework on a regular basis.
Practice	Any work that reviews and reinforces skills and concepts taught in class	Helps students practice newly acquired skills to develop fluency	To be effective, practice homework requires students to already be able to independently perform the skills required.
Preparation	Any work that prepares students for upcoming lessons or classes	Encourages students to acquire background information or to bring their prior knowledge and experiences to upcoming units of study	
Extension	Any work that explores and refines learning in new contexts or integrates and expands on classroom learning	Encourages students to problem solve, think creatively and think critically	To be effective, extension homework does not require a student to learn curriculum content independently. Instead, students deepen understanding and relate learning to the real world.

Based upon Toronto District School Board's Homework Policy

Research Surrounding Homework

Research on the effects of homework have provided some contradictory results.
In Cultural Literacy (1987), Hirsch argues for the value of homework. Homework gives students more time to reinforce knowledge they've learned in the classroom. And this gives them a stronger basis for future learning.

Furthermore, homework serves to develop regular study skills and the ability to complete assignments independently. Completing homework is the responsibility of the student, and as students mature they are more able to work independently.

On the other hand, Hattie (2009) synthesised five meta-analyses (161 combined studies on homework) that examined the impact of primary and secondary homework on student achievement. Sixty-five percent of studies found positive effects, while 35 percent had no effect. Overall, the effect size for homework across primary and secondary was 0.29, which is not significant. For elementary school students, no amount of homework—large or small—affects academic achievement (Cooper, 2009). For middle/high school students, academic achievement does show some improvement with targeted homework.

Furthermore, when students spend too much time on homework—more than two hours each night—it takes up valuable time to rest and spend time with family and friends. A 2013 study found that high school students can experience serious mental and physical health problems, from higher stress levels to sleep deprivation, when assigned too much homework (Galloway, Conner, & Pope, 2013).

Guiding Approaches to the Assignment of Homework

1. Homework should be considered at the local level, as it will serve as a foundation for decision-making in the classroom and by the school. It should be clearly articulated and carefully planned, and involve coordination amongst teachers.

2. Any consideration of the issue of homework should begin with the principles of relevance, consistency and equity. Many factors can affect students' ability to benefit from homework, including age, task comprehension, level of skill, motivation, environmental factors such as physical setting and travel time, or access to support. Thus, homework assignments should be differentiated to reflect the unique needs of the child.

3. The purpose of homework is to ensure it is both **effective in promoting high quality student learning** and achievement and it **nurtures a desire for students to keep learning**. Thus, effective homework assignments:

* are curriculum based, are engaging and relevant to student learning and are designed to require no additional teaching outside the classroom;

* should be commented on to provide feedback for future learning.

4. The amount of homework assigned to students should be gradually increased to a maximum of 60-90 minutes a day for Cycle 2 High School students. No homework should be assigned on scheduled holidays as outlined in the school year calendar.

5. Students should be graded on the quality of their work rather than how punctual the assignment is. “Late Penalties” lead to inaccuracy, which leads to deflated grades, which distorts the students’ achievement; their true ability to meet the intended learning outcomes.

6. Parents who have concerns with homework expectations for their child shall be encouraged to contact their child’s teacher or the school principal to discuss the situation.

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