

CALMING THE HOMEWORK HASSLES (FINALLY)!

“Students with involved parents, no matter what their income or background, are more likely to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more.”

Dr; Joseph Joyner – St. Johns County School Superintendent

Homework continues to be the ‘hot button’ for many of our students, parents, and teachers. Students resist doing it, parents prepare for battle as they look over the assignments and anticipate the overscheduled evening, and teachers look for the feedback provided by completed homework to identify skills and concepts that require additional instruction. In an attempt to help our TCE families find solutions to this ever-present and stressful issue, we felt it may be helpful to share some of the common questions/concerns/suggestions in the hopes of calming the homework hassles!

Question: What is the St. Johns County School districts’ policy on homework?

Answer: The St. Johns County Parent Resource Guide (page 38) defines and offers homework suggestions for parents as follows: “Homework is an opportunity for children to practice what they have learned in school and for families to be involved in their child's learning. However, helping children with homework isn't always easy. Children need to know that their family members think homework is important. If they know their families care, children have a good reason to complete assignments and to turn them in on time. Here is a list of recommendations for parents when their child has homework:

- Set a regular time for homework.
- Pick a location best suited for homework completion.
- Remove distractions from the area.
- Provide appropriate supplies for homework.
- Set a good example; a parent who reads, leads to a child who reads.
- Take an active interest in the homework your child is completing

Question: How much time should kids be spending on homework?

Answer: The general guideline is approximately 10 minutes per grade level. For example, a 4th grader should expect to spend about 40 minutes per night on homework. This is, however, a general time allotment. The time will vary depending on a number of variables such as: motivation, distractions, incomplete daytime assignments that need to be finished, long term projects that waited until the last minute, just to name a few. Sometimes the amount of time depends on interest in a subject. We have all experienced times when we can read one paragraph over 10 times and have no idea what it said and other times we can fly through a whole chapter in what seems to be just a few minutes. Background knowledge and degree of confidence may also affect the time required to accomplish an assignment. Things that are difficult for your child may be easy for another child in the same class. A page of math facts may take one student 5 minutes and another student may not be done with the same assignment after 30 minutes of concentrated effort.

Question: What should a parent do when a child has spent more than a reasonable time for homework completion and the child is still not done?

Answer: Our teachers suggest that you look over the assigned homework (check the planner and teacher correspondence) to determine the amount of time that you and your child believe would be a reasonable time the task should require. Make sure that your child has uninterrupted time, adequate space with few distractions, and the necessary supplies. Assure your child that you are available, if needed, and set the timer. When time is up, ask if your child needs more time to complete the assignment and look over it.

If additional attention to detail is necessary, agree on how much more time it would require, take a break, if needed and set the timer again. Here is where the battle often begins..... Our suggestion is that you do not choose to take on this battle to the point that it disrupts the often delicate balance needed to maintain personal and family health and well being. When the battle begins, the positive intent of practicing learned concepts to move them from short-term memory to long-term memory becomes counter productive. When that happens, draw a line at the end of the attempted homework and write the teacher a note to say that this was how far the child got after ____ minutes, sign and date. When homework involves multiple assignments, help your child make a reasonable and achievable schedule. Sometimes it helps to tackle the hardest task first.

Question: Will the teacher think that I am not being a ‘good’ parent by not insisting that my child’s assignment is completed and correct?

Answer: The intent of homework is to practice and refine skills learned in the classroom and to give the teacher feedback as to what concepts and skills need to be re-taught. Sometimes when bad grades come home, parents will tell us that these grades are not possible because they KNOW their child can do better because they were able to complete identical work at home with perfection. If the parent is ‘overly coaching’ the child, the teacher has no idea that the child is having difficulty understanding the concept. When the teacher doesn’t reteach the missing concepts, the student cannot demonstrate mastery on independent assessments. Teachers do not just assign ‘busy work’, they often go over the homework to help identify areas where the students are having difficulty and to reinforce important skills.

Question: Is homework a part of their academic grade?

Answer: Homework is not graded but some teachers count homework as a portion of the participation grade. Class work not completed during allotted class time and is sent home for completion, may be graded. Class work that must be done due to missing class for illness, family emergencies and appointments are usually turned in for a grade. Absences due to family celebrations/vacations may be turned in for a grade IF it has been pre-approved and excused. However, it is difficult for a child who misses classroom instruction, discussion and demonstration to grasp difficult concepts.

Question: “My child’s teacher requires 15-30 minutes of reading per night. Should that be considered as a part of the expected 10 minutes per grade level?”

Answer: If you spend 15 minutes of pleasure reading a night before turning out the light for a ‘good night’s rest’, do you consider that homework? Personally, I think that helps me refocus and let go of the anxieties of the day and relax. This is just part of a formula for a healthy lifestyle that just so happens to have some educational benefits. The educational tie-in is that reading for pleasure vastly increases reading fluency and comprehension – two essentials for academic success in all areas of academics. Reading aloud together at any time also has incredible family emotional benefits as well. If you choose to make it a part of the REQUIRED homework, it becomes more of a chore that must be done as opposed to a gift that you share with your child....I suppose you can call it what you wish. Know that whatever you call it...your child will call it for their children as well.