

NORTHERN YORK COUNTY  
SCHOOL DISTRICT  
**BOARD BRIEFING**

**Tracking ID: BB2017-Curr01**

**Date:** February 17, 2017

**From:** Jason Beals and Dr. Pat Franko

**Re:** Briefing on 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Homework Practices at Dillsburg Elementary

**Board Committee:** Curriculum

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This briefing has been prepared in response to Board Members receiving questions from concerned parents about Dillsburg Elementary 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Team homework practices during the 2016-2017 school year. An opportunity for discussion will be provided at the February Curriculum Committee meeting.

**Background:**

During the summer of 2016, two current 5<sup>th</sup> grade teachers proposed a plan to Dr. Franko based on their experience as parents of children within a neighboring district. They were in favor of a change in homework practices and brought the idea to Dr. Franko.

Concurrently, Dr. Franko had set a goal with the Fifth grade team to work on improving parent communication and encouraged them to partner with parents. This goal was partially based off of parent feedback from their experiences working with 5<sup>th</sup> grade team of teachers in the past. The decision was made to develop an initial parent survey and share this with their parents as one action step towards improving communication and solidifying a plan for homework practices. The team reviewed the survey results along with current research on best practices for homework.

A change in homework practices was announced to the parents during the Back to School Night presentation. It was stated that there would be “no formal homework” during this presentation. There were some initial questions from parents concerned about this change, and they voiced their concerns to Dr. Franko. She assure the parents that she would be meeting with the team and that they would be putting things in place to allow parents to be involved with their child's learning. She also told them they would revisit this decision further in the school year.

Teachers developed the attached practices including homework options. They started the Class Dojo (100% of families signed-up) as a communication tool.

The school team sent a second follow-up survey out the last week of January, and the results were mostly favorable except for communication. Some comments indicated that they would appreciate one consistent platform of communication throughout the school. Concerns continued to be raised about the homework practices and some parents reached out to individual board members.

**Issue:**

Parents have raised concerns regarding the “no formal homework” practices and the term “policy” has been used.

1. Questions about consistent practices across grade level, within Dillsburg Elementary, and across the district.

2. Questions about types of homework being assigned and the work that is expected to be done at home.
3. Questions about transition to the Middle School and concerns over use/nonuse of student agenda books.
4. Concerns about how this may have been communicated to parents.

**Findings:**

1. Attached are the surveys and results
2. Copy of letter sent by Dr. Franko to 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Parents
3. Copy of 5<sup>th</sup> grade Homework Practices this year
4. Copy of some research that was compiled by the team

As a result of the feedback received, Dr. Franko met with the team and they are offering more opportunities and options for homework. An example is Mrs. Lohr's high math class has My Math video links posted on her website. She also sent out links to Eureka Math and she sent home printable packets for the upcoming fraction unit. Getting parents into a routine to check these websites is challenging. Any change takes a while to catch on and we need to communicate the changes to our parents as we move forward.

**Recommendation:**

The team requests they would be permitted to continue to customize homework "opportunities". They are not in favor of including homework in a grade, providing a "one size fits all" approach, and they don't want punishments assigned at school for what is not done at home (i.e missed recess time or deduction in grades).

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED

## Fifth Grade Practices at DES February 2017

- Students have binders with tabs for each subjects to aide them with organization
- Students have agenda books to record upcoming tests and assignments
- Students receive study guides to assist them with content area summative tests
- Teachers and parents participate in Class Dojo- to record both conduct and to send messages to parents regarding any concerns. This allows two-way conversations.
- Teachers may post assignments on Class Dojo but students are expected to record the assignments in the agenda books.
- Parents who choose not to participate in Class Dojo receive communication through e-mail. Printed homework opportunities are also sent home
- A take home folder is provided in their binder to aid parents in finding important communications.

### **Two Types of Assignments:**

1. **Optional** – if students and parents see a need to practice or just want to practice a few to check for understanding.

Examples:

- Math: Math problems on a “My Homework” page or other assigned material sent home with each math unit of study

2. **Required**- if teachers determine a need for a child or all children to practice.

Examples:

- Completion of study guides
- Completion of data collection to assist with a collaborative class assignment
- Writing assignments that need finishing touches
- Projects that have not been completed in class
- Reading 20 minutes per night
- Math: Math problems on “My Homework” page on as needed basis

Teachers do not punish students with either grades or missed recess for not completing the homework. They have them complete assignments at alternate times. Students in need of extra practice are included in homework club on an as needed basis.

# Homework Survey

Data from HW Survey

Question Summaries

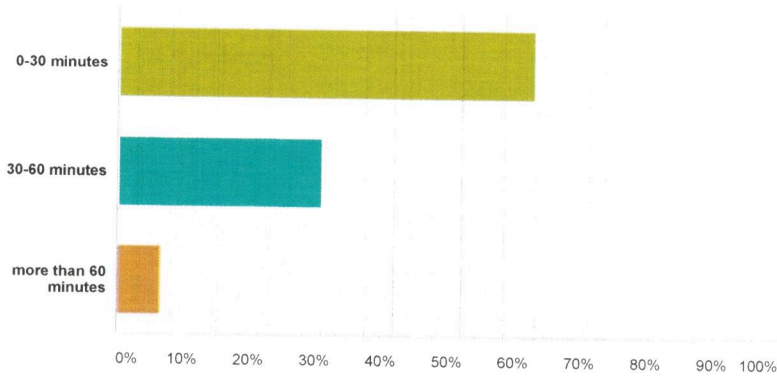
Individual Responses

Tweet G+ Share

Q1

## How much time do you spend on homework?

Answered: 62 Skipped: 2



Answer Choices	Responses	
0-30 minutes	62.90%	39
30-60 minutes	30.65%	19
more than 60 minutes	6.45%	4
Total		62

64 responses

9/2/2016 - 9/8/2016

7 views

### Need insights?

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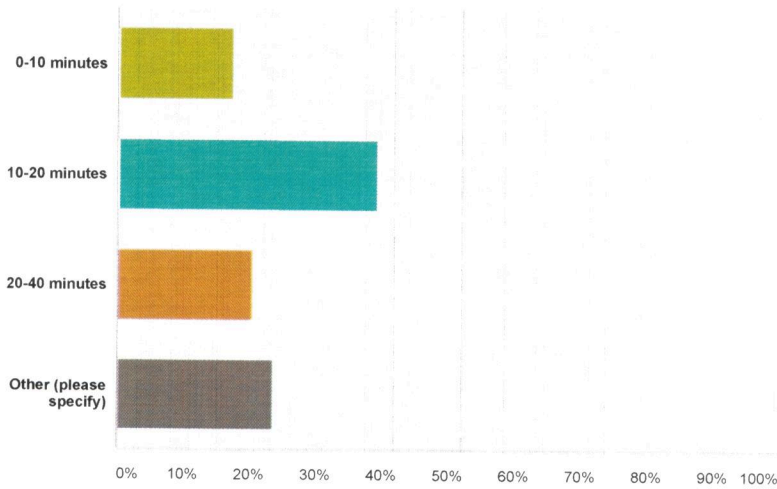
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Q2

## How much time do you think you should spend on homework with your 5th grader?

Answered: 64 Skipped: 0

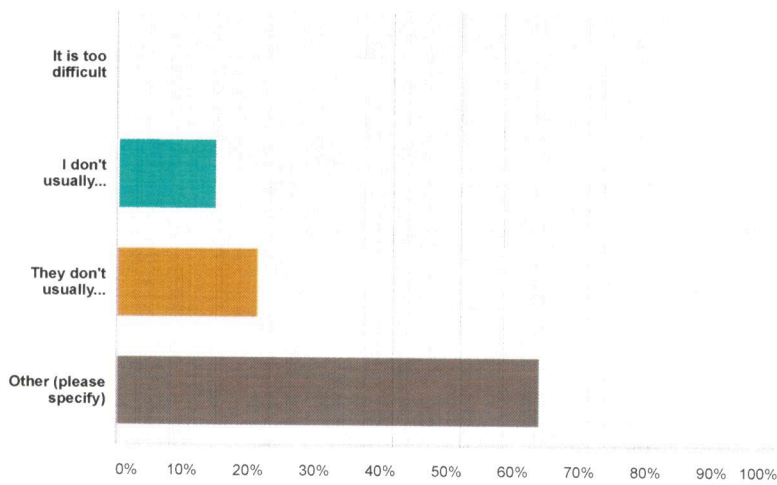


Answer Choices	Responses	
0-10 minutes	17.19%	11
10-20 minutes	39.06%	25
20-40 minutes	20.31%	13
Other (please specify)	23.44%	15
Total		64

Q3

### What problems do you have with homework that your child has received?

Answered: 61 Skipped: 3

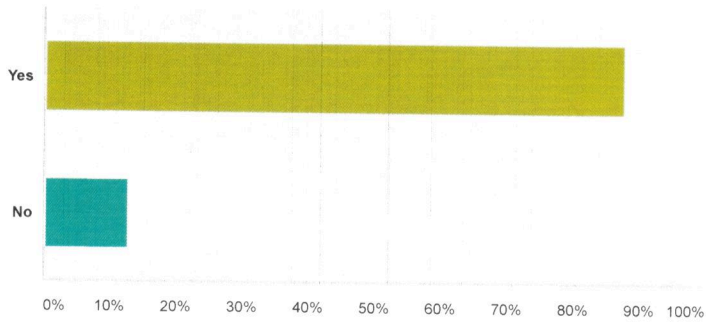


Answer Choices	Responses	
It is too difficult	0.00%	0
I don't usually understand it	14.75%	9
They don't usually understand it	21.31%	13
Other (please specify)	63.93%	39
Total		61

Q4

**If it is determined that homework will be limited in nature this year, would you support this? (You would still receive study guides and communication about what your child is currently learning)**

Answered: 64 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses
<b>Yes</b>	<b>87.50%</b> 56
<b>No</b>	<b>12.50%</b> 8
Total	64

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# Mid-year Homework Survey

Question Summaries

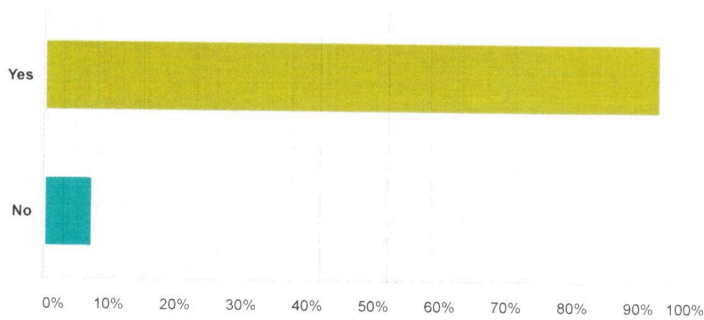
Individual Responses

Tweet G+ Share

Q1

## Has your child received optional homework this year?

Answered: 56 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses	Count
Yes	92.86%	52
No	7.14%	4
Total		56

56 responses

1/31/2017 - 2/9/2017

45 views

### Need insights?

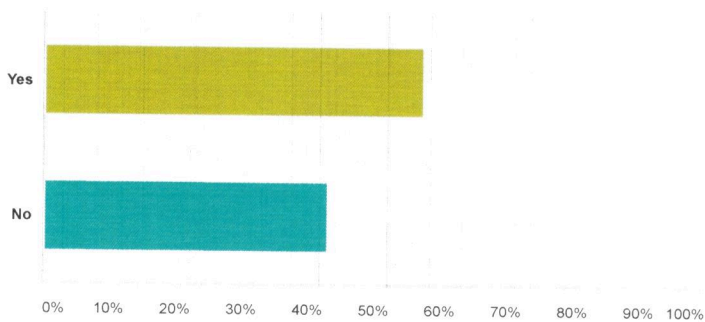
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Q2

## Has your child worked on any extended learning (not homework) outside of school?

Answered: 56 Skipped: 0

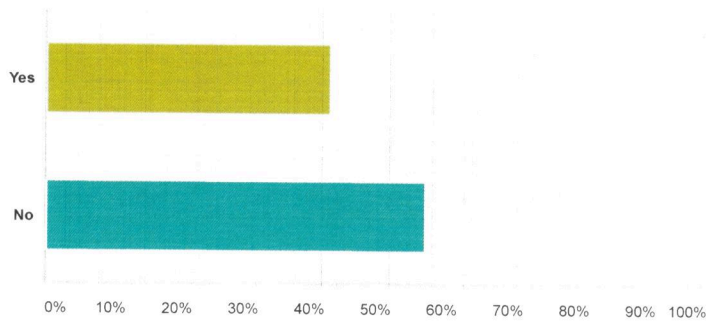


Answer Choices	Responses	Count
Yes	57.14%	32
No	42.86%	24
Total		56

Q3

### Do you feel you know what your child is learning based on communications?

Answered: 56 Skipped: 0

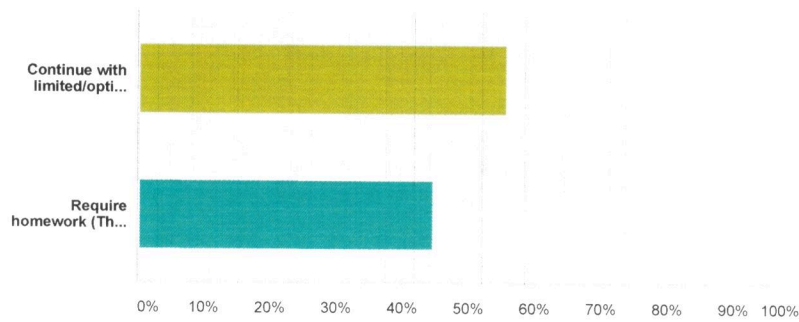


Answer Choices	Responses	
<b>Yes</b>	<b>42.86%</b>	24
<b>No</b>	<b>57.14%</b>	32
Total		56

Q4

### How would you like to see the homework for the remainder of the year?

Answered: 54 Skipped: 2



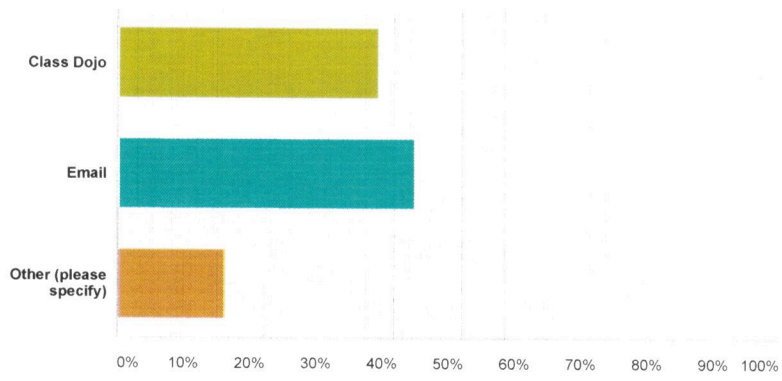
Answer Choices	Responses	
<b>Continue with limited/optional homework (as necessary)</b>	<b>55.56%</b>	30
<b>Require homework (This will not be graded)</b>	<b>44.44%</b>	24
Total		54

Q5

### What has been the best form of communication for your family?

Answered: 56 Skipped: 0





Answer Choices	Responses	
<b>Class Dojo</b>	<b>39.29%</b>	22
<b>Email</b>	<b>44.64%</b>	25
<b>Other (please specify)</b>	<b>16.07%</b>	9
Total		56

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Dear Fifth Grade Parents:

I hope that you and your child are having a positive year in fifth grade. The Fifth Grade Team is working hard to create partnerships with parents to work in the best interest of your students. The teachers have researched and presented me with the pros and cons of daily formal homework. If you follow me on Twitter, I posted an article outlining pros and cons of homework earlier this year, and many of these mirror concerns that were raised to me by teachers, parents, and students over the years as principal of DES.

One thing for sure, making standardized practices for homework, that meet diverse learning needs is difficult. I asked the teachers to reach out to you regarding homework with a survey at the beginning of the year to assure that we move forward united in our efforts to provide a quality year in fifth grade. There were 85% of parents who responded positively to having no formal homework assigned to their students this year.

The teachers decided to move forward without assigning formal homework. This decision was made in an effort to minimize stress for students and parents because sometimes homework was assigned to practice before a student mastered a concept. We do not want parents to have to teach concepts at home. We know, however, that students do better in school when they have involved parents who reinforce learning at home. We certainly do not want to take that opportunity away from you or your child.

Several parents asked me to reconsider our stance on homework. I discussed this with the teachers and we hope that you are finding opportunities to be involved and connected with your child's education this year. Here are some ways a parent can help:

1. Reading each night and record this so your child can be part of the PA Reward Challenge.
2. Practice math facts and allow your child to record their efforts.
3. Optional practices will be offered based on your child's needs.
4. Project Based Learning (PBL) work may be sent home for parent involvement and assistance periodically.

We hope that you are finding fifth grade a supportive environment in preparing your child for the middle school. We believe we can create opportunities to assist students in developing the skills and habits to be successful throughout their school years.

Please help us by completing a short follow up survey by going to the following webpage:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/M3VY52J>

Sincerely,  
Dr. Patricia Franko