



ELEMENTARY HOMEWORK GUIDELINES

Amherst & Pelham Elementary Schools

January 2018

Dear ARPS Staff and Community:

This document is the result of an iterative process led by educators and parents/guardians to review the homework practices in the Amherst and Pelham Elementary Schools and develop a set of guidelines that take into account equity and high standards for student achievement.

In late June 2017, a team of nine educators and three parent/guardians, representing all of the elementary schools in Amherst and Pelham, spent three mornings together drafting the following document intended to ensure that homework was aligned with best practices and research and consistent both across our schools and between grade levels. The work was contextualized with an ongoing conversation about the role of homework in our schools that began the previous winter. This conversation resulted in a new practice of not having homework during vacation/break periods throughout the year.

This Homework Inquiry Group reviewed research on [homework at the elementary level](#) and shared their experiences as teachers and parents/guardians to ensure that both scientific and experiential data sources contributed to the draft report. The draft report, fully written by educators and parents/guardians, identifies the purposes of homework, the grade-level expectations, and the responsibilities of different stakeholders.

During Fall 2017, the draft was reviewed by all faculty and provided to every member of the ARPS community to offer feedback. This resulted in a subsequent revision, which was again vetted by faculty, staff, and the community. This final document is the result of that extensive process.

Sincerely,

Dr. Michael Morris
Superintendent of Schools

Timothy J. Sheehan
Coordinator of Curriculum, Instruction, & Assessment

Homework Inquiry Group Contributors:

Stephanie Joyce, Crocker Farm Grade 3 Teacher
Angela McCall, Crocker Farm Parent/Guardian
Susan Radtke, Crocker Farm Grade 4 Teacher
Carissa Ackroyd, Fort River Grade 5 Teacher
Omar Almodovar, Fort River Grades 5 and 6 Teacher
Ann Shea, Fort River Kindergarten Teacher
Jill Isabelle, Pelham Parent/Guardian
Suzanne Quinlan, Pelham Grade 5 Teacher
Jaimie Bust, Wildwood Grade 6 Teacher
Julie HawkOwl, Wildwood Parent/Guardian
Victoria Munroe, Wildwood Grade 1 Teacher
Lisa Poirier, Wildwood Kindergarten Teacher

I. Purpose of Elementary Homework

The district values the balance our students need for academic growth and social emotional growth throughout the hours of school and beyond in the hours outside of school. The district wants our students to understand that learning takes place during the school day and outside of school in all aspects of their lives. There are many learning activities that support the balance of these areas of growth after school including homework, time to pursue other interests, and other activities that children do with their families and friends. Homework should function as a means for families and educators to collaborate on the educational development of their children and is never meant to supplant these other important non-academic activities.

The district homework policy integrates the following three purposes that are meant to promote the relationship between children, teachers, and families:

1. Student Skills

Homework can be helpful in developing students' habits of work and learning. These habits include:

- responsibility
- organization
- independence
- effective time management

Homework can support the practice of academic skills, curriculum concepts, and independent work habits. At the K-4 level, the primary focus of homework is to develop strong foundational literacy skills, in addition to the work done daily during the Literacy and Enhancement Blocks in school. At the 5-6 level, the expectations are designed to prepare students for Middle and High School expectations, while also continuing to engage them in practice of important academic skills.

2. Family Communication

Fostering pathways in our family-school partnerships is a priority in the Amherst schools, and communication about ways to support student learning at home is an essential element in those partnerships. Shared information about educational resources, links to useful sites, and apps for digital access to learning, enable families to make choices about supporting students' ongoing learning outside of school. Homework helps to foster one pathway in our family-school partnerships. Homework can be a window into your child's learning. Homework may also convey strategies being used in the classroom. Classroom newsletters provide additional information from the classroom to connect families to ongoing learning and events in school. In addition, school-wide newsletters that include information on curriculum, school initiatives, events, and learning opportunities for families are yet another way our schools aim to keep families well-informed. Families are also encouraged to have meaningful conversations with their child about what they are learning at school.

3. Student Creativity, Discovery, Play, Fitness, and Opportunities Outside of School

Students' time outside of regular school hours is an ongoing opportunity to be curious, creative, inquisitive and physically active. Play and family time, in balance with homework and other learning occasions, encourages students to communicate, think critically, solve problems, persevere and learn from mistakes.

Appropriate Workload & Balance

Keeping in mind the three purposes explained above, the Amherst & Pelham Public Schools also strive to help children develop an appropriate work-life balance that encourages them to become well-rounded adults. To that end, we are keeping to a practice of thinking about homework assignments as gradually increasing in the amount of time they require in each grade by ten minutes. For example, a first grader would spend an average of 10 minutes on homework, while a sixth grader may spend one hour. While this is not a perfect formula, it is a useful guideline for teachers and families. One exception is that, from time to time, other homework may be assigned to support practice that offers review and reinforcement of learned concepts, to prepare students for upcoming content or assessments, to extend learning to contexts and situations outside the classroom, or to promote creative and critical thinking skills with problem solving, challenges, or maker options.

Additional Enrichment & Practice

Families are encouraged to seek out other ways to enrich their children's learning in meaningful ways. As a means to this, you will find an appendix to this document that includes other suggestions that families and children can do to facilitate stronger learning habits and skills.

II. Grade Level Expectations

Kindergarten, First Grade, Second Grade

Play and social development are important parts of learning at the primary grade levels. Outdoor play, physical activities, arts and crafts, games, cooking, and other activities that families enjoy are all valued and encouraged to nurture learning and social growth.

Content:

Reading—Reading at home and school is an integral part of learning at these grade levels. Reading at home supports the development of reading skills by having more opportunities to:

- Talk about reading
- Retell stories
- Ask and answer questions about what is being read
- Experience different kinds of books, genres and other reading materials

Frequency/Quantity:

Daily reading minimums

Kindergarten: 5-10 minutes

First grade: 10-15 minutes

Second grade: 20 minutes

Quality:

Students can read to themselves or be read to by an older sibling or adult. Listening to someone read aloud and model fluent reading increases students' own fluency and comprehension skills. It also expands children's vocabulary, background knowledge, sense of story and comprehension.

We want students to have access to reading materials at their reading level outside of school. Students may borrow books to read at home, or they may receive copies of books at school that can stay at home. Some reading can also include audiobooks and eBooks.

Accountability:

In grades K-2, students will be responsible for bringing a folder back and forth from school to home that will include newsletters, flyers, completed work and other school information. Newsletters, sent home on a regular basis, will reflect what is happening in the classroom and can help foster conversations at home about what your child is learning at school. Responsibility for homework completion will be discussed in class, at parent conferences, and will be reflected on the report card.

Additional Resources:

For families that would like to spend more time on math activities outside of school, there is an Appendix of Supplemental Activities at the back of this document with a variety of possibilities for additional math practice. Students also have access to the online portal that accompanies the Everyday Math part of our curriculum and teachers can provide students with their usernames and passwords to access that resource.

Third and Fourth Grade

Content:

Reading is the sole focus of homework in grades three and four. Research supports the need for sufficient time for reading for students to both sustain reading levels and to make ongoing progress. While the importance of time to read is well documented in research, it is difficult to substantiate homework in spelling, math, etc., based on the conclusive research that informs us that the overall impact of daily homework on student learning outcomes has weak or no evidence of influence. For families that would like to spend more time on math activities outside of school, there is an Appendix of Supplemental Activities at the back of this document with a variety of possibilities for additional math practice. Students also have access to the online portal that accompanies the Everyday Math part of our curriculum and teachers can provide students with their usernames and passwords to access that resource.

Reading—Third and fourth grade often mark a unique milestone in the lives of readers. After the foundational work of learning to read in grades K-2, reading comprehension provides the basis for most instruction and learning in grades 3-4. As texts become more complex, readers need to develop the reading tools/strategies to engage meaningfully with their texts. Focusing on reading as the homework initiative at these grades aims to build good reading habits and foster strong reading lives for our students.

These are the years in which we support students to expand purposes in reading:

- Expanding background knowledge
- Monitoring for meaning
- Analyzing—characters and story elements, multiple meanings, author’s message, author’s craft
- Expanding vocabulary—multiple meanings, literary language
- Exploring ideas and theories
- Writing about reading
- Reading like a writer with a writer’s eye
- Reading to learn in content areas

Reading Volume and Time to Read - To support growth in reading for all these purposes, it is critical that the volume of reading students do, and the time spent reading, be maximized. Many third and fourth grade readers find themselves at a place where reading is still hard work. Time spent reading is the only fix for moving beyond where reading is a chore, to where reading is a pleasure. With enough time spent on reading, students at these grade levels often make the move to becoming passionate, lifelong readers.

Reading homework is essential to ensure students have sufficient time to read. Reading research (Allington, R. L. 2012, 2009) informs us that reading a minimum of 60 minutes per day is critical to help students sustain progress as readers. Classroom reading programs at third and fourth grade levels provide at least 30 minutes of daily reading. Reading homework is an essential part of reaching the 60 minute threshold. In comparison, we are fortunate that our math program provides 70 minutes of daily math instruction and practice, across the day, in the classroom.

Frequency/Quantity:

Daily reading

Third grade: 20 minutes in September-October, growing to 30 minutes by November

Fourth grade: Minimum of 30 minutes

Weekly writing about reading—reading journal and notetaking, post-it notes, annotations. Teachers may also include short vocabulary and spelling activities that relate to developing strong literacy skills.

Quality:

Choice in reading materials is important. Children should be encouraged to read what they love. However, students can be guided to reflect on reading choices to read diverse genres. Some reading may include audio books, read aloud, and eBooks. A list of possible sources for digital texts will be provided to all 3rd and 4th graders and will be updated periodically to support students and families in knowing the kinds of resources that teachers find useful to support diverse interests in reading.

Accountability:

Students can account for their reading in many ways. Some students may prefer to record their choices on a paper or digital log. Others may prefer to maintain a journal or notebook listing books read or making jots and sketches of meaningful lines, passages, or images. All students will be expected to write about their reading in order to deepen their comprehension, apply learned vocabulary, and practice and improve use of reading strategies. Writing about reading also helps students prepare for book talks and conferences with partners and teachers.

In grades 3-4, students will be responsible for bringing a folder back and forth from school to home each day. The folder is the place to carry newsletters, flyers, completed work and other school information between home and school.

Responsibility for homework completion will be discussed with students in class and with families at fall conferences. Accountability for homework completion will also be reflected on the report card. Parents/guardians will be contacted if a student is not completing the daily reading homework.

Fifth and Sixth Grade

Content:

Reading—Reading continues to be of significance in grades 5-6. Students can be expected to read texts in different genres. They may also be expected to read content area materials for science and social studies.

Math—Math homework will reflect classroom learning and may include work for practice and reinforcement of math skills, problem solving, and math vocabulary.

Additional Resources—For families that would like to spend more time on math activities outside of school, there is an Appendix of Supplemental Activities at the back of this document with a variety of possibilities for additional math practice. Students also have access to the online portal that accompanies the Everyday Math part of our curriculum and teachers can provide students with their usernames and passwords to access that resource.

Frequency/Quantity:

Reading: 30-40 minutes daily, including pleasure reading on Saturday & Sunday

Math: 20-25 minutes, Monday - Thursday

If students have worked productively for the 20-25 minutes and the assignment is not completed, students do not need to continue to work past the allotted time.

Quality:

Choice in reading materials is important. Children should be encouraged to read what they love. However, students can be guided to reflect on reading choices to encourage them to read diverse genres. The quality of reading materials available to students will likely increase their voluntary reading beyond the daily, required minutes. Some reading may include audio books, read aloud, and eBooks.

Accountability:

As students begin their upper elementary career, homework practice and completion becomes increasingly important for reinforcement of student learning and ongoing success. Where possible, building-based strategies may be developed to support all students in being accountable for homework completion during flexible times in the schedule.

Responsibility for homework completion will be discussed with students in class and with families at fall conferences. Accountability for homework completion will also be reflected on the report card. Parents/guardians will be contacted if a student is not completing the daily reading and math homework.

III. Responsibilities

Responsibilities of Teachers

- Provide children with homework that corresponds to grade-specific guidelines.
- Prioritize reading at home on a daily basis to foster a love of literacy.
- Ensure homework assignments leave school with clear expectations.
- Provide opportunities for students to ask questions and receive clarification of expectations when assignments are given.
- Make homework as engaging as possible.
- Provide homework assignments that take into account the differences among students so that the work can be completed independently.
- Collaborate with students' other teachers to ensure that the students do not receive an excessive amount of homework across academic areas (Special Education, ELL, Intervention Teachers).
- Share homework expectations at Curriculum Night and in a newsletter that is sent home early in the school year.
- Ensure that families are aware of topics that are being learned in school, so they can opt to extend that learning at home.
- Offer families specific suggestions on how to help their children with homework.
- Review and provide feedback to students that may include self-evaluation and/or tracking of progress, peer feedback, or teacher comments.

Responsibilities of Families

- Support your child's completion of homework by making it a priority on a daily basis and set a routine that works for your family.
- Provide a quiet, well-lit space for your child to do homework.
- Encourage reading for pleasure, and let your child see you reading, too.
- Show confidence in your child's ability; never do your child's homework for him/her.
- Hold your child accountable for getting homework to and from school.
- Let the teacher know if your child is experiencing difficulty with homework.

Responsibilities of Students

- Know homework assignments before leaving school.
- Take homework assignments and all necessary supplies home.
- Spend the expected time on homework each evening.
- Contact a homework buddy for support if there are questions.
- Ask for help when it is needed.
- Submit finished homework to the teacher, neatly done and on time.

IV. Appendix of Supplemental Activities for Families

Families may wish to choose from additional activities to do with their children to supplement homework given by teachers. These additional activities are optional and are provided as a resource for families. The Amherst Public Schools does not endorse these websites, but provides them as a possible resource for families. As always, please preview sites prior to providing links to children, and always supervise children when they are using the Internet.

Math Additional Resources

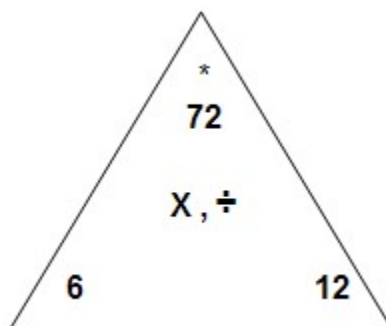
1. Making Sense of Numbers, Flexibility, and Understanding of the Number System

Students spend a lot of time learning to make sense of how numbers work and develop flexibility with numbers and numerical operations. This helps promote the type of thinking that leads to success with higher-order mathematics. A good website with resources for parents/guardians and students is <http://www.youcubed.org>.

2. Fact Family Cards

Teachers in some classes may send home sets of fact family cards in addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division based on targeted points of instruction throughout the year. In our math curriculum, fact family cards are used in games and in practice for building fact power or mental math fluency. The cards are a visual reminder of the inverse operations of addition/subtraction and multiplication/division. Fact family cards for each student, which families may think of as ‘flash cards,’ are for use at home to support students in developing automaticity in math computation skills.

Fact family cards can also be made at home. They feature a numeral at the top of the card that can be the sum, difference, product, or quotient depending on the math operation reflected in the center of the card (+ - or $\times \div$). The other two corners each contain a numeral, and together, they make the fact for the answer at the top of the card. On the example below, $6 \times 12 = 72$, $12 \times 6 = 72$ AND $72 \div 12 = 6$, or $72 \div 6 = 12$



3. Strategy Games/Math Games

Strategy games provide creative outlets for students and families to enjoy. These games also offer opportunities for thinking strategically, making informed decisions based on strategies, and

practicing math skills. 3rd and 4th graders will be provided with a list of strategy games for families to consider for use at home. Over the year, students and families may also receive copies of games and directions to use at home. These games come from Everyday Math units of study and from other teacher resources, and they offer students the chance to deepen their understanding of math concepts by explaining the game to family members. Families also gain insights into math units and ways math computation is applied in game format in math class.

4. Math Digital Resources

The following is a list of digital resources that are free to families and teachers and can be used at home on tablets and computers. Some of these resources are used in school on Chromebooks and others are adapted to provide families with information, strategies, and practice formats to use with their children at home.

- a) Everyday Math Online: <http://everydaymathonline.com>
This is the online component to the district's math program. Teachers can provide students with usernames and passwords to access online games and other resources for families.
- b) <https://illuminations.nctm.org/> and <https://calculationnation.nctm.org/>
Both excellent math offerings from The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics.
- c) <https://xtramath.org/#/home/index> - a free site that offers quick paced computation practice and enables students to track their progress online.
- d) 11 Free Math Sites for Students at this link - <https://www.reallygoodstuff.com/community/11-free-math-sites-for-kids/>
(includes <http://mathblaster.com>; <http://multiplication.com>; <http://LearnZillion.com> for 3rd-9th grades; <http://hoodamath.com> includes logic and reasoning games as well as computation practice; <http://MathGameTime.com> - an array of math games for PreK-7th grade; <http://MathPlayground.com> - includes word problems and video explanations to understand solutions for logic problems, numbers skills, geometry, fractions, and algebra; Cryptokids at <https://www.nsa.gov/kids/home.shtml> - requires critical thinking to do codemaking; BBC KS2 Bitesize at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/ks2bitesize/> addition, subtractions, factors and multiples, decimals, and more with a bit of British humor; www.coolmath-games.com offers math practice that uncovers photo images by solving puzzle pieces to reveal to the photo and it includes elementary math plus pre-calculus and calculus.)
- e) www.mathlearningcenter.org/resources/apps
Math practice with virtual manipulatives on The Math Learning Center web app - (this site also has a great "family" link at the top of their HOME page).
- f) http://www.glencoe.com/sites/common_assets/mathematics/ebook_assets/vmf/VMF-Interface.html
Math practice with virtual manipulatives PreK- 8th grade
- g) School Kit Math app - free at iTunes
<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/schoolkit-math/id775643572?mt=8>
- h) GregTangMath.com

Includes 10 frame Mania, Kakooma, Coin Bubble, and much more.

- i) Addition Blocks at www.mathplayground.com
- j) <https://nrich.maths.org/>
Puzzles, challenges, brain teasers for primary and secondary grade levels
- k) <http://bedtimemath.org/>
Family activities to make math part of a child's daily routine.
- l) <http://www.mathforum.org>
Math information and activities provided by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM).
- m) <http://visiblethinking.weebly.com/daily-routines.html>
A collection of math activities that can be used to promote flexible thinking.
- n) <http://www.brilliant.org>
Interesting ways to explore math and science concepts.
- o) <https://gfletchy.com/3-act-lessons/>
A resource for families to use with students to practice math skills.

Reading, Science, and Social Studies Digital Resources

Reading in diverse genres is important for all readers to build background knowledge, vocabulary, new contexts for understanding, and creative imaginations. Historical fiction invites readers into different eras and time periods. Fantasy offers the realm of the imaginary, utopian, or science fiction created worlds. Poetry grabs readers with vivid words and big feelings. Biography introduces readers to new people in all walks of life and is often motivational or inspirational. Informational text, the reading that constitutes about 80% of our reading as adults, answers students' questions and challenges them to ask new questions and read on. Fiction often sends a message, or teaches a life lesson, as students are given a chance to walk in a character's shoes and share experiences that could really happen in life. By 3rd and 4th grades, many readers are beginning to try new genres and latching onto favorites that nudge them towards reading more and more!

Students will be provided with a list of digital resources for sites that offer articles, texts, audio books, and eBooks to read. In addition to accessing the free diverse genre in our school libraries and Town of Amherst libraries, we invite families to investigate the digital resources on the list, for use at home, to support reading and conversation with family members about the content and learning from the stories, articles, and texts.

- a) <https://sites.google.com/arps.org/scienceforfamilies/home>
Amherst Public Schools' Science for Families website provides resources and activities to promote curiosity and inquisitive thinking on scientific topics of interest to children.

- b) <https://kids.nationalgeographic.com/>
Texts, games, videos, polls to take as students explore science topics.
- c) <https://mysteryscience.com/r1>
Inspires children to love science, provides opportunity to sign up to receive a weekly question and answer with video support.
- d) <https://www.reallygoodstuff.com/community/11-free-reading-websites-for-kids/>
11 free reading sites at this link.
- e) <https://www.reallygoodstuff.com/community/11-free-science-websites-for-kids/>
11 free science sites at this link. (Includes: <http://kids.frontiersin.org/> - A scientific journal for kids that also includes math explorations. <https://earthquake.usgs.gov/learn/kids/> - learn more about earthquakes and related experiments. <https://www.chemcool.com/> - a site for students to learn about the periodic table of elements. <https://solarsystem.nasa.gov/galileo/> - explore NASA's Galileo mission and it's legacy. <https://airandspace.si.edu/> - follow exhibits and discoveries with the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum. <https://climatekids.nasa.gov/> - NASA's site for students to explore climate and global impact of climate change. www.seussville.com/loraxproject - official site of Dr. Seuss to help children understand science of conservation. <http://extension.illinois.edu/firstgarden/> - learn about gardening to support the gardening projects in our schools and student can plan their own garden. <http://www.almanac4kids.com/> - read and explore the Farmer's Almanac for Kids to understand more science and weather patterns. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/buildingbig/index.html> - Building Big is a site for students to craft architectural designs. <http://discoverykids.com/> - Discovery Kids offers eBooks, activities and more about science and social studies.
- f) <https://wonderopolis.org/>
Investigate the daily wonder in social studies, science, or current events, and read more about it.
- g) <http://www.fcrr.org/resources/>
ABC letter games, reading/word activities from the Florida Center for Reading Research.
- h) <http://magicblox.com/>
Register to read a vast array of books at the MagicBloxs Children's Book Online Library.
- i) <http://www.uniteforliteracy.com/>
The site can fast become a favorite for their diverse collection of books to read online.
- j) <http://readtomelv.com>
Features famous people reading children's books.
- k) <https://www.oxfordowl.co.uk/>
Includes many options of eBooks for elementary grade children to read.

- l) <https://www.getepic.com/>
Offers 25,000 books for children of all ages. Is free for 30 days of use.
- m) <https://www.storyjumper.com/>
Online writing adventures for students to create books of their own.
- n) <https://freekidsbooks.org/>
Online books galore, organized by themes and genres.
- o) <https://www.readconmigo.org/>
Promotes bilingual literacy, site available in Spanish, also books in Spanish.
- p) <https://www.gutenberg.org/>
Over 50,000 titles to choose from, primarily with appeal to grades 4 and up.
- q) <http://www.educatorstechnology.com/2013/09/6-good-websites-to-access-kids-free.html>
(Free Audiobooks: 6 free audiobook sites are available at this link; sites include: McGenius, Storynory, Online Talking Stories, Storyline Online, Children's Storybooks, and Books Should Be Free).
- r) <https://newsela.com/> - constantly updated articles in science, social studies, and math; the elementary link at the site offers resources suited for grades 2-6. Spanish offered and choice of reading levels for articles. Registration required at the site for free access.
- s) <https://www.joneslibrary.org/228/Digital-Books-Media>
A growing collection of audiobooks and ebooks for children that can be downloaded with a library card in the Town of Amherst.