

Alice Buffett Magnet Middle School

Homework Policy for 2009-2010

Background Knowledge:

Homework is defined as any tasks that are “assigned to students by school teachers that are intended to be carried out during non-school hours” (Cooper, p. 4). Quality homework is not busy work, it is doable and well-organized and easy to understand (Vatterott). Effective homework practices have a positive correlation with high student achievement. Students have higher achievement when they are provided appropriate, meaningful homework.

Marzano (2006) indicates that at a basic level, classroom assessment is a form of feedback to students regarding their progress, and it stands to reason that descriptive feedback will enhance learning (pg. 5). Indeed, as a result of reviewing almost 8,000 studies, researcher, John Hattie (1992), made the following comment: “The most powerful single modification that enhances achievement is descriptive feedback. The simplest prescription for improving education must be ‘dollops of feedback’ (pg. 9)”. Homework needs descriptive feedback.

Researched Best Practices:

Homework should be:

- **purposeful** to prepare for future lessons, **practice** an independent skill or process, **elaborate** on information to deepen knowledge, and to **explore** topics of their own interest.
- a tool for feedback. **Descriptive feedback should be provided twice per five contact days with a mix of both verbal and written feedback.** It should specifically inform students what they are doing correctly and what they are doing incorrectly and how to fix it. Descriptive feedback should be timely, frequent and specific.
- **designed at the appropriate level of difficulty or readiness level.** This will increase student motivation and allow students to be able to complete homework
- designed to take the amount of time that is appropriate according to the students age. Teachers will discuss assignments amongst team members to give the right amount of homework. **Students should have about 10 minutes (up to 15 minutes if reading is included) of homework each night for each grade they are old.**
- clearly understood by parents and students. A school should always publish their homework and grading policy. **The Buffett policy will be sent to parents during the first quarter of 2009-2010.**
- **updated daily via the homework hotline and website.**
- scaffolded with a clear scoring guide. **Rubrics should be provided for the majority (75%) assignments and the expected criteria on the rubric should be taught explicitly and repeatedly.**
- **categorized into three types: practice, formative and summative.** Practice homework may not be graded rather teachers may give practice homework participation points. If practice homework is graded it will be weighted at 10% of the total grade.
- **frequent and with shorter assignments.** This is much better than fewer but longer assignments.
- **distributed material across multiple assignments.** Assignments that include a review of materials from past assignments along with a preview of future concepts and procedures better facilitate student learning.

- **a mix of both easy and hard materials** throughout an assignment in order to keep students engaged and interested.
- provided that gives students homework choices and assignments should be varied according to individual students' learning styles whenever possible (25% of the time).
- **designed to keep parental involvement to a minimum.** We want students doing their own homework without too much parent direct aid. Avoid dioramas or craftwork.
- **preceded by teaching and modeling to students strategies that will assist them in studying.** Study skills and strategies need to be taught just like we teach vocabulary and fractions. Examples of strategies include: notemaking, highlighting MVPs., using a frayer model, four square outlining, summarizing in the students own words, etc.
- **intermittently graded.** Do not grade every homework assignment. Descriptive feedback coupled with reteaching has a positive effect. Providing descriptive feedback intermittently is more meaningful.
- **will be tracked by the student for self reflection.** "One of the most powerful straightforward ways a teacher can provide feedback that encourages learning is to have students keep track of their own progress on topics." (Marzano, 2006) There are two ways you can accomplish students tracking their progress. Buffett teachers may create their own or use one of these two ways:
 - student self- assessment where by students self-assess their formative assessments before the teacher does usually with a rubric.
 - students articulate and reflect what they are currently learning on exit cards.
- **different for students with verified disabilities.** It should be: 1) short, and 2) focused on reinforcement of skills and class lessons. Monitoring for students with disabilities might consist of:
 - use of class time to begin assignments so that the teacher can ensure that students understand the assignment,
 - frequent contact between teachers and parents to make sure parents understand assignments and things are going smoothly at home,
 - prompt in class review and
 - the use of intrinsic rewards for completion or accuracy.
- **supported with an after school homework program called, "Strategic Tutoring".** This involves;
 - assessing the student's current study skills and the students use of instructional strategies for learning,
 - determining what the assignment requires the student to do, and the tutor's knowledge of strategies appropriate for the current assignment;
 - creating a new strategy that addresses the task at hand;
 - teaching and practicing the new strategy until it is mastered by the student; and
 - making sure the student independently uses the strategy for other assignments.

These best practices reflect the review of the literature on homework and are the practices that teachers at Buffett will adhere to as a standardized process for assignments and homework.

*Blue font indicates priority focus for 2009-2010

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