

TO: Mike Riggle  
FROM: Rosanne Williamson  
RE: Foundational Homework Study  
DATE: May 11, 2015  
CC: Board of Education

### **Introduction**

As articulated in the District Initiatives, a foundational homework study was conducted during the 2014-2015 school year as an important first step. The scope of this study is limited to a review of current homework literature and the examination of surrounding districts' policies. Baseline Glenbrook survey data from the 2010 and 2012 High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE) was also consulted (See Appendix C). This is the first phase in our study of homework that helped identify recommendations for next year's work. In addition, related gaps identified through the technology vision process will complement and coincide with the 2015-16 review of Glenbrook homework practices.

### **Limitations**

Given that this is the first year that GBS is on the block schedule and the first year that all students are in a Chromebook 1:1 environment, an extensive study of Glenbrook homework practices relative to current research was not undertaken. Both schools will also be under the leadership of new principals next year. Because current data regarding Glenbrook homework practices is not part of this study, discussion of such practices is beyond the scope of this report.

### **Process**

A multi-disciplinary approach was utilized involving representatives from the GEA and the administration. Associate Principals for Curriculum & Instruction along with teachers representing four major academic areas (English, Math, Science, Social Studies) helped review policies, analyze and summarize the review of literature.

### **Research/Materials Consulted**

The 2009 book, Rethinking Homework (Vatterott), was one of the primary sources used in this study. This resource not only provided research on homework, but also suggested effective homework practices, strategies for improving completion and support. Two extensive studies presented a synthesis of data and meta-analysis of research going back to the mid-1980's. *How Well Are American Students Learning? – Part II: Homework in America*, a report published in 2014 by The Brown Center on Education Policy at Brookings, analyzed nearly 30 years of data provided by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and other sources. In a 2006 synthesis of homework studies by Duke University, *Does Homework Improve Academic Achievement? A Synthesis of Research, 1987-2003*, researchers addressed the question of whether homework improves academic achievement. Existing policies in area high schools were collected (See APPENDIX B). Data from the 2010 & 2012 *High School Survey of Student Engagement* (HSSSE) were reviewed.

### **Findings based upon review of literature:**

General:

- Homework is widely researched with many competing findings – some refuting, but more supporting its value
- NAEP data collected from students and parents since the mid-1980's through 2012 indicates homework load at the high school level has remained stable over time & does not support the view that the homework burden is growing
- Parents hold polarizing views of homework
  - Nationally, 15% of parents feel that students have too much homework (typically among well-educated professionals)
  - Nationally, 15-25% of parents desire more homework
- Homework is often a source of friction between parents, students, teachers
- Homework is influenced by more factors than any other instructional strategy (external factors, assignment characteristics, home-community factors, classroom follow-up, grading practices)
- Homework can be a source of stress

#### Potential Benefits:

- Research indicates a positive influence on academic achievement, especially Grades 7-12
- Immediate achievement & learning (knowledge, understanding, critical thinking, concept formation)
- Long-term academic benefit (study habits & skills, positive attitude towards school & learning)
- Non-academic benefits (self-direction, self-discipline, time organization)
- Parental & family benefits (greater parental involvement & student awareness of home-school connection)

#### Potential Negative Effects:

- Satiation (loss of interest in academic material, physical/emotional fatigue)
- Too much homework may diminish effectiveness or be counterproductive
- Cheating
- Denial of access to leisure time
- Parental interference (pressure to complete/perform; excessive reliance on others)
- Difference between high and low achievers associated with economic differences (parental support, study space conducive to learning)

#### Characteristics of Quality Homework:

- Clear academic purpose
- Instills competence – positive attitude towards success in learning
- Student Ownership – choice & opportunity for personal expression
- Presentation – how engaging/appealing is the task

#### **Next Steps – Recommendations for 2015-2016:**

- Identify gaps/information regarding Glenbrook practices in relation to research by
  - Conducting independent focus groups of teachers and students to garner information regarding practices framed by current research
  - Administering HSSSE homework survey questions to students
  - Developing active digital spaces in all courses for blended learning (*District 225 Technology Vision* recommendation)
- Develop a homework policy modeled after surrounding districts/PRESS policy
- Determine professional development needs to address identified gaps
- Develop student/parent education/communication plan
  - Research shows educators, parents, and students are in the best position to resolve homework complaints on a case by case basis

## APPENDIX A

### VARIATIONS AND PURPOSES OF HOMEWORK

#### Variations:

- Amount (frequency or length of assignment)
- Skill area(s)
- Purpose
- Choice – compulsory or voluntary
- Deadline – short or long-term assignments
- Degree of individualization
- Social context – work alone or with others

#### Instructional Purposes:

- Practice or review – most common
- Preparation/Pre-learning – introduce new material
- Processing – reflect on concepts, apply skills or knowledge
- Extension – transfer of knowledge/skill to new situation
- Integration – apply separately learned skills and concepts

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE POLICIES

## **Instruction**

### **Homework**

Homework is part of the District's instructional program and has the overarching goal of increasing student achievement. Homework is assigned to further a student's educational development and is an application or adaptation of a classroom experience. <sup>1</sup> The Superintendent shall provide guidance to ensure that homework:

1. Is used to reinforce and apply previously covered concepts, principles, and skills;
2. Is not assigned for disciplinary purposes;
3. Serves as a communication link between the school and parents/guardians;
4. Encourages independent thought, self-direction, and self-discipline; and
5. Is of appropriate frequency and length, and does not become excessive, according to the teacher's best professional judgment.

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<sup>1</sup> This policy's contents are at the local school board's discretion; a board should customize the list of standards for homework to reflect the district's practices. Below are two optional provisions to add at the end of the sample policy:

- Option 1: Recognizing the importance of parental involvement in homework, the Superintendent or designee shall ensure that parents/guardians are informed of, (1) whom to contact with questions or concerns about homework assignments, and (2) methods to facilitate homework completion.
- Option 2: The Superintendent or designee shall annually report to the Board on the effectiveness of homework assignments on increasing student achievement.

## **Instruction**

### **Homework**

Homework is a necessary part of the District's instructional program. Homework is assigned to further a student's educational development and is an application or adaptation of a classroom experience.

ADOPTED: January 12, 2009



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# NEW TRIER TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 203

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Board of Education Policy 6-290

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## **INSTRUCTION**

### **HOMEWORK**

Teachers may give homework to students to aid in the students' educational development. Homework should be an application or adaptation of a classroom experience and should not be assigned for disciplinary purposes.

**Adopted: 10/17/94**

**Affirmed: 4/17/2006**



Book	District 211 Board Policy
Section	I: Instruction
Title	Homework
Number	IKB
Status	Active
Legal	
Adopted	February 8, 2001

High school level academic work requires that additional study, assigned by a professional educator, occur outside the regular school day. This homework will vary with the rigor of the outcomes and objectives of a course and the individual student's academic program.



## TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 214

### SECTION 6 - Instruction

#### 6:290 - Homework

#### **6:290 - »Homework«**

»Homework« is part of the District's instructional program and has the overarching goal of increasing student achievement. »Homework« is assigned to further a student's educational development and is an application or adaptation of a classroom experience. The Superintendent shall provide guidance to ensure that »homework«:

1. Is used to introduce, reinforce and apply concepts, principles, and skills;
2. Is of appropriate frequency and length, and does not become excessive, according to the best educational interests of the student;
3. Serves as a communication link between the school and parents/guardians;
4. Encourages independent thought, self-direction, and self-discipline; and
5. Is not assigned for disciplinary purposes.

CROSS REF.: District 214 Student Handbook

ADOPTED: April 18, 2013

**TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 214**

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## **Instruction**

### **Homework**

Homework is a necessary part of the District's instructional program. Homework is assigned to further a student's educational development and is an application or adaptation of a classroom experience. The Superintendent or designee shall provide guidance to ensure that homework:

1. Is used to reinforce and apply previously covered concepts, principles, and skills;
2. Is not assigned for disciplinary purposes;
3. Serves as a communication link between the school and parents/guardians;
4. Encourages independent thought, self-direction, and self-discipline; and
5. Is of appropriate frequency and length, and does not become excessive, according to the teacher's best professional judgment.

ADOPTED: November 20, 2006

## APPENDIX C

### **Baseline Glenbrook Data: 2010 & 2012 High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE) Homework Trends**

**\*Statistically significant** (occurs with more frequency) when compared to students nationally who participated in the survey

#### **How often have you (0=Never, 1=Rarely, 2=Sometimes, 3=Often)**

- Attended class with no assignments completed – Rarely/Sometimes
- Worked on a paper or project that required you to do research outside of assigned texts – Sometimes/Often\*
- Worked on a paper or project that required you to interact with people outside of school – Rarely/Sometimes\*
- Worked with other students on projects/assignments during or outside of class – Sometimes/Often\*
- Prepared a draft of a paper or assignment before turning it in – Sometimes/Often\*
- Written a paper of fewer than five pages – Sometimes/Often\*
- Written a paper of more than five pages – Rarely/Sometimes
- Received helpful feedback from teachers on assignments or other class work – Sometimes/Often\*
- Attended class with all assignments completed – Sometimes/Often\*

#### **The school contributed to student growth (0=Not at all, 1=A little, 2=Some, 3=Very Much)**

- In learning independently – Some/Very Much\*
- In solving real-world problems – A little/some

#### **I have opportunities to be creative in classroom assignments and projects (1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree, 4=Strongly Agree)**

- To be creative in classroom assignments and projects – Agree\*

#### **How important is (0=Not at All, 1=A Little, 2=Somewhat Important, 3=Very Important, 4=Top Priority)**

- Doing written homework – Somewhat/Very\*
- Reading and studying for class – Somewhat/Very\*
- Participating in a sport and/or musical instrument and/or rehearsing for a performance – Somewhat/Very

#### **Hours spent in a typical week**

- Doing written homework – (3-4 hours)\*
- Reading and studying for class – (2-3 hours)\*
- Practicing a sport and/or musical instrument and/or rehearsing for a performance – (4-5 hours)\*

#### **Digital Textbook Survey Question:**

*(Given the limited number of responses to this question, future follow-up is warranted)*

Given your access to digital resources and textbooks, did the quality (i.e. more student choice and greater purpose to the learning) of homework assignments (e.g. readings, problems/questions, writings, online discussions) improve?

Yes    **67**    48.2%

No     **72**    51.8%