

The Purpose of Homework

Salem Public Schools believes that homework has a different purpose depending upon the grade span. At all levels, homework should be used to provide additional practice and extension of content and skills that have already been introduced in class. It is not intended to introduce new or unfamiliar material. Providing students with multiple opportunities to practice what they have learned is a recommended standards-based practice.

For students in the elementary (grades K-5), teachers should encourage reading nightly to build a positive home-school connection and a love for language and learning. As students move up through the grades, homework may be assigned to provide additional practice on content and skills learned during class time.

For students in middle school (grades 6-8), homework should play a gradual and supportive role in building academic skills, time management, organization and persistence. Nightly reading is encouraged in addition to short, low-stakes practice

For students in high school (grades 9-12), Homework should support the development of executive functioning, time management and life skills that are connected to the world of work and higher education so that students can be prepared for either. Literacy is a foundational post-secondary skill and students should have ample opportunities to read, write and reflect on relevant, standards-based content as part of homework.

How Much Homework Should be Assigned?

Current academic research suggests that the association between achievement and homework grows progressively stronger for older groups of students, with the greatest benefit at the high school level. While some research suggests that the “10 minute per grade” recommendation is a reasonable benchmark, the district believes that such a rigid structure is not in the best interest of students. In addition, we recognize that a healthy and balanced lifestyle includes academic and non-academic activities, including unstructured play, clubs, extracurricular activities, family time, and more. Therefore, the district does not mandate a certain number of minutes of homework per grade.

The cumulative number of minutes per night of homework (for all subjects combined) should not exceed:

Grades 1-3	Grades 4-5	Grades 6-8	High School
15-30 minutes	30-45 minutes	60-75 minutes	75-90 minutes

Is Assigning Homework an Equitable Practice?

There is much debate about whether it is equitable to assign homework to students.

Dr. Katie Novak, an international education consultant who focuses on equity and inclusive practices, states:

Assigning homework for a grade is not an equitable practice. The ability to do homework assumes that a student will have the necessary time and means to do the homework outside of school. That means that there will be a safe, comfortable place that has heat, light, a stable work surface and often, technology. It also means that there won't be any distractions, competing obligations, and there will be time to do the work. Some students also face significant barriers after school – full-time jobs, after-school activities, childcare for younger siblings, inequitable access to technology, and the need for balance.

Others claim that urban districts with a significant population of high needs students might shortchange these students through low expectations by assuming that they are not capable of performing at the same level as their suburban peers. (*Brookings Institute Report, [Analyzing the Homework Gap Among High School Students](#)*) In addition, if students have not built some routines for completing homework over their K-12 experience, those that are headed to college or post-secondary training will be unprepared for the demands of higher education programs.

Salem Public Schools takes a balanced approach, which suggests regular, short, and accessible opportunities to practice and solidify material learned in class. Teachers are asked not to make assumptions about resources at home, including support from adults, school supplies, or access to technology. When projects are assigned that require materials and adult supervision, this perpetuates a climate of inequity. Teachers should be confident that all homework assignments can be completed independently by the student. No student should be penalized for failure to complete or turn in homework assignments if there are extenuating circumstances or they are unable to complete it because they require more assistance. Families should be involved as soon as a student establishes a pattern of not completing homework.

Teachers should also communicate to caregivers that if their student is struggling to complete homework assignments, they should reach out to the teacher to develop a plan to help the student succeed. We are fortunate to have community partners who provide free drop-in, free, after-school programs that offer adult support, technology access, supplies and a space to complete homework. Teachers and adjustment counselors could refer families to these resources.

Criteria for Homework Assignments

Homework assignments should meet the following criteria:

- Homework is not intended to introduce new or unfamiliar material.
- There is a clear purpose to the assignment, which is communicated to students.

- The assignment is aligned to the learning goals of the curriculum.
- It is accessible to all students and is appropriate for the grade in terms of time, scope, and expectations.
- Homework assignments with consistent formatting, content, and length from week to week promote familiar routines and greater accessibility.
- Students in the elementary and middle school will need paper-based materials since Chromebooks do not go home. At the high school level, students who do not bring Chromebooks home or who do not have access to the internet should also have paper-based homework assignments.
- The assignment is manageable for students to complete with reasonable time and effort.
- Do not make assumptions that students have materials at home to create assignments that might require specialized resources (e.g. makers, poster board, etc.)
- Homework is intended to be done outside of school. Teachers should not provide class time for completing homework assignments.

Types of Homework Assignments

Reading

There is a direct correlation between the amount of time students spend reading and their growth as learners. Although reading may be assigned as homework, it is also an essential life-long habit that helps students develop their vocabulary, improve fluency and comprehension and increase background knowledge. In addition to reading for homework, students should be encouraged to read (or listen to books) for enjoyment. Assigned reading might include students reading silently, reading aloud or being read to by peers or family members. This can be in English or in the student's home language.

Completion of Classwork

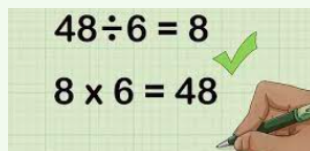
This work helps students to keep up with classwork in any content class by allowing them to finish work outside of the school day.

Practice

This reviews and reinforces skills and concepts taught in any content class. "Low-stakes" practice assignments that can be completed quickly and independently are encouraged.

Math Fluency

Many students in all grades need additional practice in learning math facts and operations such as addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. Spending 5-10 minutes per day on these skills can provide a significant benefit.



$$48 \div 6 = 8$$

$$8 \times 6 = 48$$

Grade Level Recommendations

Grades K-2

- Reading (independently or with others in the household) in English or home language
- Informal math facts practice
- Indoor and outdoor play activities

Grades 3-5

- Reading (independently or with others in the household) in English or home language
- Informal math facts and operations practice
- Skills practice or classwork completion - teacher discretion
- Indoor and outdoor play activities

Grades 6-8

- Reading (independently or with others in the household) in English or home language.
- Math facts and operations practice as assigned by teacher
- Skills practice or classwork completion - several times/week
- Activities or work that possess a relevance to career pathways and the world of work
- Longer projects may be assigned if:
 - They are “chunked” into manageable pieces which are modeled and practiced in class
 - Scaffolds are provided
 - Successful completion is not reliant on resources that might be unavailable to some families.

High School

- Literacy - reading and reflecting
- Work based projects
- Review for tests or exams
- Assignments to deepen their understanding of classwork
- Activities or work that possess a relevance to career pathways and the world of work
- Community service/internships
- Activities that promote life skills
- Indoor or outdoor activities

Homework Feedback and Grading

- Teachers who assign homework should be prepared to provide timely feedback to the student. Teachers do not need to grade every question/problem on every assignment.
- Homework review should not take up significant instructional time in class. A suggested strategy is to ask students to identify one question or problem that was particularly challenging for them. The teacher can spend a few minutes reviewing the selected question.
- Performance on homework assignments or the rate of homework completion are not factored into the student’s academic grade; it can be addressed in the *Personal Growth and Development* section of the report card.

When to Assign Homework

Recognizing that families have busy lives outside of school on the weekends, Salem Public Schools asks that no homework be assigned at the K-5 level on weekends (e.g., assigned on Friday and due on Monday).

Homework should not be assigned to be completed during (assigned day before, due the day after) [legal holidays](#) recognized by the state of Massachusetts. When a [religious/secular holiday](#) not formally recognized by the state of Massachusetts may prevent a student from completing an assignment, students will not be held responsible for the assignment.

At the upper grades, long term assignments must be assigned at least five days before a school vacation break and should not be due until the third day back after the break.

Cumulative demands of homework at the middle school level can occur as a result of multiple teachers assigning homework. Teachers should coordinate the duration and frequency of homework assigned across content areas. In some schools, this is managed by having each content area select one day of the week for assigning homework; a shared Google document or calendar can also be used.

Elementary Example

A grade 1 teacher sends home a bag of three books to practice reading at home during the week. She knows that reading logs are not an effective way to capture student reading behaviors, so she gets students excited about sharing a book with someone in the home or learning something new independently.

A grade 4 teacher sends home a multiplication chart. Students are asked to identify and explain any patterns that they see. They are also asked to practice a specific set of six math facts.

Middle School Example

A middle school ELA teacher assigns a packet of homework on Monday. Assignments are short (less than 20 minutes/day), low-stakes assignments such as conventions practice, vocabulary, and figurative language, etc. Students turn in their homework packets on Friday. The Monday *Do Now* is to have students log into Aspen to see what assignments they are still missing from the previous week.

The Aspen checks include homework, but these assignments are not attached to a standard in the gradebook, so students are not penalized on their report card for missing homework. The teacher “grades” homework through the Personal Growth and Development section of the report card. She also created a game to incentivize homework completion.

The *Do Now* also includes a self-reflection based on the week’s learning. The teacher has additional homework packets available, contacts family about consistently missed assignments, and provides a sign-up sheet for extra help. As the teacher guides students to greater independence, she uses an approach that is supportive rather than punitive.

High School Examples

A high school English teacher assigns a short story, poem, or excerpt for reading. Students are instructed to annotate the text and engage with a few text dependent questions. When students enter

the classroom, they will have time to reflect on their reading and engage in small group or whole class discussion.

A high school mathematics teacher assigns students two equations to complete. This assignment expects that students present their work step by step and demonstrate an understanding of the concept. These equations will be used in class through presentation and discussion to demonstrate mastery of the mathematical practices.

A World Language teacher assigns students to write a short dialogue in the target language using key vocabulary and proper grammar. This homework will be used in class to build upon written work in the target language.