

***AHISD Guidelines for Meaningful and Purposeful Homework:  
Frequently Asked Questions***

- 1. How will accountability and monitoring be maintained for teachers to adhere to the *AHISD Guidelines for Meaningful and Purposeful Homework*? How do we ensure that students and parents follow the guidelines, such as their roles and responsibilities or planning time allocations realistically to “balance” their days and studies? Answer:** The AHISD homework guidelines act more like a set of agreed upon norms than rules to be enforced. As norms, teachers, parents, and students in our community act in accordance with them as a matter of professionalism and good practice. In a learning organization, colleagues hold themselves accountable for group norms. For example, if a teacher consistently goes over the weekly target times for a unit of study, then it is appropriate for colleagues, administrators, students or parents to talk to that teacher about the possible causes for going over time and help constructively to address the problem. Conversations between students, parents, school counselors, and teachers should refer the roles and responsibilities in the guidelines as guides for conversation. Thinking about the AHISD homework guidelines as “rules to be enforced and monitored” misses the point. When the norms of homework, as articulated in the AHISD guidelines, are not adhered to, then members of the learning community- teachers, administrators, students, and parents- should have good faith, constructive conversations about them.
- 2. How will the meaningful and purposeful nature of homework be addressed? Answer:** The topic of how to design meaningful and purpose work in general involves deep thought, extensive training, and long-term reflection through high-quality professional development that no guidelines on homework could achieve through mere publication. Instead, AHISD builds our capacity as teachers to design meaning and purposeful work through a variety of avenues. Teachers on each campus are trained in year long, on-going sessions about Differentiated Instruction. Likewise, each campus trains teachers in designing engaging work through Working on the Work conferences and on-going professional development. Finally, the *AHISD Best Practices*, an action plan developed from our strategic plan, identify best instructional practices in a wide range of domains to improve instruction. Nevertheless, the AHISD homework guidelines do address meaningful and purposeful work when it emphasizes the focus on student growth, clear learning objectives, formative assessment for learning, and the importance of feedback on homework. Those four items, along with the guidelines as a whole work together to improve the likelihood that assigned homework is meaningful and purposeful.
- 3. What counts as “homework,” for the purposes of these guidelines? Often students do not complete class work and are allowed to complete it at home. Does that count? How about reading? Studying for exams? Answer:** Homework is any work assigned to be completed outside the classroom. Studying for an exam, then, is homework, and so is assigned reading. Work that is meant to be completed in class but is allowed to be taken homework isn’t, strictly speaking, homework. The spirit of the AHISD homework

guidelines, however, as norms for the way we approach homework, should lead us all to consider the time it takes students to complete work at home even if that work was meant to be done in class. For example, if most of the students do not have time to finish an assignment in class, then it makes sense for the teachers to consider that the assignment should figure into their estimates of weekly time on homework during a unit of study. If students are spending time outside of class on work for class, it is wise to use the AHISD homework guidelines as a framework for thinking about that work.

4. **Summer assignments are not addressed in the *AHISD Guidelines*. What guidelines govern summer homework assignments? Answer:** Indeed, the AHISD homework guidelines do not address summer assignments specifically. The fact that students are out of school alters the entire weekly target time structure; it is not applicable. Nevertheless, as teachers design work for the summer, they should have a clear idea of how much time is expected to complete the assignment and communicate that time estimate to students. Likewise, teachers should use the guidance offered in the guidelines about the coordination with other content areas to avoid overloading students, the importance of clearly articulated learning objectives, the role of homework as formative assessment of learning, and the importance of timely feedback to impact student learning. Maintaining the overall spirit of the AHISD homework guidelines and its emphasis on balance, well being, and student learning should also guide teachers as they think about the necessity and design of summer assignments.
5. **How do the guidelines address student cheating on homework? Answer:** The student and parent roles and responsibilities implore both students and parents to, “Demonstrate and promote academic integrity” (pages 4 and 5, respectively). As these norms strengthen over time, cheating should decrease. Likewise, the more meaningful and purposeful homework is to students, the less likely students will be to cheat. Finally, more reasonable homework loads will also decrease the temptation to cheat. While the causes of poor academic integrity in students are many, these three measures can work together to prevent the problem of cheating.
6. **Why is it necessary, for grades 6-8, to secure parent permission to work in groups and what will this permission look like? Answer:** Students 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade have little control over their own time and travel arrangements outside of school. At that age, students still rely on their parents to take them places, so it seems unreasonable for a student to commit to working with other students in a group outside of the school day without checking with their parents. Parents are not always able to commit to outside of school scheduling needed to facilitate students working together at home. Teachers, then, should secure parent permission prior to assigning students to work in groups and, in all cases, students should be given a choice about whether or not they want to work in a group. Some students prefer to do homework independently. Even if an assignment is begun in class, as a group, but it’s completion spills over outside of class, teachers should consider such work as requiring parent permission to work as a group outside of

the school day. The district doesn't mandate the method by which teachers secure parent permission. Nevertheless, signed parent permission forms make the most sense whenever the opportunity for group homework arises.

- 7. Do guidelines take into account that homework should be something students can do on their own (in case parents are unable to help)? What do we do for students without home resources? Answer:** Teacher roles and responsibilities, include a teacher ensuring that students are prepared to do the homework and checking that students have the materials they need to complete the homework (page 6, #2 & #6). Secondly, the resources section of each grade span in the guidelines, notes that each campus provides some sort of homework help outside of class time (HS- page 10; JS- page 12; elementary- page 14). You may consult a student's teacher(s) about the homework help provided on a particular campus. Finally, both the high school and the junior library offer extended hours outside of the school day to provide students with access to technology or just a quiet place to complete homework.
- 8. How do time guidelines impact music or school related sports practice Answer:** The homework guidelines cover academic courses, so extra- or co-curricular activities are not addressed. Other venues, such as University Interscholastic League (UIL) time guidelines and communication with directors and coaches can address time spent outside of class on these activities.
- 9. How will departments coordinate their assignments? Answer:** In grades 6-12, coordinating assignments between English, math, science, social studies, and languages is definitely a challenge. No guidelines can promise that coordination will eliminate overlapping assignments. There will still be pockets of time during the school year when homework from different contents areas fall on top of each other, much like what our students will experience in college at mid-term and the end of a semester. Nevertheless, the more mindful we are as teachers and administrators of our responsibility to coordinate with other content, the better we'll get at balancing a student's workload (page 6, #10).
- 10. Why include time in the guidelines? Answer:** No discussion of homework is complete without addressing the issue of time spent on homework. Of course, time is a difficult subject to tackle because it is so variable: no two students are alike, no two teachers are alike, and no two weeks are like. Nevertheless, rather than side step the issue of time, the guidelines establish weekly targets of time, as a broad framework within which time may be discussed by students, parents, and teachers (HS- page 7-9; JS: page 11; elementary: page 13).

**11. What is the rationale for the particular time targets listed in the *AHISD Guidelines*? Answer:**

The HS Course Description book, prior to the creation of the AHISD homework guidelines, suggested 5 hours per week (at least) for all Advanced Placement (AP) and PreAP course. In talks with AP teachers and students, it sounded like 4 hours was reasonably close to what students did per week anyway, so 240 minutes (i.e., 4 hours) per week per course seemed like a reasonable starting point for AP courses. For PreAP, time was pulled back to 210 minutes for developmental reasons: they aren't AP. For ninth and tenth grade time was adjusted downward for age appropriateness, to recognize that these students aren't always as mature or developmentally ready for more of a workload. The same goes for 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade level courses. For the junior school, time gets scaled back from the high school's ninth grade times to acknowledge age appropriate, developmental differences for grades 6-8. Ninth grade PreAP times were 180 minutes per week. Likewise, the transition from seventh to eighth grade target times is a big jump, but it seems developmental appropriately given increased brain development, maturity, and the increasing complexity of the work they are asked to do. In the sixth grade, grade level and Advanced homework times are the same. This acknowledges that coming from fifth to sixth grade, developmentally, students are transitioning into newly set up "separate" levels that they didn't experience in fifth grade.

**12. What does it mean that homework may count "no more than" a 25% of the overall grade for high school (20% for junior school; 10% elementary)? Answer:**

"No more than 25%" refers to **formative assessment**, that is, homework assigned for learning, during the learning process. A good homework assignment is constructed to help the teacher assess where students are in the learning and provide feedback to the student during the learning process. As such, this sort of homework should not be more than 25% of a student's six weeks grade because six weeks are meant to reflect a student's mastery of knowledge, concepts and skills. Summative assessments, not formative assessments, show a student's mastery of learning. The "no more than 25%" does not apply to summative assessments, that is, final assessments of learning at the end of a unit of study. For example, an essay in a high school course that is the culminating work that students use to demonstrate their mastery of knowledge and concepts from a particular unit of study, would be a **summative assessment**. The guidelines define formative assessment, summative assessment, and feedback (pages 10, 12, and 14).

**13. What is meant by "all homework should be assessed"? Answer:**

Assessing means using homework to gauge what a student knows and doesn't know, and using that knowledge to adjust instruction accordingly. "Assess" doesn't necessarily mean a grade; it means letting students know what they get and don't get so that it can be addressed prior to summative assessment. Teachers may use several ways of assessing work and offering feedback to students that do not require a grade. Additionally, such feedback should be returned in a timely fashion to impact learning prior to summative assessment. Homework done without feedback doesn't help learning because the student doesn't get confirmation of what they know or don't know.