

## Don't let Homework weigh you down - Plan for Success!

### Sutterville's Homework Policy

Sutterville School recognizes that the ability to work independently is a valued and necessary skill for all children that is an integral part of the elementary instructional program. Homework is an important part of the educational process. In addition to reinforcing classroom work, homework can be used to accomplish many more life skills such as:

- \* a sense of responsibility
- \* resourcefulness
- \* time management skills
- \* creativity, imagination & initiative
- \* self-reliance
- \* organizational skills
- \* pride in work
- \* perseverance
- \* problem-solving skills
- \* good study habits

Sutterville staff will assign homework to all elementary students as an extension of a classroom assignment; to give needed additional time to the individual child who is not working to appropriate grade level expectations; as a result of extended student absence; and to give needed additional time for an individual child to pursue a particular interest or project. Depending on grade level, homework will be assigned on a daily or weekly basis, with some long term projects. The expected time to be spent on assignments per day is approximately 10 minutes per grade level in the lower grades (K/1 – 10, 2 – 20, 3 – 30, 4 – 40) and should not normally exceed 1-2 hours in the upper grades.

Parent support of homework is an extremely important factor in building positive attitudes and successful study habits. To help foster that support, each classroom teacher will inform parents of his/her individual homework guidelines and curriculum connections during the Back to School Night Program in September. Teachers will keep parents informed weekly regarding student's success in completing and turning in homework and at least monthly regarding learning expectations.

## Find a Special Time and Place for Homework

Time: Demonstrate that homework is a priority in the family by scheduling a specific time each day for homework. The best time is one that works for your child and your family. Whatever time you choose, be sure it is consistent every day.

It is very important to not only set a homework start time but an ending time as well. The super-conscientious child, wanting to turn in the "perfect" paper, may spend an inappropriate amount of time on homework. And the "procrastinator" may have trouble using the allotted time efficiently. The child may be responsible for deciding when to begin, but parents should decide when to call time. The end-time should be consistent, say 7:30 p.m. every day, but can be temporarily suspended for special projects or assignments.

Your child may need to take breaks during the study periods. Stretching or getting a snack after a productive period of study can do wonders for reviving attention. A good study break formula for 6<sup>th</sup> grade students is 30 minutes of work and a 10 minute break. For younger students, 10-15 minutes of work and a five minute break would be appropriate.

Encourage your children to utilize their homework time to review the new material they learned in class or for pleasure reading even if there are no homework assignments to complete.

Place: Arrange a quiet environment for homework that is in a private, personal area, rather than a "public" area like the kitchen or family room where interruptions or distractions occur.

Provide a table or desk, chair, and proper lighting.

It is important to avoid interruptions and distractions: keep the TV off, restrict social telephone calls, and try to keep the study area off limits to brothers and sisters during homework time. If you live in a small or noisy household, have all family members take part in a quiet activity during homework time. You may need to take a noisy toddler outside to play or into another room.

## Managing the Homework

The most important element of homework management is to establish a strategy to keep track of assignments and due dates. Use an assignment book, daily planner or a large calendar to write down daily assignments, long-term projects and outside commitments such as piano lessons, soccer, etc. Family times and family commitments should also be taken into account so that homework can be completed by due dates. Remember to schedule trips to the library and get supplies for projects.

The next step is to establish a daily time for homework. A daily routine will help to establish good study habits. Estimate how much time the homework assignment will take and plan accordingly. If you think you are spending too much time on homework, ask others how much time they spend on homework or find out a class average. Break assignments into smaller tasks, doing the hardest one first. Take short breaks following a 20-30 minute work session to reduce fatigue and to recharge your mental battery.

In order to manage the stress that homework can cause, be sure you are eating and sleeping well. Effective time management should include work AND play/relaxing times. Revise schedules if necessary to maintain a healthy balance. Finally, be sure you are scheduling homework time during high-, not low-energy times. You will work more effectively and efficiently.

## Motivation

Praise: Consistently praise your child's efforts. Don't generalize ("that could be better"). Be specific ("bright colors will make your picture more interesting"). Strengthen praise with a smile or gesture. Always find something positive to say about your child's efforts. Positive reinforcement will make your child eager to give that little extra to do an outstanding job. Emphasize by example that it is important to try your best and to feel pride in your work.

Incentives: Our expectation is that your child will do his/her homework daily, within the homework timeframe and turn the work in. Positive incentives/consequences are feelings of success, good grades, and becoming more self-reliant and responsible.

If you feel your child needs additional incentives to be successful, decide with your child what the goals are (homework done every night, homework done by Thursday each week, 100% on spelling test, etc.) and an appropriate reward for success. Incentives/rewards don't have to be material things. Be creative—lunch out with a parent or the teacher, having a friend over, game time with the family are some possibilities. Incentives should be meaningful to your child, earned within a short time and gradually phased out. If necessary, negative consequences (loss of recess at school, loss of TV time at home, etc.) may be a logical consequence.

## Homework Survival Kit

To keep interruptions to a minimum, try to keep homework supplies at the homework/study area. The following is a list of supplies that would be useful for older students—younger students need at least the underlined items:

- ◇ pencils
- ◇ writing paper
- ◇ dictionary
- ◇ construction paper
- ◇ pens
- ◇ glue stick
- ◇ thesaurus
- ◇ pencil sharpener
- ◇ crayons
- ◇ eraser
- ◇ almanac
- ◇ colored pencils
- ◇ markers
- ◇ white-out
- ◇ atlas
- ◇ holepunch
- ◇ tape
- ◇ scissors
- ◇ stapler
- ◇ folders for reports
- ◇ calculator
- ◇ paper clips
- ◇ ruler
- ◇ assignment book
- ◇ school books
- ◇ watch or clock (to keep track of start & stop times!)
- ◇ telephone number of a classmate (who can help answer homework questions)
- ◇ place to put finished work

In addition to the above materials, it is important for older students to have an organized binder. It should include:

- an assignment sheet/notebook to write down assignments
- a special section for finished work
- a note pocket for notes that go home to parents and notes parents send to school
- a calendar to help plan your time
- sections for unfinished work
- sections for work that is to be saved
- a supply of paper
- a case for carrying pencils, pens & erasers

## Four Things Parents can Do to Help Their Child with Homework (from "Helping Your Child With Homework," U.S. Dept. of Education)

### 1. Show that you think education and homework are important.

Children are more eager to do homework if they know their parents care that it gets done. In addition to setting a regular time for homework, finding an appropriate place to study, keeping distractions to a minimum, and gathering study materials, parents can:

--Set a good example by reading and writing yourself. Your child learns what things are important by watching what you do. Encourage educational activities. Go on walks in the neighborhood, trips to the zoo, and encourage chores that teach responsibility.

--Read with your child. This activity stimulates interest in reading and language and lays the foundation for your child's becoming a lifelong reader.

--Take your child to the library and encourage him or her to check out materials needed for homework.

--Talk about school and learning activities.

--Attend school activities, such as conferences and parent-teacher meetings.

### 2. Check on your child's work.

How closely you watch over homework will depend on the age of your child, how independent he or she is and how well he or she does in school.

--Know what the teacher expects. At the start of the school year, find out what kinds of assignments will be given and how the teacher wants you involved.

--Check to see that assignments are started and finished on time. If you aren't home when the homework is finished, look it over when you get home.

--Find out from the teacher when homework is due and how you will know whether your child has completed assignments appropriately.

### 3. Provide guidance.

The basic rule in helping with homework is "Don't do the assignment yourself. It's not your homework—it's your child's!" Here are some things you can do to give guidance:

--Figure out how your child learns best. Knowing this makes it easier for you to help your child. For example, if your child learns things best when he can see them, draw a picture or a chart to help with some assignments. But if your child learns best when she can handle things, an apple cut four ways can help her learn fractions. If you've never thought about these learning styles, observe your child. Check with the teacher if you aren't sure.

--Encourage good study habits. See that your child schedules enough time for assignments and makes his own practice tests at home before a test. When a big research report is coming up, encourage her to use the library.

--Talk about assignments and ask questions. This helps your child think through an assignment and break it into small, workable parts. For example, ask if she understands the assignment, whether she needs help with the work, and if her answer makes sense to her.

--Give praise. People of all ages like to be told when they have done a good job. And give helpful criticism when your child hasn't done his best work so that he can improve.

#### 4. Talk with someone at school if problems come up.

If homework problems do arise, everyone needs to work together to resolve them—the school, teachers, parents, and students.

--Call or meet with the teacher. For example, get in touch with the teacher if your child refuses to do assignments, if you or your child can't understand the instructions, or if your child is spending too much time on homework.

--Believe that the school and the teacher want to help you and your child. Work together to fix or lessen the homework problem.

## Solving the Six Most Common Homework Problems

If you think your child is having problems with schoolwork, contact your child's teacher right away. Good communication between you and your child and your child's teacher is extremely important for your child's success! Below are some problems/concerns that parents have experienced with their children regarding homework along with suggested strategies/solutions:

- **Child Does Not Do His/Her Best Work**

State clearly how you expect homework to be done.

Provide specific praise for work well done and specific suggestions for improvement.

Schedule mandatory homework time to study or read even if no homework is assigned.

Provide additional incentives when appropriate.

Work with your child's teacher to discuss classroom expectations.

- **Child Refuses to Do Homework Assignments or Fails to Bring Assignments Home**

State clearly that you expect homework to be completed.

Be sure that your child understands the assignment directions and has all materials needed to complete the assignment.

Work with your child's teacher to make sure you know what has been assigned.

Work with your child's teacher to provide consequences at school.

Institute a mandatory homework time.

Provide praise and positive support when your child does his/her homework.

Provide additional incentives when appropriate.

- **Child Takes All Night to Finish Homework**

State clearly that you expect all homework to be done during the daily scheduled homework time.

Make sure that homework is being done in a distraction-free study area.

Make yourself available for help only during the scheduled homework time.

Be sure your child understands the assignment and has all the materials needed to complete the assignment.

Provide praise and positive support when your child finishes on time.

Arrange for a parent, child, teacher conference to discuss homework expectations.

- **Child Waits Until the Last Minute to Finish Assignments**

State clearly that you expect long-range projects to be completed responsibly.

Use a long-range planner/calendar to break the task into smaller day-by-day segments.

Monitor your child to make sure each step of the project is completed on time.

Provide praise and positive support when your child brings home all of his/her homework.

Provide additional incentives when appropriate.

- **Child Will Not Do Homework If You Are Not Home**

State clearly that you expect homework to be done whether or not you are home.

Make sure that the person responsible for child care knows about daily homework time.

Monitor your child when you are not home to make sure homework is done: call at the beginning of daily homework time to make sure he/she has started and if possible, at the end of the daily homework time to make sure the work is finished.

Provide praise and positive support when your child brings home all of his/her homework.

Provide additional incentives when appropriate.

- **Child Will Not do Homework on His/her Own**

State clearly that you expect your child to work on his/her own.

Use encouragement—emphasize your confidence in his or her ability to get the task done successfully.

Help your child to break up tasks into smaller, less overwhelming pieces.

Help your child only after he has genuinely tried to solve the problem on his/her own.

Be available for help only during scheduled homework time.

Provide additional incentives when appropriate.

## Resources

There are many resources available at your local library and bookstore. The following are just a few examples:

Gall, Meredith. Study for Success. Eugene, Oregon: M. Damien Publishers, 1985.

Gallagher, Richard. How to Study. 416 Comly St., Philadelphia, PA 19120.

"Helping Your Child with Homework," U.S. Dept. of Education. Order through Consumer Information Catalog, Consumer Information Center, Pueblo, Colorado 81009.

Jensen, Eric. Student Success Secrets. New York: Barron's Educational Series, 1989.

"Learning Partner," Family Involvement Partnership for Learning, National Library of Education, 555 New Jersey Ave., NW, Washington, D.C. 20208

Ohme, Herman. Learn How to Learn. Palo Alto, California: California Education Plan, 1989.

Rich, Dorothy. Megaskills. Houghton Mifflin, 1992.

Rosemond, John. Ending the Homework Hassle. Kansas City: Andrews & McMeel, 1990.