

Homework At Little Harbour School

2005-2006

WELCOME TO LITTLE HARBOUR SCHOOL!!

This handbook has been designed to give parents specific information regarding homework and homework guidelines used at LHS from Kindergarten through 5th grade. We hope that by providing this information, many frequently asked questions and concerns will be addressed and answered. In addition to this handbook, LHS will provide other materials to help you decipher and better understand the expectations and procedures required for grade level assignments and grade-dependent homework issues. Most importantly, we would like to emphasize that LHS strongly encourages parent-teacher communication regarding all aspects of homework concerns. While there are specific district and school homework guidelines, LHS will consider the personal needs of students and families in the assigning of homework. LHS makes every effort to strike a balance between teacher, school and district expectations and parents' philosophical beliefs. As students mature developmentally, more responsibility is placed on the children as they prepare for their venture into middle school.

PORTSMOUTH SCHOOL DISTRICT GUIDELINES FOR HOMEWORK

At the elementary level the time spent on homework should approximately equal ten minutes per grade per night. For example, in grade 1, homework assigned should be approximately 10 minutes per night or 50 minutes per week. In grade 2, students should spend approximately 20 minutes per night or 100 minutes per week. In grade 5, time spent on homework should be approximately 50 minutes per night or 250 minutes per week. There is an expectation that elementary students read or are read to every evening. Homework assignments typically are a practice of skills learned during the school day. In addition, students may be assigned long term projects, which require planning and budgeting of time.

Parent/Teacher communication is crucial at all grade levels. Teachers strongly encourage parental input regarding homework.

GRADE SPECIFIC HOMEWORK GUIDELINES:

Kindergarten Homework:

- Given once a week on the same night throughout the year
- Should take about 10 minutes to complete
- Supports home-school communication
- Supports the curriculum
- Can encourage parents and family members to work together
- Builds responsibility and fosters a love of learning
- Should be shared in class
- Serves to acknowledge and applaud individual efforts
- Helps build community at school and provides opportunities to learn about diversity
- Needs to be explained to the children (examples and ideas are brainstormed)
- Assignments are best when varied
- Assignments combine work and fun
- May be turned in the following day or within a few days of being assigned

First Grade Homework:

- Takes an average time of 10 minutes a night
- Practices things already introduced in the classroom
- Includes math, reading, word and letter study, games, science or social studies, special projects
- Is interactive and needs to be done with assistance
- Should be a positive, quiet time
- Incomplete homework has no consequences—homework will be left in folder to be completed at another time
- Math and reading homework can be adapted to child's level

Second Grade Homework:

- Takes an average time of 20 minutes a night for both math and reading
- Parents are asked to correct math with children and to read with children if possible
- Math should be a review of classroom material
- Reading should be with "just right" books
- Parents are encouraged to use everyday math games to enrich

children's understanding of math concepts

- Incomplete homework results in loss of recess to allow for completion of work
- Warning signs include students expressing frustration/anxiety about their inability to complete homework independently

Third Grade Homework:

- Takes an average time of 30 minutes a night (20 minutes of reading, 10 minutes of math)
- Is a review and should be done independently
- Modifications can be made as needed for individual students
- Free time and recess time is used to complete any incomplete assignments

Fourth Grade Homework:

- Takes an average time of 40 minutes a night which includes nightly reading
- Includes spelling practice, math, math games, long-term projects
- Parent signature is required on agenda book Monday-Thursday
- Not given on the weekends, however reading is expected on the weekends

- Notes can be sent to school if homework is an issue
- Free time and recess time is used to complete any incomplete assignments

Fifth Grade Homework:

- Takes an average time of 50 minutes a night (20 minutes of independent reading)
- Includes word study, math, long-term projects
- Evolves habits to prepare students for 6th Grade
- Parent signature is required in Agenda Books
- Emphasis is on teaching students how to organize their time
- Parents need to assist in time organization at home
- Teaches students how to research topics using the library and more than one reference
- May incorporate typing of assignments if students need extra challenge
- Free time and recess time is used to complete any incomplete assignments

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: Why do some students, even within the same grade level, get nightly homework, while others get weekly homework?

A: Grade level teachers meet and plan as a team to ensure that the curriculum and expectations in each class are similar and comparable. Although all teachers on the team have similar expectations there is a degree of autonomy. Some teachers assign daily homework and others assign work for the week. The common goal, however, is to provide opportunities for students to practice at home what is taught during the day and to encourage students to organize their time, take responsibility for their own work, and allow themselves enough time to accomplish the tasks assigned.

Q: What is an agenda book?

A: Agenda books are used in the upper grade levels (4th and 5th) as homework assignment books, calendars of upcoming assignments, field trips and events, timelines for progress on long-term projects, and parent-teacher communication books. Generally, the parent needs to sign the agenda book daily. These books help students organize themselves and

assist parents in helping their children. In grades K-3 there is a folder that travels back and forth from school and home that is used as a communication tool between families and teachers. The folders also help students organize their work and keep track of many notices.

Q: When does neatness start to count?

A: “Counting” or awarding a grade for neatness depends upon the age of the child and the type of assignment. Typically, it is a matter of personal preference of the teacher. Neatness generally receives a greater emphasis in the upper grades. Due to developmental and fine motor differences it is difficult to have one standard for neatness. Certainly the expectation is that the writing and/or printing be legible and that students try their very best. If parents are concerned about a student’s ability to print or write neatly and legibly, the classroom teacher should be contacted. Fine motor practice and strengthening activities are available upon request.

Q: What are homework clubs?

A: The Title I Program at Little Harbour School sponsors two homework clubs that meet twice weekly after school. Students who reside in

Osprey Landing may attend the Osprey Homework Club on Monday and Wednesday afternoons. Children who live in Winchester Place may attend the homework club at LHS on Monday and Wednesday afternoons. There is a late bus for the students who attend the Winchester Place homework club that meets at LHS. Tutors monitor the homework clubs at both sites. Since Title I (not the Portsmouth budget) supports these homework centers, they are not open to all LHS students. Students must meet criteria in the Title I grant. In addition to the afternoon homework clubs, the upstairs resource room is open in the morning before school. Any student in grades 3-5 who needs time or assistance with homework may go to the Title I room as early as 8:15. Please contact Joanne Simons or Robin Burdick if there are questions regarding the homework center or clubs.

Q: What is the policy for making up homework due to absence?

A: We recommend that for absences of 1-3 days the student obtain assignments from the teacher or a friend in the class. Work may be picked up in the office or sent home with a neighbor or sibling. For longer absences, parents are advised to call the teacher.

Q: What is the best way to communicate an individual child's needs for and response to homework?

A: The most efficient and effective way to communicate your child's needs is directly with the teacher. All teachers at LHS are open to discussing and tailoring homework needs to individual students, provided the requests are reasonable. The goal is to help the child have success in the classroom. If further discussion is needed, Robin Burdick, LHS Principal, is always willing to meet with parents.

Q: What is "LRR"?

A: LRR, or "Learn to Read by Reading" is the model used at LHS for teaching students how to read. It is a comprehensive and balanced literacy framework designed to meet the needs of all children. This research-based model, designed by Tufts University, recognizes and builds upon the connection between reading and writing. Readers' and Writers' Workshops are taught daily. Teachers model effective reading and writing strategies during a brief whole class lesson. Students practice strategies from the Focus Lesson while teachers work with individuals or small groups. Teachers use ongoing assessment to plan individual and small group lessons. Students

share their work at the end of the class and teachers reinforce the use of the targeted strategies.

Q: What is a "just right" book?

A: Students know they are reading a "just right" book when: the story or topic is appealing, there are no more than 5 tricky words on a page, the text is readable, there is appropriate picture support and students can retell what they have read. If a book is "just right" there should be some difficult and challenging words. If everything is easy to read, it is time to read a more challenging book. Teachers rotate books in the classroom to keep children reading at the appropriate levels.

Q: What is a "wall word"?

A: Wall words are high frequency words; words used frequently enough that children should recognize them immediately. Each grade level has a list of wall words that students will know by the end of the grade. These lists are cumulative; students in grade 2, for example, should be able to easily READ all words on the K-2 wall word lists and they should be able to accurately SPELL all words on the K-1 list. Students in grade 5 should be able to instantly

recognize all words on the K-5 wall word lists and spell all words on the K-4 lists.

Q: What is a DRA?

A: DRA stands for Developmental Reading Assessment. This is an individualized reading assessment that is typically administered at least twice a year to all LHS students. The assessment is primarily used to inform instruction. Hence, teachers not only know what level a student is able to successfully read but they also know the degree to which a student comprehends the text. At the K-3 grade levels, the assessment is administered orally and the children respond verbally. At the 4th and 5th grade levels, students are expected to answer portions of the assessment in writing.

Q: What is “EVERYDAY MATH”?

A: “Everyday Math” is the standards-based math program used at LHS. This curriculum provides students with rich experiences in the major strands of mathematics (Numbers and Operations; Geometry and Measurement; Algebra and Functions; and Data, Statistics and Probability). The program incorporates mathematical processes into everyday work, thus allowing children to develop mathematical

intuition and understanding. The “Everyday Math” program has an ambitious and strict lesson timetable that all teachers follow to ensure child readiness for the next lesson as well as for the next grade. The curriculum spirals, meaning that concepts are repeatedly reviewed before new ones are introduced. At the same time the curriculum is rigorous and the pace is rapid and challenging. The combination of review and rigor as well as the breadth of topic studies provides for a rich mathematical experience for students. The “Everyday Math” curriculum is aligned to the NH grade level expectancies in mathematics. Skills learned in the “Everyday Math” program, K-5, ensure a smooth transition for students as they enter the Middle School and prepare to use the standards-based “Connected Math” program.

Q: How can a parent become more knowledgeable in “Everyday Math”?

A: LHS has designed a math handout that outlines references and tips for students and parents. The Parent Resource Center, newly opened in January 2005 and located in the Title I room (downstairs across from the computer lab), provides materials, games, and resources for parent guidance with this math curriculum. In addition, “family letters” and

“home links” are sent home with math homework. These have been designed by “Everyday Math” to assist in teaching parents how a particular lesson is being discussed and learned in the classroom. They give explanations of units and answers to homework problems. In addition, look for PTA sponsored information nights scheduled during the school year that will teach parents the focus algorithms or procedures for solving specific operations (For Example: Partial Sums, Trade First Subtraction, Partial Products, Partial Quotients). Parents are encouraged to attend these meetings to get direct answers to questions.

Q: What other parent resources does LHS have?

A: The Parent Resource Center, located in the Title I room, also includes books and materials on a variety of educational topics that may be of interest to parents. Resources that provide more depth into the research that supports the balanced literacy and standards based math program are available. Books and videos for families to use are available. Please contact Amy Danusis or Joanne Simons if you want more information about the newly created Parent Resource Center. LHS has informational trifold explaining the “LRR”

model, the “Everyday Math” curriculum and the Differentiated Instruction philosophy. In addition, all teachers at LHS can be reached via email using their first initial, last name with: @portsmouth.k12.nh.us.

TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL HOMEWORK:

- Set regular times for homework, based on what works the best for the family
- Arrange a special, quiet place in the home for studying where there is ample light
- Avoid distractions like television, loud music, and phone calls
- Parents should talk with their children: find out what they are learning, make sure they understand homework assignments, check completed homework, review trouble spots to help students understand their mistakes, and most importantly, offer praise for work well done
- Parents can model a love of learning
- Keep all materials together in a box at your work area

TIPS FOR STUDENTS:

- Pay attention by listening and observing in the classroom
- Take part in discussions by asking questions.
- Ask for assistance from your teacher when needed
- Clarify homework assignments before leaving the classroom
- Use a study area that is comfortable, well-lit, and that has minimal distractions
- Organize your thoughts and materials before getting started
- Begin your homework assignments with a positive attitude
- Take breaks from studying when you feel tired

Please familiarize yourself with the LHS family compact. This is an agreement signed yearly by parent, teacher, and child. It states each person's responsibility in a child's learning process. Homework is an invitation to parental involvement. When parents show their interest in what students are learning, and that they are willing to help them learn, students are more motivated both inside and outside the classroom.

Little Harbour School

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