



SOUTHMORELAND PRIMARY CENTER



March 2015



Dear Parents/Guardians,

Our February weather has been difficult, but we have persevered. Valentine's Day was fun for our students and for us, and though the snow and cold weather made our month a bit more complicated, we still saw our Reading Buddies. Teachers found ways to be flexible with the lessons and worked very hard to ensure that our students still received our guaranteed and viable curriculum.

In March, we will be celebrating Read Across America. Our vision this year was to enhance our program. This is our second year of making reading a year-long priority and our Read Across America week (March 2-6) will be another step on our journey to helping our students become thoughtful, critical and proficient readers. It is supported through our *Daily 5* program and guided reading, and we are excited to watch our students grow as young learners with the evidence that those two systems provide us.

As always, we continue to pursue, with relentless focus, our mission of High Quality Learning for All. I thank you for your support of our school.

Respectfully,

Mr. Clara
Principal, SPC



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Whether your child is in elementary, middle, or high school, *every child* will eventually need clear and consistent help with their homework. As homework can directly impact a child's success in the classroom, as well as his or her overall educational development, a parent's involvement absolutely provides a child with encouragement, support, and direction. By using positive steps proven to boost student performance, parents can intervene prior to a child's struggles with homework ever begin to surface.



The Importance of Homework in Cognitive Development

While children often perceive homework to be a form of punishment from their teacher, the act of practicing classroom skills at home is an integral part of the developmental process. As Nucleus Learning explains, homework serves a myriad of essential purposes for both instruction and reinforcement. Most fundamentally, homework allows students to practice skills learned in school with their own autonomous engagement outside of the classroom. As there is a limited amount of time in each school day, children are forced to accept the educational contract that they must put in effort both in and outside of school to master all of the required material.

Adding to this, homework allows students to “Investigate on their own, learn how to find answers to questions, show that the teacher does not have an answer to everything.” Homework allows student to more thoroughly learn and understand the material instructed; furthermore, actively engaging in homework teaches students how to become advocates for their own learning, as they can engage in an inquiry-based process of asking questions and seeking out more answers and discoveries.

Further expounding on the importance of homework, Mary Sheedy Kurcinka, the educational author of *Kids, Parents and Power Struggles*, asserts that parents play an immense role in a child's successful engagement and completion of homework assignments. As she explains, “What most people don't realize is how much support their kids need with homework... It isn't something where you can just say, 'He's 10 or 12 or 15, he should just do it.'”

Instead, a parent's foundational support in helping their children understand and practice homework sets the child up for the scaffold of evolving responsibilities. If a child fails to acknowledge his or her responsibilities with completing mandated assignments from their teacher, the child may be heading down a dangerous path of irresponsibility, which can later impact a child's ability to thrive in their first job or professional realms of life.



THE TOP TEN HOMEWORK TIPS FOR PARENTS

1. Establish a Routine

The first step in creating a positive homework pathway for your child is by primarily creating a routine. This may mean that parents may have to compromise with their child on the working conditions for homework time. As *The Seattle Times* further explicates, “That means helping students designate a set time and place where they can comfortably — and routinely — hit the books without being disturbed. Some families keep the TV off on weeknights and tape favorite shows for weekend watching.

Following such a rule consistently, Kurcinka says, may avoid parent-child power struggles.” Adding to this, if a child is comfortable independently working in his or her bedroom, then parents may need to allow this freedom and choice of the child; however, if a child’s homework is incomplete or if their grades drop, then parents should immediately step in and enforce a different homework strategy and routine.

2. Create Boundaries

As the homework routine is clearly outlined and consistently enforced, parents should simultaneously create clear boundaries for their child as well. This may entail that a teenager’s cell phone must be turned off during homework time, or a child’s television or radio must be off until assignments are complete.

3. Get Organized

For younger children, a parent may need to create a homework calendar that both the parent and the child can clearly access and see. This may help a child learn how to plan ahead and create a schedule for long-term elementary and middle school projects. For high school kids, this may mean that a parent talks with their teen about setting progress goals for assignments each day.





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4. Accountability and Responsibility

Regardless of a child's age or school grade, a parent must immediately require their child's personal accountability for homework and assignments. Parents should have clear rules about writing down assignments in a notebook, or remembering to bring all necessary homework materials, such as books or calculators, home each night. If a child fails to hold up their end of the bargain, then the established consequences should be enforced.

5. Create a "Learning Space"

For many children, a "learning space" that is specifically set aside for homework can allow them to mentally enter into a "school mode" when they are at home. This may mean that a small office is stocked with pens, paper, and necessary tools for assignments; however, on the other hand, this also may mean that a child may need to access the library each day for homework (if they are too distracted at home). Regardless of a child's needs, a parent must create a free space for a child to complete assignments without disruptions or distractions.

6. Teach Prioritization

Children are gradually assigned more homework tasks as they progress through the school grades, and parents can intervene and teach children how to prioritize their homework assignments. If a project is due in a week, a parent can help their child to set up a time line for small tasks each day. Or, if a child is feeling overwhelmed, a parent can help their child make a list of everything that must be done, and then number each task in order to prioritize the academic responsibilities.

7. Check Your Child's Progress

While public schools send out report cards and progress reports, many schools now post grades and homework assignments online. Parents can speak with their child's teacher(s) about the best ways to check in on the student's progress throughout the semester and school year, so that students are able to consistently perform to their potential without falling behind or struggling.



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8. Allow Freedoms When Earned

If a child successfully meets all of the outlined homework rules and expectations, parents can allow certain appropriate freedoms if their child seems to be excelling in their tasks and schoolwork. For example, if a child asks to change their homework time or change their “learning space,” parents should experiment with new freedoms as the child gradually excels with their own academic responsibility. As long as the child seems to be successfully comprehending and excelling in academic pursuits and assignments, parents can consider new privileges and rewards for their child’s achievements.

9. Be a Study Buddy

Many times, especially when a child feels overwhelmed with a task or assignment, parents can offer support by simply helping their child study. This involves quizzing a child, teaching a child study strategies, or also just helping a child get organized. Sometimes the simple act of giving a child attention during difficult tasks can boost a child’s morale and effort.

10. Encourage and Support

Most importantly, a parent should serve as a motivational academic cheerleader. Homework should not be a punishment or a time that’s dreaded. Approach homework with a positive attitude, and consistently reward the child with positive verbal feedback. Children do not require material treats or presents for their success; moreover, children thrive on verbal support and encouragement. For example, if a child consistently does their homework without complaining, remind them each day, “I love how you always do your assignments with such a great attitude. I admire your ability to do what’s assigned with such an adult work ethic!” When compliments are specific and meaningful, a child will feel more confident and motivated to continually follow through with his or her responsibilities and performance.

References:

“Homework,” Family Education, available at
<http://school.familyeducation.com/homework/activity/34550.html>

Pollack, Susan. “10 Homework Tips for Parents.” *The Seattle Times*, available at
http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/living/2008447745_parenttiphomework29.html

“What is the Purpose of Homework?” Nucleus Learning, available at
<http://www.nucleuslearning.com/content/what-purpose-homework>

Whitney, Sue. “Preventing Reading Difficulties... Early Intervention,” Wrightslaw, available at
<http://www.wrightslaw.com/heath/read.prevent.failure.htm>



Snow Delays and Cancellations



Cancellation or delay of school takes place only during extraordinary circumstances such as extreme weather, equipment failure, or public crisis. The administration is aware of the hardship, which can be caused by an abrupt cancellation; therefore, school will not be canceled unless a significant safety risk exists.

It is important that you share a **plan of action** with your child for such situations. Review this information with the child periodically. This information should include: what the child should do in the event of an unexpected early dismissal, cancellations and other emergencies, where the child should go (for example, neighbor, friend, grandparent), if they are to call someone, and also inform the school via the teacher and office. At this point a note will be made on the emergency office card.

Parents should listen to WLSW Scottdale (104 FM); WCVI Connellsville (1340 AM); WPQR Connellsville (99.3 FM); WHJB Greensburg (620 AM - 107.1 FM); KDKA Pittsburgh (1020 AM); 3WS Pittsburgh (94.5 FM); WTAE Pittsburgh (1250 AM); Channel 2 (KDKA-TV), Channel 4 (WTAE-TV), Channel 11 (WPXI-TV), or Scottie (Southmoreland) Channel 39 or on HD 202.

Notification of scheduled early dismissals will be reported in the Principal's Newsletter and/or monthly calendar.



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