

**(AHS Parent Handbook excerpts regarding Homework, Homework Expectations, and Criteria for Meaningful Homework, updated August 2017**

**14.1. Homework Philosophy.** Well planned and meaningful homework (see “Criteria for Meaningful Homework” below) can help students not only to gain a better understanding of the material they are studying, but also form character through teaching responsibility, accountability, and time management. Meaningful homework may also inspire parents to be involved in the teaching and learning process; however, if homework is parent-focused, it should generally “pull” (inspire) rather than “push” (require) parents to be involved. Poorly planned homework assignments can be counterproductive to the teaching and learning process and frustrate more important objectives of home and family. Though studies about homework quality and quantity come to some different conclusions, most agree that there is a tenuous and sometimes even inverse relationship between the *amount* of homework assigned and long-term mastery and motivation outcomes for students. And many studies have concluded that the strongest predictors of long-term academic success, social and emotional stability, and overall positive life outcomes is neither time spent on homework nor academic grades received, but rather the frequency and quality of “family style” learning that happens outside of the traditional classroom setting: team-based activities and projects, service-learning, family activities, family work, and family meals. Teachers at American Heritage are encouraged to trust that parents are their children’s primary and best teachers, and therefore to respect family time after school, and to customize homework in ways that accomplish the most essential objectives of the classroom given the differing circumstances of the students in the classroom. Education is primarily a family matter, and each child in a family is uniquely created for a divine purpose. Teachers should take great caution that they are supporting and not disrupting the important learning that takes place after school. On the parents’ part, support for teachers and consistent reinforcement in the home of lessons and principles learned at school is a vital component of each child’s success in the classroom. Thus, parents are encouraged and expected to assist their children as necessary and appropriate to complete all homework assignments on a timely basis and to the best of the child’s capability.

**14.2. Homework Expectations; Criteria for Meaningful Homework.** The quantity and complexity of homework will vary by grade level and subject, assigned in frequency and amount as the teacher deems appropriate, but should be minimal (if assigned at all) on Monday evenings or spanning major academic breaks, such as fall break, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, experiential learning weeks, etc.

When assigning homework, teachers are encouraged to ask themselves the threshold questions of “Is this assignment really necessary?” and “Could I accomplish the same objective in class?”

If the teacher determines that an assignment is necessary, then the following questions should be asked by the teacher to determine whether the assignment is *meaningful*.

*Purposeful.* Is this homework assignment essential and purposeful to the overall objectives of the unit? For example, if the objective of vocabulary exercises is to learn and retain the definitions of words, then rote memorizing at home may not be the best and most purposeful way to accomplish the objective. A more thoughtful approach might be to assign vocabulary as an application task

after a sensory-rich lesson that incorporates the vocabulary, such as building and launching rockets and *then* adding words such as force, speed, acceleration, and momentum to the student notebook.

*Efficient.* Is this homework assignment respectful and sensitive to other demands on student and family time? Is it efficient in accomplishing the purpose of the homework? Some homework tasks are inefficient either because they show little to no evidence of learning, or because they take an inordinate amount of time to complete and yield little return on invested time (“busy work”). Are there more efficient ways to accomplish the same goal and demonstrate student learning?

*Personalized.* Does the student have *ownership* or *choice* in this assignment? Is the student *interested* in this assignment? Students love to do *their* work. It’s *our* work they don’t like to do! Try letting students choose what, when, and how. Typical assignments dictate what and how much: “twenty minutes each night” or “30 pages from your book.” Forcing students into those requirements may actually have the adverse effect of students actually reading less than they would if they were not “on the clock” or “collapsing at the finish line.” Not to mention the difficulty of judging whether students actually completed assignments like these.

*Doable.* Does the student feel competent in completing the assignment? Does this assignment encourage or discourage the student? Homework that students can’t do without help is often not good homework, and can lead to feeling of frustration not only on the part of the student but parents as well. The “one-size-fits all” approach to homework is rarely good homework, because it ignores differing ability levels of students. Struggling students may require fewer questions, less complex problems with fewer steps, less reading, and will be encouraged and motivated to learn more when allowed different ways to demonstrate *their level* of mastery. It’s important to learn to fail gracefully, but if a student hasn’t sufficiently experienced what it’s like to feel successful, they may lose patience with their failures too quickly. When it comes to learning, motivation is the taproot, and so long as it is growing, it matters far less how much fruit we see on the tree this week, or this month, or even this year.

*Inviting.* What is the student’s first impression of this homework? Does it have aesthetic or “curb” appeal? The way homework *looks* and *feels* is important, and, as gourmet cooks like to say: “presentation is everything.” Long, multi-page worksheets with unclear instructions or assignments that are invented in the last five minutes of class when the teacher feels he/she didn’t cover enough ground in class can actually have counter-productive effects in overall motivation and mastery. The word “aesthetic” comes from the Greek notion of “perceive with senses.” The opposite of aesthetic is “anesthetic,” which means to “put to sleep.” Better to give fewer, high-quality, and aesthetically appealing assignments than a string of anesthetic ones.

Meaningful homework should be purposeful, efficient, personalized, doable, and inviting. (Credit to Cathy Vaterott, *Education Leadership*, Vol. 68, No. 1, Sep. 2010 for these five aspects of meaningful homework).