



PALO ALTO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
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OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

February 3, 2015

Dear PAUSD Colleagues,

In many discussions with students, parents, and faculty this past week, it became clear the District homework policy, [BP 6154](#), and accompanying administrative regulation, [AR 6154](#), were not widely known. These documents were developed by a district-wide committee that involved faculty, administrators, and parents. They were approved in June 2012 and February 2013. While this note likely feels “top down,” the policy and regulation were developed through an inclusive process, and as adopted Board Policy, compliance is expected and required.

The full texts of the policy and regulation are on the website, but I thought it would be most helpful to pick out the most salient highlights for teachers and principals that had the most impact on students. What follows are specific excerpts that teachers and administrators are required – not just expected – to follow. Under each item, I have added a comment where I thought clarification and/or emphasis were needed. I realize this note is long, but please read it in its entirety.

HOMEWORK DESIGN

Policy: “Homework should be designed to:

- Deepen understanding and encourage a love of learning.
- Reflect individual student needs, learning styles, social-emotional health and abilities in order for students to complete their homework.
- Provide timely feedback for students regarding their learning.
- Include clear instructions and performance expectations so students can complete the work independently.
- Be assigned in reasonable amounts that can be completed within a reasonable time frame.
- Provide teachers with feedback regarding overall classroom progress toward expected outcomes.”

Comment: *Homework is an important part of a student’s education, and there is a research base behind these design principles. As we remember from our own experiences of doing homework when we were students, however, some assignments were meaningful and others were just busy work. Thinking about homework as something we **design** and not just assign is a valuable practice. Stanford’s Challenge Success team is working with both high schools, and attached is a short, informative piece worth reading, [“Changing the Conversation About Homework from Quantity and Achievement To Quality and Engagement”](#).*

SLEEP AND FREE TIME

Policy: “Effective homework practices do not place an undue burden on students. The Board recognizes the value of extracurricular activities, unstructured time and adequate sleep for a student’s success in school. “

Comment: *There is a body of research regarding the critical importance of sleep for all children as well as the need for unstructured, free play for younger children. AR 6154, cited below, describes specific guidelines for the amount of homework.*

HIGH SCHOOL: WHAT IS A REASONABLE AMOUNT OF TIME?

Administrative Regulation: “As a guideline, when teachers choose to assign homework, students might reasonably be expected to devote the following amounts of undistracted, focused time to weekly homework, including time devoted to long-term projects and test review:

9-12 7-10 hours weekly average M-F

Note 1. Freshmen . . . may reasonably expect average homework loads closer to seven hours a week. Similarly, seniors can expect loads closer to ten hours per week.

Note 2: Students who choose to enroll in Advanced Placement, Honors, or accelerated courses should expect loads higher than those outlined above . . .”

Comment: *Note 2 states that students in AP, Honors, and accelerated courses should expect more homework, and based on my experience working with talented and accelerated high school students for several years, it is my opinion (and many of theirs) that generally 15 hours for a seven day week (Monday through Sunday) is a maximum reasonable load for top students.*

MIDDLE SCHOOL: WHAT IS A REASONABLE AMOUNT OF TIME?

Administrative Regulation: “As a guideline, when teachers choose to assign homework, students might reasonably be expected to devote the following amounts of undistracted, focused time to nightly homework, including time devoted to long-term projects and test review:

6 60 minutes average M-F
7-8 70-80 minutes average M-F”

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS: WHAT IS A REASONABLE AMOUNT OF TIME?

Administrative Regulation: “As a guideline, when teachers choose to assign homework, students might reasonably be expected to devote the following amounts of undistracted, focused time to nightly homework, including time devoted to long-term projects and reading.

K Occasional short homework
1 0-10 minutes average M-Th
2 0-20 minutes average M-Th
3 0-30 minutes average M-Th
4 0-40 minutes average M-Th

Comment: *As we well know, a significant body of research exists that supports parents reading to and with their children. My hope and expectation are that parents read to and/or with their young children at least 10-20 minutes a day beyond the above guidelines. It is especially important for building the vocabulary base of primary aged children and English language learners.*

PROJECT AND TEST STACKING

Administrative Regulation: “With the support of administration and staff, teachers should make efforts to coordinate with one another to establish deadlines, due dates for projects/assignments, and tests in an effort to minimize student over-extension.”

Comment: *In my conversations with high school students and middle school parents, I frequently hear that one of the biggest stressors is having multiple tests and/or projects due on the same day. I realize the cross-departmental communication to decrease this problem is a significant challenge. Some schools try master calendars, others designate specific days, e.g. Mathematics tests and projects due on Mondays, Science tests and projects on Tuesdays, English tests and projects on Wednesdays, etc., and sometimes teachers will have a two- or three-day window for test dates or due dates so students can choose the day within those windows for their tests or for completing their projects. This problem may be the most difficult to solve, but I am confident we can do it.*

PRINCIPALS’ AND ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS’ ROLE

Policy: “The Superintendent or designee shall ensure that each school site develops an effective homework plan in accordance with Board policy and administrative regulations.”

Comment: *I have asked the principals to work with faculty to develop a plan for assuring the policy and administrative regulation are implemented with fidelity.*

Administrative Regulations:

- “1. Provide professional development on homework, including overview of the policy, effective strategies and practices, and time for collaboration with grade level teams or departments to plan, as needed.
2. Be responsible for ensuring compliance with the homework policy, including the use of feedback processes to support its implementation.
3. Have on-going discussions with staff regarding effective homework strategies and practices.”

Comment: *There are a total of six of these guidelines for site administrators, but these are the most critical. Dr. Charles Young, Ms. Katherine Baker, Mrs. Barbara Harris, and Dr. Kelly Bikle will be assisting the principals in preparing professional development, and the principals will be reporting to me on how they are having discussions regarding effective homework and what they are doing to ensure compliance. Please note that these items are required and not just encouraged or recommended.*

FACULTY ROLE REGARDING HOMEWORK TIME

Administrative Regulation:

- “1. Clearly explain objectives, timelines, suggested amount of time for completing the homework, and required materials associated with the assignment.
2. Post assignments in a manner that is clear, consistent and easily observed by the student both in and outside of the classroom. The use of online communication tools is strongly encouraged at the secondary level.
4. **Monitor homework time requirements and feasibility of assignments using student assignments, student feedback, and parent feedback.**
5. Differentiate assignments when it is determined that, despite appropriate effort and learning habits, a student is spending more than the expected time on homework.
10. Work with grade and department level colleagues to promote consistent homework practices and reasonable total time requirements for each evening.”

Comments: *Please note the language in number 2: “The use of online communication tools is strongly encouraged at the secondary level.” Likewise, according to Appendix C of the contract, “In order to provide readily available and inclusive access to learning expectations, instructional materials, and assignments, secondary teachers are expected to electronically-post homework assignments, instructional materials, and test and quiz dates (with the exception of pop quizzes and regularly scheduled quizzes defined in the posted course syllabus) in a timely manner.” Currently, teachers are not required to use Schoology, which is the district’s online communication tool. Most teachers use it, and others use their own websites or other communications tools, which are accessed independently or through Schoology. While recent public conversations repeatedly relate to Schoology, the first and most important sentence of number 2 is neglected, and that is **the requirement to: “post assignments in a manner that is clear, consistent, and easily observed by the student both in and outside of the classroom.” In other words, students need to be able to access assignments from home.** Also, please note that AR 6154 is clear that numbers 4, 5, and 10 are also required, and not just encouraged.*

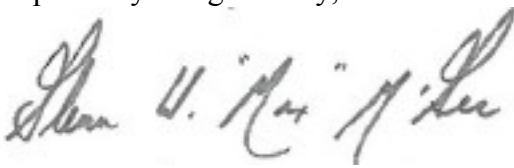
FACULTY ROLE REGARDING MAKEUP WORK

Policy: “Students who miss school work because of an excused absence shall be given the opportunity to complete all assignments and tests that can be reasonably provided ... Students shall receive full credit for work satisfactorily completed within a reasonable period of time.”

Comment: *It seems fair and clear. “Reasonable” is best determined on a case by case basis.*

In closing, I want to thank all of the faculty and administrators for attending to these documents. Realizing not everyone has read the Policy and Administrative Regulation, I hope these excerpts clarify some of the key points and that everyone will closely attend to them. Implementing the policy and regulation as intended matters a great deal to our students.

Respectfully and gratefully,



Glenn “Max” McGee
Superintendent