

The Importance of Homework

“Skill to do comes of doing...” (Ralph Waldo Emerson)

Students are born with a powerful desire to learn. Everything we do as parents and educators must ensure that this powerful desire is kept alive. To achieve this, schools must be safe arenas in which children can discover their talents, take responsibility, explore their beliefs, and learn how to learn. Hilldale School provides an environment that is safe, nurturing, and academically stimulating. The teachers are highly educated, talented, and caring individuals, and you can be assured that they are doing everything they possibly can to give your children the best possible K-8 education. However, they need your support!

Research has documented that schools which require regular and meaningful homework assignments increase the academic performance of the students. We at Hilldale School view homework as an important way to reinforce classroom lessons and to give students needed extra practice. Reading, Languages Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, and Spanish homework should be coming home with each student multiple times each week. Music and Art homework may also be required once weekly. In addition, teachers will often have the students work on long term assignments (reports, projects, etc.) to supplement the daily assignments, and they will announce these well ahead of time, so that you and your child can schedule the necessary time to complete this extra work. Every student is also expected to do 30 minutes of daily reading and to pick a study topic (math flashcards, a social studies chapter, vocabulary words, etc.) for daily preparation toward a goal of mastery.

The Hilldale Parent Handbook discusses the approximate amount of time your children are expected to spend on homework each night:

- Kindergarten: 20-30 mins. plus 15-20 mins. of parent-directed or choice reading + math flashcards
- 1st grade: 30-40 mins. plus 30 mins. of choice reading + math flashcards
- 2nd & 3rd grades: 45-60 mins. plus 30 mins. of choice reading + math flashcards
- 4th & 5th grades: 60-75 mins. plus 30 mins. of choice reading
- 6th – 8th grades: 90-120 mins. plus 30 mins. of choice reading

Throughout our nation, homework has become a controversial subject. Parents are very busy, and children are often overscheduled. Finding time to do homework can be a challenge. However, we feel that it is important for parents to be actively involved in supporting their children to see that homework is completed promptly, done well, and returned on time. Students are asked to neatly record their assignments into their agendas, so that they and their parents will know exactly what is expected and when it is due. Parents are asked to review this agenda nightly in order to help monitor the assignments and to check for any notes from the teachers or requests for signatures. There are a number of other ways that parents can put homework first, while making it seem like less of a burden to their students.

Since many Hilldale children do attend the after-school Homework Club, when three adults monitor and provide assistance, some or all of the assignments may already have been completed. In general, except on workshop days, your Kindergarten through second grade child should be able to complete most of the assignments (except choice reading/math flashcards) within the after-school Homework Club time. However, older children have longer homework expectations (as much as two hours nightly), so they will probably need more time to complete their assignments at home. Be aware, also, that some children work faster than others, some assignments are longer than others, and some children may also have unfinished class work to complete, so the above “expectations” are only guidelines.

If your child seems to be spending long hours on homework every night, try these suggestions:

- Homework Club - If your child is not attending Homework Club, consider allowing him/her to attend, or provide a similar situation at home.
- Distractions – Provide a quiet, well-lit study area to aid in good concentration, where the child may finish incomplete assignments. Don't allow television, phone calls, pets, toys, food, or siblings to distract from the tasks at hand.
- Expectations – Set aside a consistent homework time in order to help avoid conflicts and stress. For some children, it may help to divide the work into smaller, manageable portions so that the night's assignments do not seem quite so overwhelming.
- Advice – Be available to answer quick questions, including general explanations of the material and strategies to improve the quality of the work. Quiz your child periodically on spelling, vocabulary, or factual information. Ask lots of thoughtful questions to help them to see connections to other situations in their lives.
- Remember: It is never okay to “help” by doing work for the child! This defeats the purpose of the assignment, gives the child a sense that he/she does not really need to complete what has been asked, and does not allow the teacher to know when the child is having problems and needs to be supported academically. It is much better to send a note to the teacher telling of your observation that, after giving explanations, the child still appears to be having trouble with something.
- Encourage the importance of a nightly “free reading” time of 30 minutes. Read in full view of your child while he/she is reading.
- Tools – Ensure that your child has ready access to the necessary tools, i.e. paper, pen, crayons or markers, calculator, dictionary, etc., to complete the assignments.
- Attitudes – Parents play a large part in how children think about school and homework. Children need to see that you support the need to complete this work in a positive, directed, manner and that it be neat, complete, and on time. Act excited and pleased about their completion of the work; reward them with words and family time!
- Scale Back! – If your child's life is so full of after-school activities that there is no time or energy for homework, it is probably time to re-evaluate. Other activities should never replace school as the primary focus of a child's life.
- Stay involved – It is important that children know that you care about what they are doing in school. Check their assignment books every day to help them keep track of what is due. Review their homework to see how well it was done and whether or not it is complete.
- Most important, praise them for work done well and neatly and for positive study habits. It is this coordination and cooperation with the teachers that will help your child attain the maximum educational success in Hilldale School and beyond.

Please help us to stress the importance of homework to your child, and help him/her understand its value and the need for doing one's personal best in this area, as well as in school! Your positive attitudes in these areas will be reflected in how your child thinks of and does in school.