

Homework at FGCS

Background

When the school opened in 2007, we did not assign homework to students based on the following:

1. We recognized that homework was often assigned despite little research-based evidence of its efficacy, especially for younger students.
2. We hoped that children without homework would use their at-home time to explore their own interests, engage in enriching activities of all kinds and spend time with family.
3. While we recognized the need for students to have time to practice what was learned in school (independent practice time), we intended for them to have sufficient time for this independent practice time at school rather than through homework.

After the school opened, we found that we needed to adjust our approach to homework for the following reasons:

1. Research: Research is unequivocal in finding that students who read more, read and write better. While students do have time to read at school, more time is needed for most students to make adequate progress in school. Math research also points to the need for students to have time practicing math to retain acquired skills and knowledge over the long term.
2. Time constraints at school: Because our schedule includes early release for program development on Fridays and half-day Out and Abouts, teachers found that they could not provide as much time as students needed to engage in independent practice time.
3. Family resources: We recognized that because of work schedules and other pressures, families could not always access resources to support their students' learning and needed additional help from school.
4. School-home connection: Without schoolwork going home, despite newsletters and teacher email messages, many families felt uninformed about what their children were doing at school. Many parents told us that they missed having the opportunity to help their child with schoolwork or to have dialogue generated by homework.
5. Lack of preparedness in high school: With our no-homework practice, our first middle school students heading off to the high school reported being unprepared for the level of homework expected of them to be successful in high school. We adjusted homework practices at middle school after our first year. We have continued to develop our middle-school program with the twin goals of retaining an experiential, place-based curriculum while preparing students to transition to a traditional high school.

Our response to these issues was to reflect on our original approach to homework and create a new one that is tiered by grade level, differentiated within grade levels, and increases accountability for students as they get older:

- Level 1: Literacy homework consists of regular reading. Teachers send books home weekly. Teacher and student choose the books based on the student's interest and reading level. Math homework consists of occasional "At Home Connections" games or activities.
- Level 2: Literacy homework is for students to read for 20-30 minutes during the week and to do one writing assignment a week. Math homework is a math packet that comes home Monday to be completed during the week. Students are expected to keep track of their work at home in their binders which include a planner form.
- Level 3: Literacy homework includes students reading for 20-30 minutes daily. Students also do a weekly spelling and writing assignment. Math homework is unfinished work from class, First in Math (an online program), or math packets to be completed during the week. Students keep track of assignments through their binders and the teacher's website.
- Level 4: Literacy homework is spelling, vocabulary, and writing. Students complete a reading response each week. For math, students watch instructional videos and complete unfinished work from class. Science involves occasional readings and projects. Students track assignments through a planner, teacher websites, and an online program called Engrade that parents may also access.
-

Other notes about homework:

- Support Offered: Because we recognize that one reason homework is ineffective for some students is that families are not able to help them at home, we have created after-school support programs for Levels 2-4.
- Accountability: At Levels 1-3, the accountability for homework is limited to teacher encouragement. At Level 4, where we believe students need to learn the habit of doing homework in order to be ready for high school, students have higher accountability. Level 4 students who do not complete school work, including homework, may have to work on it during recess. Chronic failure to complete school work will result in parent conferences and report cards that reflect poor work habits.
- Flexibility & Differentiation: Our PLP and conference process allows us to have individual conversations with parents about the unique needs of their children. Teachers work with parents to craft homework plans that work for families. In some cases, that may mean more homework; in other cases, less.