



LAWRENCE

SCHOOL

Statement of Practice

Homework/Independent Practice

Grades 7-12

Statement of Problem

Lawrence School recognizes that homework may often be a source of significant and chronic stress for students and their families. We also recognize that the amount of homework a school gives is often used as a misplaced measure of academic rigor. And, we know that students and parents are often judged harshly when homework assignments are not completed, without regard for the unique challenges adolescents may face in demonstrating the range of executive function skills required to complete, organize and return homework to school on time, each and every day.

At the same time, Lawrence School recognizes that homework is a necessary part of a student's educational experience. Particularly at Lawrence School, where diagnostic teaching is standard practice, teachers must be able to assess, through homework, a student's grasp of the information covered in class. Further, we believe that consistent completion of homework assignments enhances a student's learning experience and helps to build skills that will be applicable throughout the life span.

Bridging the Gap-Lawrence School's Response

The faculty and administration of Lawrence School recognize that a different approach to the homework dilemma is required. Beginning during the 2008-2009 school year, and continuing through the 2009-2010 school year, a core group of teachers and members of the school's administration met to discuss the issues related to homework and to craft a response to the homework debate. Our goal was to create a set of procedures that respected the needs of the students and families we serve, while honoring the effectiveness of homework in guiding instruction.

The process was exhaustive and involved more than a dozen small group meetings, two half-day planning sessions guided by a trained facilitator external to the school, surveys of students and teachers, as well as interviews with teachers and administrators at other schools like Lawrence across the United States. From this process, we learned that the issue of homework plagues schools across the country. Most of the staff at the other schools we talked to indicated that their school has no formal procedure for managing homework, aside from penalizing students for the lack of completion. More than one school asked us to send our completed policy and procedures related to homework to them upon completion. We believe, therefore, that this undertaking will not only help us to better meet the needs of our students, but it may also serve as a model that other schools will choose to emulate.

Please review this document carefully, as the policies and procedures outlined are a departure from our previous mode of operation. We welcome your questions and comments and look forward to partnering with you to end the “homework wars” once and for all.

What We Believe

The **purpose** of homework at Lawrence School is to

- Assist students in building academic confidence by allowing them to experience success, while also becoming aware of their limits.
- Facilitate the capacity for students to demonstrate a sophisticated level of metacognition—a student’s ability to think about their own thinking.
- Reinforce critical concepts taught in the classroom through independent practice.
- Continue to build and enhance a partnership between home and school.
- Allow the teacher to have an increased level of awareness of student strengths and weaknesses, thereby guiding personalized instruction.
- Improve executive function skills –the ability to organize, plan and manage time.
- Provide opportunities for students to demonstrate application of knowledge and skills in a variety of settings.

In a **way** that

- Minimizes anxiety and frustration.
- Honors individual learning styles and needs.
- Recognizes and respects competing demands on students' time outside of school.
- Is meaningful and purposeful.
- Promotes exploration and discovery.
- Meets students at the zone of proximal development (Zone of Proximal Development – or ZPD- asserts that all learning is meaningful when level of challenge is not overwhelming to a child’s level of competence).

- Recognizes attempts at completion and/or attempts to problem-solve.
- Is strategically designed for each child.

So that **students**

- Apply and expand knowledge in different settings.
- Gain a desire for continued learning and growth.
- Transfer skills to future life experience.
- Become more self-sufficient and accountable.
- Own their academic and social strengths and challenges.
- Practice self-advocacy without arrogance or apology.
- Master effective study techniques, organizational, and time management skills

So that **teachers**

- Are able to assess students' strengths and challenges using subjective and objective - based data.
- Can obtain a better perspective of how each student learns.
- May adjust curriculum and methods according to students' needs.
- Are equipped to provide constructive feedback regarding student progress.

So that **parents**

- Can celebrate their child's strengths and accomplishments.
- Are empowered to taper their level of involvement based on child's developmental needs, independence, and level of ability.
- Gain a better understanding of their child's learning style.

- Receive consistent feedback regarding what the student is learning and how he or she is progressing toward the goal of content mastery.

Belief in Action

In order to effect meaningful change related to homework, Lawrence School has developed a clear set of procedural elements that will become an integrated part of the school's daily operation, effective with the start of the 2010-2011 school year.

- ✓ Homework will be *weighted*, such that homework will be worth no more than 20% of a student's grade in any class.
- ✓ Among many grading categories, Homework and Assessments (tests) will most likely be the two areas that make up the highest percentage of a student's grade in a course.
- ✓ In order to honor student achievement in their area of highest performance, a *Top Skill* category will add 10% to a student's grade for either the Homework Category or the Assessments Category, whichever is higher at the close of the grading period.
- ✓ A Learning Resource Center, in operation from 3:20-5:00 p.m. Tuesday-Friday, will be staffed by one of Lawrence School's Learning Specialists, and will serve the function of providing students with a structured, supportive environment in which homework assignments can be successfully completed.
- ✓ If students neglect to complete a homework assignment that is due on a particular day, they will have one evening to make up that assignment and submit it the next day, for 75% credit.
- ✓ If the assignment is not completed overnight and submitted one day after the due date, the student will be required to attend the Learning Resource Center after school *on that day* in order to complete the assignment. If the assignment is completed and submitted during the Learning Resource Center hours, 75% credit can still be earned.
- ✓ *If a student must attend the LRC, parents are responsible for transportation following the session.*
- ✓ Any assignment not submitted two days or more after the due date will receive 50% credit if submitted before the *end of the unit in which the work was assigned*, and if the student voluntarily participates in the Learning Resource Center in order to complete the work.

- ✓ Any student who fails to attend a required session in the Learning Resource Center, or who neglects to turn in an assignment before the close of a course unit will receive 0% credit for that assignment.

- ✓ An incentive program is in development that will reward students who consistently complete homework. Incentives will be provided at regular intervals throughout the school year.