

**THE COLUMBUS SCHOOL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
HOMEWORK AND EXTENDED LEARNING APPROACH**

[Versión en español](#)

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Underlying Principles:

- A foundation of trust - we will trust that our students and their families will do what is expected. We will work under the assumption that people behave in responsible ways when they are trusted to do so. We will communicate this trust by letting our students know that we trust them, by being clear with expectations, and by not always asking for evidence of completed work.
- Our homework practices serve three purposes:
 - Establish consistent reading habits
 - Meet individual student needs
 - Inspire students to be lifelong learners
- We developed and will modify our homework practices by informing ourselves of research and trends, by collecting data, by considering the potential side effects, and by analyzing our cultural context.
- Students should not spend more than 10-30 minutes a day on activities assigned by school, unless they choose to do so. We will work to inspire and encourage students to want to learn for longer periods of time.
- Learning goes beyond what happens in school and we must provide opportunities for children to learn in different contexts and settings
- The more families and educators nurture love and enthusiasm towards learning, the more likely it is that children will grow into lifelong learners.

Practices

As an Elementary School, we will implement the following four practices to support our students' learning outside of school hours. Not all practices will be implemented in the same way with all students, you will find specifics about each practice in the linked documents under each practice

1. **Reading** - Students are expected to read at home every day, in ways that are appropriate to their age, grade level, and individual strengths and needs. For rationale and details, click [here](#).
2. **Targeted Practice** - While students benefit most from practicing skills in an environment where they can receive immediate feedback from the teacher, teachers may assign purposeful and targeted activities for certain students to complete at home. This will be done informally, occasionally, and only used as a short-term strategy for some, skills. For rationale and details, click [here](#).
3. **Extended Learning for Families** - The school provides opportunities for families to learn together by recommending monthly learning activities for the family. For rationale and details, click [here](#).
4. **Extended Independent Learning for Students** - The school provides opportunities for students in grades 2-5 to extend their learning at home by assigning projects that will spark student interest and that include an element of choice. For rationale and details, click [here](#).

EXPECTED READING

Summary

Students are expected to read at home every day, in ways that are appropriate to their age, grade level, and individual strengths and needs.

Rationale

Language is a fundamental part of Columbus School culture; we place strong emphasis on speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills in both English and Spanish. We work to foster a love of reading as well as instill a habit of reading for pleasure every day. Consistent reading habits provide ample benefits for children including increased vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, and even empathy.

As a school we expect students to read at home every single day. We choose to move beyond encouraging reading to expecting it because this helps our students create the habit and it strengthens our school's culture of reading.

Details

- All students are expected to read after school on a daily basis, including weekends.
- After-school reading may include:
 - Independent reading
 - Being read to by an adult or older sibling
 - Reading books, poems, articles, online material, Raz-Kids, songs, recipes, etc
 - Reading with someone else
 - For younger students, looking at pictures in books and other printed material
- **The expectation for students in K4 -1 is to be read to by an adult every day for a portion or all of their reading time.** The other portion may be spent reading *with* an adult (for those students who can decode) or interacting independently with printed material by looking at the pictures and/or storytelling. Those kindergarten and first grade students who are ready, may spend a small *part* of their reading time reading independently. At this stage of the reading development, students will benefit more from being read to than from reading independently.
- Students in grades 2-5 will benefit from reading independently as well as being read to by someone else.
- Students are encouraged to read in both English and Spanish but given the freedom to read in either or both languages.
- As a school, we do not encourage families to set a timer for reading or allot a number of minutes for this purpose. Instead, families are encouraged to establish a habit of reading in their homes. The length of time depends on the child's age, motivation, and abilities. Families can increase the time and set goals to read for longer periods or to read more books. The more a student reads, the better, but it's important that the reading is a pleasurable experience. Following are some **flexible** guidelines to support families as they decide how long children should read for or be read to:
 - K4-1: 10-20 minutes each day (can be more if the child is being read to)

- 2-3: 15-30 minutes each day
- 4-5: 20-40 minutes each day
- Teachers will communicate this expectation to their students consistently throughout the year (daily, weekly, bi-weekly, as necessary).
- Teachers will spend time in the classroom providing students with positive reading experiences (book talks, book choice, read-alouds, author talks, conferences, book clubs, etc) so that students grow to love reading and find at-home reading pleasurable.
- Students may read all sorts of texts at home - books, fiction and non-fiction, magazines, Raz-Kids, online material, newspapers, etc.
- As a school, we will communicate that students are expected to read on a daily basis and we will trust that they are meeting this expectation
- Teachers and families will communicate with each other about the child's at-home reading practices. Teachers will communicate with parents if they sense that a student is not reading at home and parents will communicate with teachers if their child is struggling to read at home. A plan will be made to increase that child's at home reading (eg. motivation, book choice, goal setting, reading logs, reading responses)
- Students will not be expected to fill out a reading log, unless the teacher determines that it is necessary for those students who need an accountability component. This is decided on a case by case basis.
- At home reading supports the reading that is done in school. Class and student-teacher conversations around books are connected to the reading that is done both at school and at home (eg. conferences, book clubs, small group work, reading response, etc)

EXTENDED INDEPENDENT LEARNING FOR STUDENTS

Summary

The school provides opportunities for students in grades 2-5 to extend their learning at home by assigning projects and activities that will spark student interest and that include an element of choice.

Rationale

At The Columbus School we work to foster a love of learning that moves beyond the classroom. It is our responsibility to support learning that goes beyond the academic by providing students with opportunities to further their learning independently, at home, and in meaningful ways. Our current school culture is not one in which a large number of students pursue intellectual learning outside of school by choice; by incorporating this component into our Homework Policy, we ensure that our students are nudged and encouraged to do so.

Practices

- This practice applies only to grades 2-5
- Homework is designed to foster love for learning and give students opportunities to work on things at home in which they normally wouldn't
- Completion of assignments is expected
- Students have choices for topics, assignments, activities, etc. Teachers might give students choice by giving them a menu, a list, a tic-tac-toe board, etc or teachers might assign a project and give students choice on the topic.
- Grade levels decide how often they will assign Extended Learning opportunities, considering the complexity of the tasks offered and the student's' age. Time frames should always include at least one weekend. Some examples:
 - Students are given a tic-tac-toe board and asked to choose three tasks to complete in a month
 - Students are given a list of simple tasks and asked to choose and complete two by the following week.
 - Students are assigned Passion Projects and encouraged to work on a topic of their choice
- Teams will meet with Spanish teachers to decide how to implement this practice at their grade level to ensure that there is no overload and that the activities meet the objectives stated on this document (positive, element of choice, tied to student interest). Teams might choose to make a yearly schedule to decide the frequency of assignments and to ensure that activities are not assigned by homeroom and Spanish teachers at the same time.
- Teachers assign homework options that fit student interests, these might include:
 - Journal prompts to which the teacher responds to in writing
 - Passion Projects
 - Free Writing

- Drawing related to what students are learning in the classroom or something they are learning about on their own
- Inquiries, research, investigation
- Field journals
- Challenging problem solving activities (which may or may not involve math)
- Different types of reading activities (book bags, extensions, simply reading, reading responses, book ads, etc)
- Making dioramas, mobiles, puppets, posters, and other crafts related to what students are learning in the classroom or a topic they are interested in
- Making videos/taking photos
- Online games, searches, treasure hunts, etc (may include *Reflex Math*)
- Other types of writing
- Assignments must be designed so that students are able to complete them independently
- Some activities might be more exciting to complete if there is an audience to share them with (Passion Projects, for example). For some activities, we might expect students to bring their finished product to share with their class; for others (online games, for example) we trust that students will do it.
- Teachers work with students and families when students are not completing the activities, searching for ways to motivate the student to continue his/her learning at home

EXTENDED LEARNING FOR FAMILIES

Summary

The school provides opportunities for families to learn together by recommending monthly learning activities for the family.

Rationale

At The Columbus School we work to foster a love of learning that moves beyond the classroom. Learning happens in the pool, at the playground, at the doctor's office, in the kitchen, etc. and that families play an important role in raising children that love learning. As a school, it is our responsibility to provide families with opportunities to enrich their family life and learn together. Suggesting monthly activities allows us to add a fresh element to the routines and traditions of our schools' families by encouraging them to do things they might not do normally. By incorporating this element into our Homework Policy, we create a stronger sense of community and broaden our students' and families' perspectives on what learning looks like.

Practices

- At the beginning of every month, the school will suggest activities that families may incorporate into their routine
- These activities are designed for students to work on with their families, never independently, and may include:
 - Cooking
 - Board games/Card games/Math games
 - Crafty and art projects
 - Reading, inquiring, investigating on a topic
 - Family book club or other types of reading activities
 - Outings to museums, shows, etc
 - Watching documentaries, TED talks, movies, videos, etc
 - Making movies together
 - Writing - field journals, stories, plays
 - Hikes, camping, star gazing or other outdoor experiences
 - Family meetings
 - Household chores
- Every month's activities should include at least one simple option that does not involve buying something or leaving the house.
- Counselors, coaches, administrators, and teachers will take turns developing the activities and sharing them with families.
- Different people in the ES will be responsible for designing activities each month, schedule for 2017-2018 [here](#)

- Suggested activities will be communicated to families in two ways:
 - An email will be sent to families via the Communications department, they will make it visually appealing and exciting
 - Teachers will communicate and promote the activities to students, vice principals will post the suggested activities in the weekly so all staff has access
- Regardless of who designs and shares the activities, teachers will share them with their students every month and motivate them to complete them Teachers will continue to communicate excitement for these activities throughout the month
- Some activities might be more exciting to complete if there is an audience to share them with (crafts, for example). For some activities, we might invite students to bring their finished product to share with their class, if they'd like to
- Activities will be proposed at the beginning of the month. With activities such as playing a board game, we might encourage families to play it 4-6 times in the month or once a week.
- Activities may or may not be directly connected to what students are working on in school

TARGETED PRACTICE

Summary

While students benefit most from practicing skills in an environment where they can receive immediate feedback from the teacher, teachers may assign purposeful and targeted activities for certain students to complete at home. This will be done informally, occasionally, and only used as a short-term strategy for some skills.

Rationale

Meeting individual student needs lies at the heart of what we do at the Elementary School. Differentiation within the classroom is part of our routine, every hour of every day. While most academic learning happens within the classroom, where students can receive immediate feedback from the teacher, there are some circumstances in which some students will benefit from working on certain skills at home with very targeted and purposeful activities. By incorporating this into our Homework Policy, we ensure that teachers have the possibility of providing ways for individual students to strengthen their learning at home when it is beneficial

Practices

- Some students will be expected to do some targeted and individualized reinforcement activities at home **if** and **when** there is a need. This work will be assigned by the teacher and students will be expected to complete it.
- Teachers will use informal, formal, formative, and summative assessments to determine which students would benefit from extra practice at home, when they would benefit from it, and what kind of extra practice they would benefit from.
- This type of homework will be assigned when students need that extra nudge to meet the expectation, when they are almost there
- Teachers will determine the best way to communicate these types of homework assignments, depending on the student. This might look like:
 - A teacher calling or writing a note home asking families for support
 - A teacher talking to the student and explaining what he should do at home and why
- Teachers will ask the student to bring a product to school to share with the teacher/class if they think it will motivate for the student
- Teachers will communicate these types of assignments in positive ways.
- **No student** will receive individualized homework every single week, this will only be assigned when practicing at home benefits the student with the skill that is being targeted. Teachers will consider the student's motivation, family support, and abilities when making this decision and use this measure occasionally
- Some students may never be assigned individualized and differentiated homework
- Individualized and targeted homework must never be the only type of support a student receives.

Students who are struggling must receive the majority of their support inside the classroom.

- This type of homework may apply to ALL students - those who are meeting expectations, those not meeting expectations, and those moving beyond expectations. It depends on the needs of each student. However, this practice is not intended for teachers to assign something to the whole class; if everyone needs to work on it, then time can be devoted to it during the school day (every once in a while, all students might get the same homework, if it is something they can all do and are ready for or something that fits a very specific purpose).
- Teachers will communicate with the other students' teachers to ensure that the child is not being assigned homework by more than one teacher at the same time.
- All teachers (Homeroom, Spanish, Learning Center, counselors, and specialists) may assign targeted practice. Assignments will be channeled and cleared with the Homeroom teacher before discussing with students or families so he/she can ensure that each student is not getting homework from several teachers at the same time. This practice will also give teachers further opportunities to communicate about individual student needs.
- At times, teachers might also expect students to finish work that they did not complete in school. This might apply to students who are able to do the work but choose not to.
- Examples of situations in which students will be assigned targeted and individualized homework:
 - A K4 student is struggling with understanding the concept of an AB pattern. The teacher asks the parent to spend a week creating AB patterns with the student using materials like rocks and sticks, colored beads, beans and lentils, paint, etc.
 - A K5 student is stuck at a reading level B and is almost ready to move to reading level C books independently. The teacher sends home a list of high-frequency words for the student to practice over the course of 5 days.
 - A 1st grade student is lacking foundational number sense and counting skills that will allow her to do the math work expected in first grade. The teacher asks the parents to play certain board or card games with the child and to practice counting objects and putting them into groups of ten.
 - A 2nd grade student shows special interest in butterflies during the *Habitats* unit. The teacher provides the student with books and websites about butterflies and asks him to make an information book about the topic to put in the classroom library.
 - A small group of 3rd students understands the concepts they are learning in math but could benefit from becoming more fluent when adding and subtracting numbers. The teacher assigns them two weeks of *Reflex Math* practice at home.
 - A 4th grade student is not writing enough during Writing Workshop, she understands the genre and strategies but is not producing enough pieces. The student is asked to write a certain number of pages at home each day until she can keep up with the expected volume in the classroom.
 - A 5th grade student is struggling with division and multiplication of fractions and the teacher realizes it is because he does not have foundational knowledge around fraction. The teacher assigns a series of hands-on, online, and paper pencil activities to reinforce 3rd and 4th grade skills related to fractions.
 - The PE teacher notices that 3 of his 1st grade students are struggling with important gross motor skills, he sends an email home asking parents to playfully incorporate skipping, hopping, and galloping into their day