

SOUTH BRUNSWICK TOWNSHIP PUBLIC SCHOOLS



Joanne Kerekes
Assistant Superintendent for
Curriculum & Instruction

Dr. Gary P. McCartney
Superintendent of Schools

Thaddeus Thompson
Business Administrator/
Board Secretary

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Dear Staff,

The modest District Homework Goal from 15---16 (review of practice) took on increasing momentum during the year, as homework became a “hot topic” in the SBSB and beyond. Many districts took steps to address rising concern. In SBSB an administrative decision was made to have the Goal Committee stay the course, work the plan (book study, literature review, surveys, shadow project) and not make change----- technical or adaptive. Over time it became increasingly difficult to maintain focus on study and review, and by year’s end we were not in a good place.

With that in mind, the intent behind this year’s homework goal is to move from study to action with an eye on tending to the whole child. The goal statement reads as follows: “Based on the findings from the 15---16 SBSB homework study, we will identify short and long---term action steps that we will operationalize during the 2016---17 school year.”

One such identified step was to “implement 2 to 4 district---wide, family---friendly occasions that shift the focus from IQ to EQ (emotional quotient).” We have decided to move forward with this step in the form of “homework---free holidays.”

To that end, over the course of 16---17, SBSB students will have 3 homework---free periods of time with assurance that projects will not be due and tests will not be given in the one to two days that follow. (The latter accommodates students on an A---B schedule.)

The time periods we have selected span the seasons.

- **Fall:** November 23---27, 2016 (Thanksgiving Holiday) --- No assignments due or tests given on the day of return, November 28.
- **Winter:** December 23, 2016 – January 2, 2017 (Winter Break) --- No assignments or long---range projects due or tests given before January 5.
- **Spring:** April 10 – April 17, 2017 (Spring Break) --- No assignments or long---term projects due or tests given before April 20.

In conjunction with this action, on October 6th and 27th the SB Parent Academy will be hosting in two parts, a viewing and moderated discussion on “Race to Nowhere.” The plan is to have each attendee experience the film through his/her own lens----- parent, teacher, or educator—in order to make connections, open dialogue, and offer thoughts about ways we each might “push the pause button.”

In addition, we have taken the action step to further engage staff in PD around the embedding of identified and valued best practices such as self---regulation strategies, technology solutions (e.g. Google Classroom), and flexible due dates.

As the year progresses, the final report of findings on homework in SBSB will be shared and further actions will be taken. These will include (a) aligning grading practices, (b) developing greater department/grade level consistency and balance in approaches to homework, and (c) being more consistent and clear about summer and AP assignments.

In the meantime, one part of the study that peaked great interest was that for a number of years SBSB has had a Homework Policy. In 2011, it was memorialized in writing and Board---approved. As you read the policy, it's clear that it has withstood the test of time.

Please review and apply to your practice the "six basic District assumptions" which are excerpted below. We think you will find that they remain a good fit for SBSB. (The full policy is posted on our District Webpage, www.sbschools.org.)

1. *Homework assignments should be meaningful/purposeful and reinforce what is being taught.*
2. *Every effort should be made by the teacher to assure that the pupils understand assignments. Teachers should model how homework should be done and make expectations clear.*
3. *Materials that are necessary to complete assignments should be readily available.*
4. *Most assignments should be able to be completed by the pupil working independently. Some assignments may be given which require the parent(s) or legal guardian(s) and child to work together.*
5. *Homework is differentiated to meet the needs of the learner.*
6. *Homework will not be punitive.*

Some end notes.

- For grades K---8, for many years we have informally followed the widely---held "10 minute" rule when it comes to assigning homework—that is, an average of 10 minutes per grade per night, with some nights being more, and other nights being less. We have also historically encouraged students to reach out if the amount of work has become too much, and have adjusted accordingly. These are best practices and should continue.
- At the high school level, students are expected to self---regulate their time and complete assigned work over the course of an A/B schedule. That being said, our teachers have long---recognized that students have 6---7 additional courses over two days (A/B) for which they may also be completing homework, projects and/or studying for assessments. Awareness of this continues to be a best practice and should continue.
- Regarding the assignment of leisure reading as homework—that is, choice reading for pleasure. This too is a practice that should continue to be modeled, encouraged and celebrated. We could all do with a little more of this.

Moving forward, future discussions await. If you wish to join the Homework Goal Committee for some of these conversations, please let us know.

Gary P. McCartney, Ed. D
Interim Superintendent of Schools

Joanne Kerekes
Assistant Superintendent