

Coventry changing district's homework policy

Shifting focus to
expectations for
each grade level
means accounting
for differences

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COVENTRY — Homework as most students and adults know it may soon be changing in Coventry's schools.

New guidelines have been proposed at all levels, focusing more on expectations at each stage — elementary, middle or high school — instead of having one policy that combines them.

"The goal for this year is to have the new policy in place by the time school begins," said Louise Seitsinger, principal at Tiogue Elementary School.

She presented the new policy information last Tuesday during the School Committee meeting along with Lynne Burke, assistant principal at Coventry High School and Mike Almeida, assistant school superintendent for the district.

"I'm glad I was able to present the information with the others because it showed a real example of how the process will continue as students go through the system," she said.

She explained how expectations in elementary school will vary from middle school and high school because they are all different types of instruction.

The basic reasons for assigning homework remain the same from the old to new policy overall: to strengthen basic study skills, reinforce independent study habits and bridge the communication between school and home as well as extend the classroom learning experience. The expectations for each student hasn't changed — understand the assignment, take home the necessary materials, and complete the assignment with as little parental help as possible. The way these expectations can be

met, however, is changing.

For the elementary school, the new policy will focus more on different types of homework, how parents and teachers can more effectively be involved and how students can use more of their creativity and take more initiative in their responsibility to get their homework done.

“The new elementary policy will allow students to take more ownership of their work and learning style,” she said.

Seitsinger explained another piece of the homework puzzle is about taking into consideration how every family has unique circumstances and how each student learns most effectively, depending on their readiness, learning style, organizational skills and emotional needs.

“Based on current research, we know that every family has unique circumstances and that’s one of the factors we’ve considered,” she said. “We really want to stress the guided beliefs piece and really stress the individual’s piece in it.”

Another goal of the policy is for parents to provide more structure for the student to complete their homework, for example, practicing math, listening to them read and providing a place with no distractions.

Assistant Coventry School Superintendent Mike Almeida, formerly the Principal at Alan Shawn Feinstein Middle School, said the new policy for the Middle school provides very clear expectations of the responsibility of parents, administration and students.

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"I believe the policy does a lot of great things and it's a step in the right direction," he said.

Almeida believes the first step in the process is claiming ownership and then the implementation of the process.

The other piece is recognizing homework as a practice and extension of classroom learning and assessing it academically.

Almeida explained some of the beliefs with completing homework assignments at the middle school level include quality, being better prepared for class, enforcing what was learned in class, it provided feedback to the teacher regarding a student's progress and it helps instill responsibility.

"Homework must be of quality in order for it to play an important role in developing skills," he said. "We don't want to give homework just for the sake of giving it. It's got to reflect the curriculum.

"When homework is assigned, it should be like a project," he added. "When we assign homework, there's no guarantee the kids are the ones who actually do it. We need to be cautious of how we count that homework for a grade."

Almeida added that family dynamics differ from home to home. Both parents may not be home each night to check homework, or a child may not have access to a computer every night at home among other circumstances, therefore, that needs to be taken into account.

The goal of homework for high school students is to help evaluate student under-

standing, provide students opportunities to apply new knowledge and reinforce their skills as well as provide opportunities to expand on topics taught in class in order to develop a wider and deeper understanding of concepts.

Like the elementary and middle school policies, the expectations for high school students are to make sure they take home the necessary materials, complete an assignment on time, and take primary responsibility for their assignments. One of the factors that varies between the two younger groups and high school is learning how to prioritize homework with after-school activities, with one tenet being the students communicating with their teachers about what they may have missed if they were absent.