

Information Note: Provincial Homework Policy

The new Ministerial Policy on homework will come into effect on September 1, 2015. This policy replaces provincial guides and school board policies regarding homework.

In the new policy, homework is an expectation for all grades and in all classes and subjects.

The policy provides a set of standards for homework and relies on teachers to use their professional judgement to plan appropriate assignments based on the grade(s) and subjects they teach and their understanding of students' needs and circumstances. The standards for effective homework apply to all types of assignments from independent reading, to practicing skills learned in physical education class, to keeping a journal or completing a longer-term project.

Teachers will determine when to assign homework, what to assign, and how much. The new policy does not include direction on maximum time for homework per week. Instead, it requires teachers to ensure that homework:

- supports individual and class learning goals
- takes students' abilities and needs into account
- can be completed with the supplies and technology resources that students have at home
- is assigned with a clear purpose of supporting students to prepare for class, practice skills and knowledge, or enrich their learning

Homework assignments can be designed for a class but must always be considerate of students' different needs and circumstances. This means it will be:

- age and developmentally appropriate
- directly connected to what students are learning in class
- based on skills and knowledge that students already have
- planned with some consideration for assignments that students have in other subjects or courses
- supportive of students learning to think and act independently
- within a student's ability to complete on their own
- mindful of students' access to help and other resources at home
- not assigned on days of cultural or religious significance for students and their families

Under the new policy, teachers are expected to promptly check homework to provide timely feedback to students. Teachers should acknowledge the completion of homework and inform students about their work, including areas for improvement and strategies for moving forward. Daily homework will not count toward students' grades. However, longer-term projects and assignments will provide feedback to students and contribute to their grades.

Effective implementation of the new policy will depend on two-way communication between home and school. Parents want to be informed of homework assignments and if possible, to know when they can expect work to come home. They also want to know how to help their child with homework (e.g. tips on building positive homework habits, helping their child to practice literacy and math skills).

If a student regularly struggles to complete their homework, the policy calls on parents and teachers to work in partnership to develop an alternative approach and necessary supports. If they are able, parents are also responsible for creating a supportive environment for homework in the home and helping students to manage their time between school work, extra-curricular and after school activities.

When a student does not complete homework assignments on a regular basis without a reasonable explanation, the teacher and parent(s) will work together to provide additional supports. If the student continues not to complete homework, the school's Program Planning Team is best suited to respond. The Provincial School Code of Conduct Policy will not apply to implementation of the Provincial Homework Policy.

What does the new homework policy mean for teachers?

- Teachers are expected to assign homework in all grades.
- Teachers will have flexibility in determining when to assign homework and how much.
- When assigning homework, all teachers will be required to follow sections 2 and 3 of the policy which outline the purpose of homework and standards for effective homework activities.
- Teachers, with leadership from the principal or vice-principal, will be responsible for participating in a school-wide approach to homework that supports communication with parents and ensures assignments are fair and realistic to all students.
- Teachers can contribute to the information parents receive to support their children with homework (e.g., contribute tips to a newsletter, post information on class websites, etc.).

What are some key messages to share with parents and guardians?

The new homework policy

- will be effective in all schools in Nova Scotia on September 1, 2015
- applies to all grades (primary–12)
- requires all teachers to assign homework, but provides teachers with flexibility to determine what to assign, and how much
- focuses on the quality of homework and its connection to what students are learning in their classes, not on the quantity
- describes three purposes for homework: preparing for class, practicing new skills or knowledge, and enrichment of learning
- makes a strong connection between what students are learning in class and the homework they receive
- requires teachers to assign homework that meets provincial standards for effective homework
- asks teachers to follow up and provide feedback on homework but not count it towards a student's grade, except in cases where it is a larger long-term project or assignment that is completed in class *and* at home; these longer-term projects and assignments will be evaluated to provide feedback and to contribute to a student's grade
- requires schools to ensure that homework is fair and equitable by assigning activities that match the needs and abilities of your child
- describes roles and responsibilities for students, parents, teachers, and principals
- encourages parents to contact their child's teacher if their child is struggling with homework