



Port Townsend School District No. 50
Superintendent Polm's Newsletter

Vol. 17-18, No. 4

October 19, 2017

Photo: High School Campus: Credit Jan Boutilier

Learning and Homework ~ from Dr. Polm



A recent blog (10/18/17) in *Education Week* by Jill Berkowicz and Ann Meyers discusses the ways we use homework - sort of prodding educators and parents to think about this practice a little more deeply. Arguably, there is academic value in homework - but it does depend on the age of the student, the level of support they have, and the feedback they receive. The authors say, "Rather than assigning independent work because we always have, assign it with the knowledge that the practice will be correct and effective and supported with immediate feedback. Discussions and feedback about what is being implemented and how it will affect the practice of the teacher are essential." Hmm...

Experts might suggest that students with strong parent support may benefit from homework more than less supported students. While there is research that supports a positive relationship between homework and achievement, the effect for young students may be limited (Cooper, 2007). Also, high schoolers who do more than two hours a night, may have worse achievement results (for a variety of reasons). These are some interesting thoughts. Hmm....

I have always wondered about the efficacy of homework. If homework is intended to develop non cognitive skills (responsibility, etc...), then that is a different purpose than acquisition of knowledge and understanding. When I was a teacher, I remember thinking that I needed to assign homework because parents expected it. But, I have learned to keep in mind that there can be negative effects of homework. Families can experience stress when students are frustrated with homework. Students can also develop negative attitudes toward school. Hmm.....

Later, when I was a principal, I became interested in when homework might be a good leverage to increase student achievement. I also became interested in how teachers might use homework in grading. I did learn that when too much of a student's grade is assigned to homework, then there may also be an increase in copying just to get a score - the results is an unclear picture of a student's understanding. Interestingly, when I worked in a district that stopped assigning a grade to homework, the copying (cheating) went away. But, I must admit, there was also a lower rate of homework completion. Hmm.....

I firmly believe that the purpose of homework should be to help students learn. I also believe that we should think more about what, when, why and how much homework we expect of students.

There is a lot of literature in journals and books about this topic. One of the more balanced books I have found is *The Battle Over Homework* by Harris Cooper. Parents, teachers or others may want to check it out. (Corwin Press, 2007).

MDS ~ Director, Sarah Rubenstein

Maritime Discovery Schools

Planning for Maritime Discovery Schools initiative projects is off to a good start this year. Many high school and middle school teachers used State Professional Day on October 13th to develop a variety of projects engaging local business and organizations in place-based learning for students across all grades and subject areas. Our partnership with Fort Worden is continuing again this school year in a new classroom location in the school house. Buses are available for classes that wish to spend time learning at the Fort, and the classroom provides a nice home base for inclement weather and indoor learning.

Scheduling Committee

The high school and middle school scheduling committee has met three times this year and has developed some metrics for evaluating scheduling options that are in line with our district strategic plan and the needs of students and staff. This work will continue throughout the first semester, and the committee will present a schedule recommendation in January that will help inform planning for next year at both schools.

Food Services ~ Director, Stacey Larsen

Some folks may have noticed a change in menus. The booster in the Blue Heron kitchen has gone out. The order for a new booster has been placed, but it has to be shipped, and we are not sure on the delivery and installation date. Thanks for your patience in dealing with the changes. We know this can be frustrating. We are doing our best and still trying to provide local and great food even though we cannot cook in our pots. I will let you know more when I get the updates.

Facilities and Maintenance ~ Director, Brad Taylor

The heating season is now upon us - fall weather arrives! Maintenance has been battening down the hatches and preparing for a questionable winter. Grounds have been busy keeping up with the leaves. They all work very well as a team and continue helping each other out regardless of the task.

Operations continues to plug away at the wide variety of tasks they are given to do. It would go a long way if in passing by your custodian you gave them a sign of appreciation.

The new school is out of the ground and stem walls and slabs are all that remain before you will start seeing the framing of the walls. At this point of construction we are over 20% complete. To date we have poured close to 1000 yards of concrete and have tied up 175,000 pounds of rebar. If you drive down Discovery Road you will see a big change, we have cleared the area out that will be the new bus drop off area and have exposed the classroom portion of the foundation.

From PTHS ~ Principal, Carrie Ehrhardt

This past Friday, several teachers from Blue Heron joined the high school staff in a productive Professional Development Day. In the morning, teachers worked on developing a new MDS/place-based project for the year, or worked on fine tuning an existing project that they wanted to expand or improve upon. In the afternoon, teachers had the option of continuing their MDS work, or to take some time to collaborate with partners from their own department, or between the middle and high school teachers, in a vertical team format. There was great participation from everyone involved and it was a great day all around.

Here are a few brief high school happenings-

- Tuesday, October 17 marked the end of our first formal 6-week grading period at the high school. Grades will be mailed home the end of this next week, along with our fall school newsletter.
- Select juniors and seniors have recently been invited to apply for membership into the National Honor Society for this year. Invited students must have a cumulative GPA of 3.6 and above. There is an application process in which candidates must outline their achievements in the areas of leadership, community service and awards/recognition. Students must also solicit three recommendations from teachers, as part of the application.
- Drama students are busy preparing for our upcoming fall play, "The Accidental Death of an Anarchist". Performances are scheduled to begin on the evening of November 3.
- Students in our Transition Program have been out in the community exploring restaurants and other businesses. Recently, each of our students participated in an interview at the Goodwill, received a tour of the facility and was able to ask questions of the staff. Starting next week, our Transition students will begin volunteering at the Goodwill, one afternoon a week, as they explore various work related aspects of their independent skills curriculum.

District Libraries ~ Joy Wentzel

What's happening in the Grant Street Library? This year has had a great start. We are watching the construction project of our new school evolve everyday by looking outside our library windows. This has sparked lots of conversations about the different tools construction workers use. Students are checking out books on backhoes, cranes and the like and connecting that when they look in the 600 section of the "Dewey Section" of our library, they will find books on inventions and machines.

In all grades we have started our book series, the Washington Children's Choice Picture Book Award (WCCPBA). Students will enjoy 20 read alouds and vote on their favorite in the spring. This is a book challenge that occurs every year in schools across Washington State. A wonderful thing about this is that kids vote, not adults. This gives students a voice. Check out our library webpage for more details on this year's WCCPBA nominees.

Students continue to enjoy our red "get cozy with a good book" chairs received through a PTEF grant. The increase in the enjoyment of independent reading is visible. Thank you PTEF!

Students for Sustainability

Students for Sustainability is working with all three schools in Port Townsend to eliminate plastic silverware from the school cafeterias. They are collecting old and new spoons, forks, and butter knives this Saturday from 9-noon at the Cotton Building.

If that is not convenient for you, please bring your donations to the Environmental Health Dept. (next to QFC in Port Townsend) or drop them off at the Port Townsend School District Office on Blaine across from the high school. Please spread the word!



The Heron Highlights ~ Principal, Patrick Gaffney

Blue Heron has been awarded a grant from the Ocean Guardian School Program for the third year. The grant helps with costs for the 7th grade Protecting Northwest



Waterways and 8th grade S20 (Salish Sea to Olympic Challenge), both of which are year-long, cross-curricular, hands-on projects in coordination with many local organizations and volunteers. The Ocean Guardian School Program is a grant program supported by the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation and coordinated out of NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries.

Grant Street News ~ Principal, Lisa Condran

PBIS Training at Fort Worden

Grant Street had a very successful Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) Program Training at Fort Worden on October 13th, 2017 at Fort Worden. All Birth to 5th grade staff were invited, including teachers from both sites, as well as classified staff, including bus drivers. Everyone was excited to see such a great turn out. Our facilitator was Dr. Maggie Schulze from the organization, Sound Supports. Below is some information describing PBIS and the process Grant Street will engage in over the course of the year with support from Maggie. In planning for the transition to Salish Coast Elementary, this is something staff from both buildings identified as a very important initiative.

Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports (PBIS) has been referred to as those systems and individualized supports and interventions that help people enhance and improve their productive social behavior while reducing any problematic behavior they may use. The PBIS approach concentrates on essential features and data based decision-making in schools. Schools apply essential features in SPBIS by establishing clear social expectations and then teaching, modeling, and reinforcing behaviors that match the expectations across all school settings. Sustained use of essential PBIS features has been found to enhance the social and academic outcomes of students.

Grant Street will be working on Tier One of the SWBIS model this school year. This includes universal or primary approaches that are preventative in nature. These approaches are for all students, staff, and settings and include the development of school-wide expectations, a behavioral matrix, and reinforcement systems to reward desired social behavior. Grant Street has already started some of this work and will be finalizing it for the opening of Salish Coast Elementary. Tier 2, Targeted Group Interventions, and Tier 3, Individualized Intensive Intervention systems will be developed after Tier One systems are firmly in place.

School Attendance

Grant Street is working on hard on improving school attendance with an attendance team that consists of Ann Healy-Raymond, Assistant Principal; Jessica Winsheimer, Attendance Secretary; Jenny Watkins, School Nurse, and Sabrina Caverly, School Counselor. Grant Street's goal for attendance this year is 95%.

Staffing Changes

Grant Street has welcomed some new employees and some employees in new roles. Molly Fallon, our Garden Coordinator, is going back to farming full-time. We will miss Molly. We are very excited about her replacement Emily Hiatt, who has a degree in biology from WWU and many experiences farming and teaching children in outdoor education settings. Tyler Brown Burnstein has joined us as a Paraeducator and is coordinating our cooperative games this year at recess. Teri Freitas has switched from her Custodian/Paraeducator role and is now the front desk Grant Street School Secretary.

Athletics ~ Lysa Falge (REDHAWK and BLUE HERON ATHLETICS)

The athletic year, for PTHS, started off with both celebrations and setbacks. Corrinne Pierson, a senior swimmer, broke the school record (100m Fly) and captured a spot at state in the 4th meet of the year (100m backstroke). Amazing! Sadly, our football team had a harder time securing enough eligible

players to start out our season and we were forced to forfeit our first game. But in true Redhawk spirit, they have rallied to a solid team of 24 dedicated players and now stand at 2nd in our league!

The girls soccer team hit the soccer pitch sporting their first official “Redhawk” uniforms and brought in a sizable group of freshman to add to their roster and future winning team. Cross Country is 22 strong and is looking forward to their league and district meets this week and next. Girls volleyball has really been the quiet “come from behind” team with a 28 girl turnout and their first league win in 3 years. They envision more wins for the season’s remaining games and have a chance to enter post-season play. Excitement is building in our gym!

Blue Heron has had a great year in football with a tight team of 22 boys. They have fought hard and put many points on the board. The XC team will be joining the high school team to head up to Cedars Golf Course for their final league meet of the season. What a dedicated bunch of athletes! The BH volleyball is a thriving program with 31 players who have improved to seeing the ball make it from bump, set, to spike and then points hitting the board. Talk about improvement!

Winter sports are right around the corner with PTHS basketball and wrestling (girls and boys) to begin practices on November 13th and boys basketball at Blue Heron on November 6th.

When you have a chance, come see our student-athletes challenge themselves on the court, field, mat or course.....it’s awesome to see their improvements, challenges and growth!

Go REDHAWKS and HERONS!!

Special Services and Assessment ~ Director, Patch Kane

Thank you to the maintenance department for installing a bench for one of our students with special needs. The bench is located by the stairs at the southwest end of the campus. This bench helps provide support for the student as her adult aid carries needed equipment down the steps. The student is able to sit on the bench in a safe location until the adult aid can assist her when walking down the stairs.



The enrollment count for students who are being given services through an IEP is 191; this is a 13 student increase since the start of school year. We have had students transfer into the district from other districts in or out of state.

Right Response training took place on Oct 14 with seven participants, 2 teachers and 5 paraeducators. The second part of the training will concluded on Oct 21. There will be more training given throughout the school year and those trainings will cover initial training or renewal of certificate. Please look for the training on the district calendar.