



BOE takes a look at homework policy draft



Illustration of homework.

DEBORAH ANN TRIPOLDI/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

By ERIN ROLL

roll@montclairlocal.news

Montclair's Board of Education took another look at what could become the district's new homework policy.

The board presented a draft version of the homework policy, which has been under review by its policy committee, at the May 3 meeting at the George Inness Annex.

During her report at the start of the meeting, Interim Superintendent Barbara Pinsak said that the draft was one with "broad and general criteria.

"Please know that I will be working with administrators and staff, and that I will be accepting caregiver input to construct the regulations," Pinsak told parents and audience members. She said that the policy, in its

completed stage, would ideally have “thoughtful and meaningful regulations for grade levels and grade clusters, with consideration of resources and family needs.”

Some of the terms of the policy include:

- The number, frequency and degree of homework assignments should be based on the ability and needs of the student and take into account other activities that make a claim on the student’s time.
- When assigning homework projects, teachers should be sensitive to the availability of home materials. It is preferred that materials for projects be furnished by the school to guarantee equal access for students.
- Homework assignments should not require the use of research or resource tools that are not readily available in the students’ homes or available for borrowing from the school/classroom.

However, during the meeting, some of the board members questioned how a teacher would be able to know which of their students had large numbers of extracurricular activities or other time demands outside of school.

The homework policy has been under discussion over the past year. In April, a group of students from Montclair High School’s Civics and Government Institute presented their own findings and recommendations for a homework policy, after surveying students, teachers and families and consulting research by different experts in the field. Some of the students’ recommendations included putting a cap on the amount of homework assigned each day, as well as providing a professional development day for teachers to discuss homework.

Board President Jessica de Koninck told the audience that the policy draft was not being officially acted on that night.

But the board also discussed how a teacher would know how many of their students have a lot of time demands outside of the classroom, and the board noted that a teacher who has one class all day, as in elementary school, would be more likely to know that than a teacher who has five or six classes during the day.

Board member Laura Hertzog asked what would happen if a teacher had a class in which half the students had lots of extracurricular activities, while the other half did not. To that, board member Eve Robinson said that she didn’t think that was the intent of the statement; instead, she said, teachers should keep in mind that homework should reflect the age and grade of the children, and an appropriate time for children to spend on homework.