Hillsboro students strive for proficiency; no excuses for missing homework needed: Guest opinion

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By Tammy Ellingson, Argus Community Writer

Now that homework is a thing of the past, dogs can reclaim their innocence and the perpetrators of late or missing homework can finally step up to the plate and, well, wait a minute, where’s the plate? No need to run the bases anymore – just keep hitting until you hit it out of the park and we’ll call it good. Or could we have we misinterpreted House Bill 2220?

According to HB2220, “The Department of Education shall implement statewide a valid and reliable assessment system for all students that meets technical adequacy standards.” So, what is the definitive assessment system? And what exactly does it say about homework and classwork?

According to a recent article in The Oregonian, “Teachers are not prohibited from docking points from assignments purely for being late if they can make the case that completing the assignment on time is an academic skill, not a behavior. ‘That depends on the context of the class,’ said [Hillsboro School District] Assistant Superintendent Steve Larson. ‘Our obligation is to grade only on academics. It is up to the teacher to decide what that means.’”

Well, that’s perfectly clear. Here’s my question: What teacher intentionally assigns work they consider not academically necessary?

HB2220 doesn’t make any mention of homework either way. What is actually says is that the Department of Education will provide assessment tools to schools, and that the “assessment system shall include criterion-referenced assessments including performance-based assessments, content-based assessments, and other valid methods to measure the academic content standards and to identify students who meet or exceed the standards.”

It also says “‘Performance-based assessment’ means testing of the ability of a student to use knowledge and skills to create a complex or multifaceted product or complete a complex task.” Who interpreted this to mean only tests and quizzes? That’s quite a leap. Aren’t projects, homework, research papers, presentations and dioramas considered a product or complex task?

Homework may or may not be an issue, but my real concern is getting students to proficiency. Here’s what HB2220-A says about that: “If a student has not met or has exceeded all of the academic content standards, the school district shall make additional services or alternative educational or public school options available to the
Well, that sounds reasonable, doesn’t it? But wait, there’s more to it than that; if the student doesn’t meet proficiency levels within one year after all this has been provided for them, then everyone agrees to find another solution which may include a transfer to another school, district or program. That sounds reasonable, especially if the school just isn’t working for the student.

We all want our kids to be proficient and have the chance to get to that point, but the other piece of this proficiency puzzle is the student’s responsibility, or accountability, for taking advantage of the additional services and following through on anything that would improve their proficiency. No mention of two-side accountability in this bill.

I dare your athlete, actor, musician, dancer or chess player to forgo practice and just show up on the day of competition or performance. Their coaches and teammates will be just fine with that. When they come back and try again without the putting in the time for conditioning, studying, rehearsing, or practicing, that’s OK too, isn’t it?

Try it, kids. Don’t show up for football practice. Tell your coach you don’t need the practice. Just show up on Friday night, demand to be put in the game and see what you can do. Some might think this comparison is a stretch because being part of a team is different; that in school, whether you reach proficiency the first or 12th time doesn’t impact anyone else, except maybe the person who has to test your proficiency. Well, look around, kids. If you fail, we all pay a price and it impacts society in many ways.

While the intent of the bill that set us on this track may be well-intended, is this really the biggest problem our school system faces today? How does the implementation of this bill increase rigor in the classroom? How does it give our students a competitive advantage in a global economy? How does it teach them to be entrepreneurs, creators, providers, parents, volunteers, community activists, and citizens? How many times in life do we get repeated do-overs?

Those who don’t put in the time and effort usually have a long list of others to blame for their unfortunate circumstances. At some point in the future, today’s students will blame the educational system for not teaching them do the work and build strong habits. If we allow this drastic interpretation of HB2220 to take hold, they will be right.

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