

From the principal's desk...

A couple of weeks ago, we joined our colleagues at Bear Creek and Mesa Elementary Schools in a screening of *Race to Nowhere* at Southern Hills Middle School. The event sold out in about two weeks, and has generated such a large amount of discussion that we are working to host an additional screening for our community.

The amount of testing that we expect from our students is a theme of the movie, as are homework demands and the amount of extra-curricular activities parents plan for their kids. These themes came up in our Open Enrollment Open House tours over the past two months as well. At each tour I've hosted since I've been a principal, I have been asked the same two questions – what should parents do to prepare their kids for Kindergarten? What is our homework practice?

To prepare kids for Kindergarten, all we ask of parents is to love their kids – and talk to them! Research has been quite clear for the past 15 years that kids whose parents talk to them enjoy an enriched environment and advanced vocabulary development that no worksheet or preschool program can match. Look for an article called “Talking is Teaching” on my web page - <http://bvsd.org/schools/douglass/principalpage/>.

The homework question is a harder one to answer. I think that parents want to hear how many hours their kids will be doing homework at Douglass. Unfortunately, it's hard to put a specific amount of time on that. When I taught 7th grade social studies, I worked closely with my teaching teammates to ensure that kids weren't overburdened every night. Even so, my students' workload ranged from 30 minutes a night to 2 hours. Same amount of homework, different paces for different students.

I find the same to be true for my kids at home – the same number of math problems one night may take my 4th grade son 15 minutes on Tuesday night, and 35 minutes on Wednesday. I've developed enough of a relationship with my son's teacher, though, that I can let the teacher know that he spent over an hour on that assignment, and that was enough for us. I hope you have developed the same open lines of communication with your child's teacher, and that if your child is spending too much time on homework, that you make a phone call or send an email.

At the other end of the spectrum, this week we learned about “The Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother”. I don't think you could have not heard about this topic this week. It raised all sorts of themes for me – from our district's work to be inclusive, understanding and supportive of all students in all cultures to my utter amazement at one mother's choices in reaching high academic levels! I fall back to my original answer to prospective Kindergarten families. I want our kids to be successful, but also happy. I want our kids to learn music, do amazing art projects, and to play every day at P.E. and at recess. And yes, I want our kids to do their best academically – and they do achieve their best thanks to our amazing teachers and supportive families.

Indeed, our focus at Douglass involves more than core academics. We also have a focus on ensuring a safe learning environment for our kids. This week, our teachers begin the “One Book, One Douglass” program. We have chosen books that address our climate goal, and this week's book *Say Something* specifically has pointers for our kids to be an ally to kids who might be bullied at school. We expect this to address one of our key focus areas this year – “other people help if they see someone being bullied.” After reading the book in class, students will talk about what it means to be an ally rather than a bystander. We will continue these books for much of the spring this year.

Thanks for all you do for our kids and teachers at Douglass!

Your principal,

Jon Wolfer