

How Study Skills Are Taught in Council Rock

“Study skills are the trellis that holds the curriculum together,” according to Dean Hentz, Council Rock’s Social Studies Curriculum Coordinator. Citizens For Education couldn’t agree more which is why we decided to find out how Council Rock incorporates how-to-study instruction into the daily lives of students.

Many study and organizational skills, such as taking notes, are taught at the elementary level. For example, teachers are expected to look at students’ notes to confirm that key information is being recorded effectively. At the middle level, study skills are incorporated into the Literacy Learning and Literacy Skills classes, where students learn about and practice organization, note taking, use of mnemonic devices, and textbook reading strategies.

At the secondary level in Council Rock, students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) are offered a Study Skills course, but in regular education classes study skills are embedded in the structure of each course and in the instructional practices of teachers.

Students are instructed on various ways to study, based on each student’s strengths as a learner. Those who are more visual learners might do well making flash cards to study, while others might be better served using outlines and notes. Both could benefit from graphic organizers, devices that assist students in organizing ideas and communicating effectively. Some ideas for effective study include pre-reading the text book before the lesson is taught, working with a partner to ask and answer study questions, reviewing lessons and notes at home soon after the lesson is taught, reading through notes out loud, using graphic organizers, creating outlines, and attending clinic on a regular basis. In addition, when teachers provide note packets, students are encouraged to highlight or underline important points stressed in the lecture, and teachers should relate any note packets back to the relevant sections in the course text book.

In math, practice makes perfect and the best way to study math is to do many practice problems. Textbooks contain practice problems, and online textbooks, now available to many students, have links to additional problems. Students are encouraged to do these problems to solidify their knowledge of the subject matter, and to ask their teacher for solutions that are not provided in the book

The Common Core State Standards initiative is now being used throughout Pennsylvania. According to the PA Common Core website, “this is a state-led effort coordinated by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). The standards were developed in collaboration with teachers, school administrators, and experts to provide a clear and consistent framework to prepare our children for college and the workforce.”

One core standard is the ability of students to navigate complex texts, since much of future learning will involve self-mastery of complex reading material. To that end, Council Rock has implemented a Reading Apprenticeship, which allows staff to become teachers of reading in addition to their specialty. This is a district initiative started three years ago in English and now

being rolled out in social studies, with five social studies teachers participating to date. This program is designed to provide teachers with tools to help students navigate specific disciplines and to apply these skills across the board in all courses.

Council Rock believes that the best way to teach a student to study is to model how to become proficient with the skill. For example, a teacher will “talk to the text” which involves reading the textual material, then talking back to it, framing and asking questions. Students should be active readers – reading with pen or pencil in hand to take notes, whether in the margins, on sticky notes, or on paper. These skills are relevant to informational or non-fiction texts as well, such as in science and math. Teachers are in-serviced on these techniques and should consistently model these behaviors and verify that their students are learning them. For example, a teacher would model the thought process of how to break down a mathematical word problem to extract the important information and set up the appropriate math equation, which can then be solved.

Entire curricula have been developed to address study skills, but with state and federal demands on instructional time and limited availability in their schedules for students to take additional courses, it would be difficult for CR to offer these to students during the school day. Embedding study skills in each course and discipline, and teachers modeling ways to study, may be the best way for most students to learn these skills. **CFE encourages the district to share study skills best practices with parents, perhaps via a district webpage, so that these skills can be reinforced with students at home, and to consider extra-curricular study skills offerings, such as an online course, for those students who may need further instruction.**

Citizens For Education thanks Joy McClendon (Director of Elementary Education and Curriculum), Dean Hentz (Social Studies Curriculum Coordinator), Julie Eastburn (Math Curriculum Coordinator) and Peggy Walsh (Secondary RELA Curriculum Coordinator) for taking the time to inform on this important area of educational practice affecting every student in Council Rock.