

Students are sick; homework piles up

Contributed by Kristine Vail
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Most of us have been a part of, or have noticed, our decline in attendance earlier in the year. We can attribute most of the absences to sicknesses like mono, the flu, the common cold, and also the swine flu that left the world in a frenzy earlier in the year. Doctors and the administration have repeatedly asked students to stay home if they are ill, but most still feel that they need to be at school. Some have said that combined with extracurricular activities and responsibilities, missing school is simply not an option.

With so many commitments demanding their time, today's high school students simply have no time to make up assignments if they have been sick. Teachers still expect that assignments are done and that students are up to speed. Students feel pressured to complete things on time. Everyone can agree that make-up work just adds to the general stress that students already have and the fact that they have no time to do something that needs to be addressed. "Grant faculty needs to have a discussion," says vice principal Kim Patterson, who is not unfamiliar with this issue. There needs to be something done about the lack of time along with unsympathetic teachers who struggle with accepting the fact that students are people too, who have other commitments.

Former Grant high school principal, Toni Hunter, who is now the assistant superintendent, has demanded that students spend more time in the classroom. The result of her efforts is our new bell schedule this year, which has added four minutes to our day and a shortened tutorial period that is now on Wednesday instead of Thursday. Even though that tutorial is only 12 minutes shorter, those 12 minutes make a huge difference to students who have missed days to weeks of school and are extremely behind. "To miss seven different classes with seven different teachers is a lot," says Patterson, who seems to be familiar with this issue and greatly sympathizes with those that struggle. A 30-minute tutorial period is hardly enough time to speak with seven different teachers. Especially when you have to collect assignments from all seven, get caught up on what was taught, and make up tests.

Sandra Seppalainen, a sophomore, missed a week of school back in October because of swine flu. "I was sick at the same time everyone else was," says Seppalainen. Seppalainen, like most Grant students, has a heavy class load. Three of her seven classes are AP. Some of her teachers were said to be sympathetic but others did not understand. Things just tend to build up after a while. In her AP Calculus class, it was almost impossible for her to get caught up. "Classes like science and math are hard to make up because of lecture notes," says Seppalainen. Trying to make up things like participation points, lectures, and note-taking are hard. So is having to learn something outside of class without the hands-on experience, explanations from your teachers, and help from classmates is something that many students struggle with. In addition, during fall when literally a third of the school was sick, teachers have to deal with so many students that it doesn't leave very much time for everyone to get the help they need.

According to the student planner, students are allowed to receive credit for an assignment that has been made up an excused absence. If you have an unexcused absence it's up to the teacher and the circumstances to decide whether or not you receive credit. "Students are required to stay home if they have a quarantined illness or condition." In the staff handbook it also states that teachers are required to give makeup time equivalent to the number of days the student missed. I know for a fact that some teachers have overlooked this vital requirement. We must remember that rules are implemented to keep the peace and just like students should follow the rules that are inflicted on us, so should teachers. Patterson has urged students to talk to their parents or their counselor if they have a problem with this specific issue, or if they believe that they are being treated unfairly.

Students need to feel that they have a fair chance at all opportunities, including making up work and not being condemned for it. We need to figure out how to manage our time more wisely and take into account the fact that we as people live very hectic lives, which demand a lot from us.