

Junior High South gets results from its no-fail policy

IN SHORT For four years, the school has made sure students who need help to pass classes get it.

By **JEFFREY SMITH**
Leader staff writer

The days of students taking zeroes instead of completing homework assignments are numbered at Cabot Junior High South.

Four years ago, the school implemented a "No Zero Policy" when it comes to homework. The policy has increased student achievement and lowered the number of failed classes that could be blamed on zeroes received for not turning in homework. Teachers are also focusing on helping students who have flunked tests.

"We want to be known as the school where you can not fail," Cabot Junior High South principal Henry Hawkins said.

He said when it comes to assignments, doing something is always better than doing nothing.

Cabot Junior High South has approximately 1,100 students in seventh, eighth and ninth grades. The "No Zero Policy" becomes especially important for ninth graders when they start earning credits that go toward graduation that are permanently added to their high school transcripts.

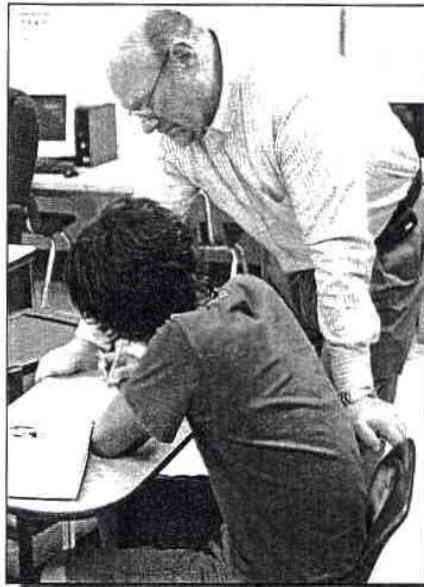
Hawkins said there are fewer class failures per semester than before the policy was created. Before the program started in spring 2006, the school had 490 failures. Since the policy went into effect, the school has fewer than 81 F's in a semester.

"It has helped discipline, morale and with homework, made it more meaningful," Hawkins said. "Our test scores continue to improve in small increments and have met AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress)."

The school's "No Zero Policy" provides a safety net for students who would otherwise not do their homework. Teachers can allow students extra time to complete their assignments if it's needed. Students who are on the brink of failing a class and do not turn in an assignment are sent to the principal's office, where they are given a notice for their parents explaining that the student didn't turn in required work.

The principal then contacts the student's parents for permission to assign the student to an after-school homework lab.

"If the parents are trying and supportive, then we are going to be successful," Hawkins said.



JEFFREY SMITH/Leader photo

Cabot Junior High South Principal Henry Hawkins helps a student with homework. The homework lab offers extra help for students.

The homework lab is held for an hour two days a week. Students are given the chance to complete their missing homework assignment there. The labs are supervised by at least one math teacher.

Students who continue to avoid doing their homework are sent to morning detention, Saturday school or even in-school suspension.

The homework lab is not strictly for disciplinary purposes. There are students who voluntarily go to homework lab to catch up on their assignments. Some

parents have requested that their child be required to attend homework lab.

Students can also get extra help on their assignments outside the lab.

"We have teachers who get here at 7 a.m. to help kids every day. Our teachers are willing to help," Hawkins said, adding, "The teachers make the program work. They care about the kids."

In the morning, students can go to TARGET (Teaching and Reaching, Getting and Educating Together) before school to finish assignments. There, a teacher is always available for students who want help studying for tests.

When "No Zero" began at Junior High South, teachers had to be flexible to give

students extra time to complete assignments. It's now grown into a successful program, thanks to teachers.

Michelle Young, a ninth-grade oral communications teacher, said the homework policy works well.

"It took some getting used to, but now I really like it," Young said.

"The students know that not doing the work is not an option. They can do it and turn it in on time or they can do it after school or in Saturday school," Young said.

She said the no-fail policy is a leverage tool to

motivate students. It puts pressure on students to do their work. Communication with parents about homework also helps put the onus on students.

"The students are mindful of getting the work done. I rarely have anyone not turn in an assignment anymore. They know they just have to do it," Young said.

A seventh-grade student who was assigned to homework lab said, "I've always been bad about homework. It motivates you to get in homework on time to avoid punishment."

"It helps with things you can't get in on time...it is discipline if you have to go to D-hall or Saturday school to complete it," he said.

Adam Koehler is a ninth-grade algebra teacher who helps in the homework lab. He taught for seven years with Pulaski County Special School District at Oak Grove High School and Maumelle Middle School before joining Cabot Junior High South two years ago. He sees the benefits of not allowing chil-

dren to fail.

"It takes the pressure off the teacher and taking away of classroom time for getting homework in," Koehler said.

"Homework is a tool for learning," he said. He's also seen improvement in the quality of his students' work. "The quality of the homework assignments are better," he said.

Koehler added that another focus of the school's policy is accepting only the student's best work because it demonstrates that students know the material, he said.

"We are only accepting your best work. You may have to retest, retake or redo. It is about the learning," Hawkins said.

Some teachers, but not all, allow students who fail tests to retest using different material.

Hawkins said the school does not inflate or give away good grades. "We work with the kids to learn," he said.

"It creates a higher expectation for the students. It holds them accountable," Shelia Nguyen, a ninth-grade English teacher said.

"The students know that not doing the work is not an option."

— Michelle Young, ninth-grade oral communications teacher.

"We want to be known as the school where you cannot fail."

— Henry Hawkins, principal at Cabot Junior High South

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