

The Week At WHMS

Week of December 20, 2021




Thought for the week:

"It is better to know some of the questions than all of the answers."

– James Thurber

Weekly Calendar: *Annual coat and winter gear drive through 12/13 – donate in main lobby*

<u>Monday</u>	<u>Tuesday</u>	<u>Wednesday</u>	<u>Thursday</u>	<u>Friday</u>	<u>Sat/Sun</u>
12/20	12/21	12/22	12/23	12/24	12/25-12/26
Day 1	Day 2	Day 1	Day 2		
AM – Amplify PD for science teachers	12:30p – Orchestra rehearsal in HS auditorium	AM – Sean @ admin for interviews		NO SCHOOL	
8:45a – Band rehearsal in HS auditorium	3:00p – Select department meetings	1:15p – PST meeting		Holiday recess begins	
Club Meets: Dignity & Tolerance; Mathletes (competition)	4:45p – Girls volleyball @ Oceanside	Club Meets: Art Club; Comic & Graphic Novel; Dignity & Tolerance; Science & Robotics			
4:45p – Boys basketball @ VS North		7:00p – Winter concert @ HS auditorium			

Instructional tips: (from *Edutopia*) – rerun for the shortened holiday week

“Supporting Executive Function Skills by Asking Questions” by Sarah Kesty

Teachers can boost middle school students’ self-management skills by using questions to get their mental gears turning.

Jumping on a giant trampoline as an adult is usually humbling and pretty awkward. Your trampoline muscles need some practice before they’re ready for full use. Our students are having a parallel experience; after over a year away from physical school, many of them may need support in developing their executive function or “studenting” skills for doing well in person. Executive function (EF) skills are brain-based management abilities that encompass a wide range of future skills like

planning, organizing, self-regulation (including managing attention and emotions), learning, and memory.

These skills are also learned at home when children do things like household chores. Reinforcing executive function at school helps students' brains understand the cueing system that activates the use of a particular skill. For example, a student needs to understand environmental cues in order to engage with self-regulation tools, and these cues will differ at home and at school.

EXECUTIVE FUNCTION SKILLS SUPPORT ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Self-management skills are often the secret sauce of school success. Kids who soar at school are often those who have the most honed EF skill sets. Being an excellent writer, for example, isn't enough. It's important for students to demonstrate that they can manage time to write, chunk writing tasks into parts, manage attention to see an essay through, remember editing strategies, and more. Empowering students with these skills can boost academic performance, since grades and assessments rely on executive function as a baseline for demonstrating mastery.

Virtual school pushed students to learn self-management tools, like getting to class without auditory bell prompts and reducing distractions to support their focus. Now, students may need more time to develop the studenting skills required for in-person learning. Knowing how to identify and encourage developing studenting skills is a key component to our educational rebound.

REPLACE DIRECTIONS WITH THOUGHT-PROVOKING QUESTIONS

If you've ever heard one student coach another, you've probably realized that they're parroting you. As teachers, we give lots of the same directions. Replacing these directions with mid- and then low-level supportive questions can help pass the onus of navigating the day to students, developing their future-skills executive functions.

For example, the directive "Please take out your book" could be replaced with mid-level support questions like "What do you need to be ready for reading?" or "What do you picture on your desk during this time?" A low-level support question could be "Do you need 45 or 65 seconds to get ready?" You could even tap the desk, signaling that something needs to be out.

There's no single right way to do this; the idea is that you're planning and adjusting the levels of support you offer so that students are gradually assuming the responsibility (similar to gradual release strategy for academic skills and tasks).

TEACH STUDENTS TO QUESTION AND COACH THEMSELVES

Whenever I design a lesson, I hear the voice of my mentor teacher coaching me to consider, "What's the biggest takeaway you want every student to learn?" It's an automatic audio track that plays whenever I'm planning a lesson. Like coaches and mentor teachers, classroom teachers can coach students to prompt themselves with questions or reminders for repeating tasks.

For example, in planning a longer project or essay, a teacher can show students how to do the following:

- Question what the steps will be, by either visualizing or noting each "scene" as a step
- Consider what materials are needed
- Identify when to do each step

- Offer tips for how to remember what to do

Students who need deeper support can have a written list of these questions to access in times of planning. The idea is to create a format to make the student invisible and thinking skills visible. In this way, teachers can augment students' developing executive function skills.

USE 6 PROBLEM-SOLVING 'MAGIC' QUESTIONS

There are some great go-to questions for teachers who want to help develop learners' studenting skills but aren't yet automatic in their questioning techniques. These magic questions include:

1. What do you notice?
2. What parts do you understand?
3. What do you think you might need right now?
4. How can you tell?
5. Where could you look for that information?
6. How will you remember to use that strategy or take that action?

When teachers ask these questions regularly, students get used to hearing them, and they can be applied automatically as students solve problems throughout their day. Teachers can also reply with these questions when students ask things like "Where is that assignment?" or "What do I need to do?" Think of how many times the students' questions for us are related to processing the task, rather than the task or its content. What a gift for students to be able to tackle that type of thinking on their own.

THE GOOD NEWS FOR TEACHERS

This isn't one more thing on your ever-growing list. These skills can be supported and extended by making small shifts, not additions, to your instruction. Replacing directions with questions can help increase students' awareness of patterns and routines, releasing the onus of self-management to the students. Coaching students to notice the executive function demands of assignments can empower them to independently seek strategies when approaching their work.

If all else fails, you can lean on those function magic questions, which are sure to get students' brain "muscles" flexing. Empowering our kids with multiple tools for studenting will reduce their barriers to growth and smooth out some of the bumps of getting through the school day, for students and teachers.

For full article see <https://www.edutopia.org/article/supporting-executive-function-skills-asking-questions>

Items of importance:

- Our annual canned food drive has concluded, but... the food pantry happily accepts donations year-round to support our families who struggle with food insecurity. Students can bring donations to Mr. Murray or Ms. Lubliner any time.
- **WEATHER NOTICE**: we have outdoor recess, outdoor AM line-up, and outdoor PE daily unless it is raining. Please make sure your child has appropriate clothing and outerwear. We only stay indoors if the temperature falls below 30° or the wind chill falls below 28°
- **Have you downloaded the West Hempstead App yet?** It is available in the App Store and Google Play, just search "West Hempstead." This will let you keep track of everything happening in our school and access documents such as this "Week @ WHMS" newsletter.

- Let me know when you have exciting learning taking place that I can tweet out and be sure to tag @WH_MS RAMS if you tweet yourself

Items of interest:

- We are pleased to offer our staff the "Parents as Partners" webinar series with Educational Consultant and Trainer Dr. Jennifer Bashant. These free webinars are accessible live or as recordings. Go to <https://www.whufsd.com/page/parents-as-partners-webinar-series> for more information.
- Our club calendar is available on the website at: <https://www.whufsd.com/o/whms/browse/221769>. Students should listen to AM announcements for the most up-to-date information about meeting dates and locations.
- The **extra help schedule** can be found at: https://core-docs.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/asset/uploaded_file/1553808/Extra-Help_Schedule_MS_21-22.pdf. Students should take advantage of teachers' availability to do their best work.
- The Homework Center is open after school on Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday. See details below:

Homework Center Information: 21-22

Homework Center is open 2:45-3:45 on the following days

Day	Teacher	Room	Notes
Monday	Ms. Healey	257	Support available for any subject, or just a quiet place to work after school.
Wednesday	Ms. Geiger	17	
Thursday	Ms. Rogan	16	

"COVID Corner" Information:

- I cannot say how vital it is that **if your child, or anyone in your home, feels sick, your child MUST REMAIN HOME FROM SCHOOL.** Call the nurse or Mr. Murray for advice on when it is okay to return to school.
- Please remember to **send your child** to school **with a** reusable or paper **mask each day**. A number of students are "forgetting" their masks on a regular basis and asking for masks at the front door.
- **Please send your child to school with a refillable water bottle.** Our water fountains are "COVID-safe" and only the water bottle filler function is available.
- For more information about the COVID vaccine for 5-15 year-olds, go to: <https://covid19vaccine.health.ny.gov>

Looking ahead:

Monday, January 3: *Day 1*

- Welcome back and Happy New Year

Tuesday, January 4: *Day 2*

- Faculty meeting, 3:00pm

Wednesday, January 5: *Day 1*

- PST meeting, 1:15pm
- PTSA meeting, 7:30pm @ HS VCR

Thursday, January 6: *Day 2*

- Great day to focus on SEL needs

Friday, January 7: *Day 1*

- RTI meeting, 8:45am