

Homework Policies

A current literature review indicates that the controversy about the pros and cons of homework is still alive and well. Yet the literature does indicate changing thought about homework policies.

Several current studies indicate that homework has a negative impact on family life and exacerbates socioeconomic class division by placing children in families with fewer resources in positions of struggling to keep up (Kralovac & Buell, 2000). Homework actually punishes children in poverty for lacking computer access and/or a supportive home environment (Kralovac & Buell, 2001). Another study (Vail, 2001) indicates that parents are frequently asking their school boards to reconsider the amounts of homework assigned. This same study also points out that administrators are questioning homework quality.

Where does this put district and school administrators currently struggling to put together a cogent realistic policy on homework. On the one hand Cooper (2001) found homework substantially affects high-school students' achievement, benefits junior-high students only half as much, elementary students negligibly. While on the other hand Silvis (2002) found that it might be true that homework boost academic achievement, involve parents, and teach students to study independently, it also increases family conflict, limits independent learning, and widens the achievement gap.

Cooper (2001) suggests that all too often educators, parents, and students fall into ways of thinking that view schools and families as adversaries. The key premise to ending the battle over homework is communication. District and school policies need to explain to both teachers and parents the rationale behind

homework guidelines they set. In *Homework for All—in Moderation*, Cooper (2001) stress homework can be an effective teaching tool when districts, schools, and teachers flex and coordinator their policies, utilize developmental appropriate assignments, and try alternatives to homework. For example a New Jersey district imposed strict limitations on homework, while allowing more reading/informal learning opportunities. Shaker Heights Middle School in Ohio has established after-school programs including a homework center, a homework hotline, and a university tutorial program to assist student in completing homework assignments (Glazier & Williams, 2001). Silvis (2002) suggests that such activities help students whose home life doesn't support getting help from parents.

What do we know about homework?

At the national level

Schools that assign and grade homework are more apt to have high achieving students. Homework is necessary and useful when it is appropriate to the ability and motivational level of the student.

The amount and type of homework should be developmental appropriate.

Homework should be subject and curriculum linked and accomplishable in a given reasonable time frame.

Traditional homework assignments in K-8 have little benefit.

Homework should focus on study habits and skill development.

Homework should be an extension and enrichment of classroom studies and activities.

At the district level

Districts should have a board policy on homework that is developed with input from teachers and parents.

District and school homework policies and guidelines should be effectively and clearly communicated to administrators, teachers, students, and parents.

Homework policies should be coordinated district and school wide.

At the school level

Homework should be clearly explained by the teacher and clearly understood by students and parents.

Homework should always be graded and returned promptly.

Do not give homework as punishment.

Do not use the “no homework as a reward” practice.

Involve parents in homework by informing them of their role in assignments.

Students should have prerequisite skills to accomplish homework assignments.

Vary the assignment as to length, skill building, and enrichment.

Student and parents at home

Write down assignments every day

Be sure to clearly understand all assignments and ask questions if it is not.

Establish a study area.

Set a regular study time each day.

Have all materials needed, paper, pencils, dictionary, etc.

Parents help but do not do homework for student.

Parents should be supportive and encouraging.

Students utilize quiet, well-lit place to study.

Parents should be aware daily of homework assignments, always ask.

In conclusion

Homework can increase student learning if it is used appropriately for grade level and the ability of the student. It must be purposeful, motivational, and extended and enriching of class concepts. School boards and districts must establish a clearly articulated board policy on homework. The policy must be clearly communicated to all stakeholders. Homework, as an integral part of the curriculum, should be graded and returned promptly to inform students and parents of educational achievements.

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