

HOMEWORK: Parent-Teacher-Student Collaboration

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Homework has always been an important part of American education. In recent years, there has been an increase in the amount of homework assigned by teachers, after a series of studies indicating that American students spend substantially less time on schoolwork outside of school than their peers in other nations.

Is homework always a plus?

- Homework is part of family life that can be a very positive experience for families or can be one of major sources of conflict between parents, students and schools. Parents are increasingly expected to be involved with homework. On the one hand, teachers, frustrated when children do not complete homework, may feel that parents aren't doing their part. Parents, on the other hand, may be unaware until their child is in trouble, that homework is indeed being assigned, and that it is not being completed, or is being completed incorrectly. Parents may become upset when the homework assigned is not appropriate for a given student, when it isn't clear to them what is expected, or when teachers do not call to say that homework did not reach school.

What should parents' roles be in regard to homework?

- Most schools that have homework policies recommend that parents take a supportive role. Parents are asked to provide a good homework space, to set aside specific homework time, and to monitor the completion of homework. Parents are not expected to become tutors. If parents take on the role of tutor, they may teach skills differently than the classroom teacher which can be confusing, and unintentionally undermine development of independent practice and study skills.

Is homework always good for children?

- Homework can have positive and negative effects on students. Homework can be tiring for some students particularly for those who have had to work harder than their peers all day. It can be boring for some students and can make it difficult for these students to stay interested in the subject or content area. If it takes some students an unusually long time to complete homework, students may not get a chance to develop leisure-time skills. Problems can develop when students feel pressured to perform beyond their capabilities. Failure to complete homework can put underachieving students further behind their classmates. Homework that is excessive in difficulty or amount can increase the temptation to cheat.

What is positive about homework?

- There can be positive effects on students as well. Students who do homework may remember what they learn better than those who do not complete homework. When students expend effort on homework, they may increase understanding of subject content and may become better thinkers. Students may increase their interest in subject matter when assignments provide enrichment.

- There are other benefits that student may accrue. Students may develop more positive attitudes toward school. Self discipline can be a byproduct of doing homework. Students may become more independent problem solvers. Students may practice and improve organizational skills. Parents who are properly involved in homework may be more supportive of their children's schooling.

Is there any research to indicate the effects of homework on student performance?

- There have been debates about the value of homework among researchers. The most important finding from this work is that there is dramatic influence of grade level on homework's effectiveness. For elementary school students, homework does not seem to influence achievement although it may have other important effects. Homework does have an effect on middle school students, and this impact is magnified at the high school level. Students who do more homework have better achievement scores. Homework obviously is most effective when students complete it, get it correct and understand the material.

What kind of homework works best?

- There are several general types of homework, practicing something learned in class, completing work started in class, preparing for a class that will be taught the next day and extending the learning in an enriching way. Different types of learners probably benefit differently from these general types of homework. Independent and quick learners may benefit most from enriching and extending activities. Students with disabilities are likely to have most success with activities that involve practice an completion of work started in school.

What can teacher's do to make homework a more successful experience for students?

- There are a number of things that teachers can do to make the homework experience more successful for students. Teachers can make sure that expectations and directions are clear and understood by all children. Teachers can make sure that the content is not complex for students.

- Beginning homework in class is a particularly helpful strategy because it allows teachers to be certain that students understand the assignment. Some students need more monitoring and clarification about assignments and expectations. It can be particularly useful to make sure that older students have written down assignments correctly. Modifying assignments for students with learning problems is critical. When students do not meet expectations, talking to them, assisting them and making adaptations are all helpful strategies. Make the homework count by talking about it as soon as it is completed, relating it to what is being addressed in class and setting consequences when it is not completed be useful by many teachers and grading homework is particularly effective as is grading students' notebooks. >

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What should be done if students aren't completing homework or if it is causing too much stress in the family?

- Incomplete homework and inadequate study for quizzes and tests are key causes of poor grades for underachievers. If homework is a problem, there are some things that can be done to help. A home-school communication system helps many children. Teachers or school psychologists can create a communication system such as a Friday report for older students or a daily report for younger students. School psychologists can help parents set up management systems at home that may help children who are resistant to complying with homework demands. A homework buddy works for some children. However, it can backfire if your child negatively compares him/herself to the other student. Talk to your child or a school psychologist about it before you attempt it. For others, a homework group developed by parents or school staff and composed of fellow students can be helpful.

- Older students may be willing to serve as homework coaches but they need training in this role. They may be a good resource when parents work late or a family may be stressed and unable to provide homework supervision. Some schools have set up homework hotlines to answer questions that students may have once they get home, and schools with Internet connections can provide information that can be accessed with a home computer.

- If students cannot manage homework and stop working, they can quickly become disinterested in school and lose hope that things will improve. Early intervention is important. Good and bad habits form early. Parents need to remember that changes intended to improve homework completion and accuracy often take several weeks to have an effect. Do not give up too soon when attempting a new strategy and be sure to give a new strategy time and attention. If nothing seems to be working, contact your local school psychologist for help. Parents and schools can be successful when they work together and take equal responsibility for students' learning.

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