



Is Homework Needed?

By Educator Barnes – January 19, 2020

Homework can become a divisive topic in education. It's a subject where there seems to be no middle ground. Some educators believe homework is necessary, and other educators believe it is a hassle and a waste of time. Which group of educators is correct? There are other stakeholders that should be considered such as parents. Yes, we should consider students, too, but we already know they are mostly team no homework. Let's look at arguments for and against homework.

Recently, two elementary schools in Utah decided to eliminate homework. When school leaders shifted to this direction there was a “reduction by about 50 percent in anxiety referrals to the school physiologist.” My twin sons are in third grade. From K-2, my sons did not have homework. This year, they have homework nightly.

One of my sons quickly adjusted; however, his brother did not. My husband and I battle with him about homework nightly. What’s tougher for us is that the homework for third grade is not the same across the grade level. Both of my sons have to complete a brief writing assignment daily, Monday-Friday. A couple of times a week, there are assignments from the Lucy Calkins literacy curriculum. There is also the reading log that must be completed nightly. One of my sons has weekly spelling tests which he does not think is fair because his brother does not have them. My son that does not have a spelling list, has a reading assignment each semester. This assignment included a book report. His book report was five-paragraphs, and he also had to add a creative component. He did a video. This took us two weeks to complete during the first semester. Then, there are the lessons that come home from Second Step, the social-emotional program. This is the only optional homework assignment. Luckily, my sons aren’t struggling with math, but if they were, they would also be required to study math facts nightly. Homework has taken away from our family time and has caused both of my sons anxiety and stress. I believe my sons would continue to earn good grades without this homework.

The school leaders in Utah that eliminated homework at the elementary level did so due to John Hattie’s research. Hattie has addressed how his research has been misinterpreted. He stated many times that his intent was not to get elementary schools to eliminate homework, but that his research showed it was not working and was not having a substantial impact on student learning. Hattie’s research does show an increase in value in the secondary grades.

So, what about secondary students? Should they have homework? I have worked in a middle school that sort of had a no-homework policy. If students didn’t finish work in class, teachers could ask students to finish it at home. The only nightly homework assignment was for the English/language arts classes. Students were asked to read independently nightly and to study word roots and stems. The reason this policy was in place is because of an issue that has been pointed out by many in education including by researcher John Hattie. Hattie shared during a presentation for educators, “The kids who need the most teaching typically don’t have parents who can do the most teaching; they need you (teachers).” I agree.

As a teacher, I am a content expert. I do not expect my students’ parents to be able to teach their children how to write a persuasive essay which would include a thesis statement, paragraphs with topic sentences, supporting details, and evidence cited correctly to avoid plagiarism. Furthermore, I would not expect them to be able to help their children include

persuasive techniques in the essay, address the other side of the argument, use various types of sentence structures, transitional phrases, grade-level vocabulary, ensure the essay was organized in a logical manner, and end the essay with a strong conclusion. What is the point of school if we expect students to learn academic skills from their parents? It is the teacher's responsibility to teach the content and to provide resources for students to use; however, one issue is there is not ample time for practice. This is when homework should be used. It should be an opportunity to practice skills that were taught, not a time to learn a new skill.

In secondary, it is appropriate to give homework. Students must learn study skills at some point. I do not know of any college that does not give homework. Students will need opportunities to learn how to endure a full day of school and homework at night. However, it is important to keep in mind how students feel about homework. In our high school yearbook, my husband said, "I think all of these teachers give us too much homework!" In secondary, students have multiple instructors. Secondary teachers must remember there are other classes where students have to complete work and should keep this in mind when they are determining what students complete at night for their class. In addition to homework, some students are athletes, have a job, or are caretakers for younger siblings or even grandparents.

In summary, there are considerations that should be thought through when it comes to homework. If homework is given it should be review. Students must be able to complete it independently of help from their parents. It is okay for students to use notes or resources provided by the teachers. Parents should only be responsible for monitoring their children to ensure they are doing the work. If teachers are maximizing every instructional minute, students need to have some time to relax and enjoy their families when they get home. Balance is important. Homework is not bad, but teachers need to make sure not to assign new concepts for homework and too large a load of homework.

