

The homework revolution

[History](#), [Revolution](#)



A young girl sits at her desk, reviewing her homework assignments for the evening. English: read three chapters and write a journal response. Math: complete 30 problems, showing all work. Science: do a worksheet, front and back. French: study vocabulary for tomorrow's test. It's going to be a long night.

This describes a typical weeknight for students across the country. Now is the time to start a homework revolution. Do students in the United States receive too much homework? According to guidelines endorsed by the National Education Association (NEA), a student should be assigned no more than 10 minutes per grade level per night. For example, a first grader should only have 10 minutes of homework, a second grader, 20 minutes, and so on. This means that a student in my grade – seventh – should have no more than 70 minutes of work each night.

Yet this is often doubled, sometimes even tripled! There are negatives to overloading students. Have you ever heard of a child getting sick because of homework? According to William Crain, Ph. D., a professor of psychology at City College of New York and the author of *Reclaiming Childhood*, “ Kids are developing more school-related stomachaches, headaches, sleep problems, and depression than ever before.” The average student is glued to his or her desk for almost seven hours a day.

Add two to four hours of homework each night, and they are working a 45- to 55-hour week! In addition, a student who receives excessive homework “ will miss out on active playtime, essential for learning social skills, proper brain development, and warding off childhood obesity,” according to Harris

Cooper, Ph. D., a professor of psychology and neuroscience at Duke University. Everybody knows that teachers are the ones who assign homework, but they do not deserve all the blame. “ Many teachers are under greater pressure than ever before,” says Kylee Beers, president of the National Council for Teachers of English and the author of *When Kids Can’t Read What Teachers Can Do*.

“ Some of it comes from parents, some from the administration and the desire for high scores on standardized tests.” Teachers who are under pressure feel the need to assign more homework. But why aren’t teachers aware of the NEA homework recommendations? Many have never heard of them, have never taken a course about good versus bad homework, how much to give, and the research behind it. And many colleges of education do not offer specific training in homework. Teachers are just winging it. Although some teachers and parents believe that assigning a lot of homework is beneficial, a Duke University review of a number of studies found almost no correlation between homework and long-term achievements in elementary school and only a moderate correlation in middle school.

“ More is not better,” concluded Cooper, who conducted the review. Is homework really necessary? Most teachers assign homework as a drill to improve memorization of material. While drills and repetitive exercises have their place in schools, homework may not be that place. If a student does a math worksheet with 50 problems but completes them incorrectly, he will likely fail the test. According to the U.

S. Department of Education, most math teachers can tell after checking five algebraic equations whether a student understood the necessary concepts. Practicing dozens of homework problems incorrectly only cements the wrong method. Some teachers believe that assigning more homework will help improve standardized test scores. However, in countries like the Czech Republic, Japan, and Denmark, which have higher-scoring students, teachers give little homework.

The United States is among the most homework-intensive countries in the world for seventh and eighth grade, so more homework clearly does not mean a higher test score. Some people argue that homework toughens kids up for high school, college, and the workforce. Too much homework is sapping students' strength, curiosity, and most importantly, their love of learning. Is that really what teachers and parents want? If schools assign less homework, it would benefit teachers, parents, and students alike. Teachers who assign large amounts of homework are often unable to do more than spot-check answers. This means that many errors are missed.

Teachers who assign less homework will be able to check it thoroughly. In addition, it allows a teacher time to focus on more important things. "I had more time for planning when I wasn't grading thousands of problems a night," says math teacher Joel Wazac at a middle school in Missouri. "And when a student didn't understand something, instead of a parent trying to puzzle it out, I was there to help them." The result of assigning fewer math problems: grades went up and the school's standardized math scores are the highest they've ever been.

A student who is assigned less homework will live a healthy and happy life. The family can look forward to stress-free, carefree nights and, finally, the teachers can too. Some schools are already taking steps to improve the issue. For example, Mason-Rice Elementary School in Newton, Massachusetts, has limited homework, keeping to the “ 10 minute rule.” Raymond Park Middle School in Indianapolis has written a policy instructing teachers to “ assign homework only when you feel the assignment is valuable.” The policy also states, “ A night off is better than homework which serves no worthwhile purpose.

” Others, such as Oak Knoll Elementary School in Menlo Park, California, have considered eliminating homework altogether. If these schools can do it, why can’t everyone? So, my fellow Americans, it’s time to stop the insanity. It’s time to start a homework revolution.