

Talking to parents about homework reform

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How would most parents in your school  
( or the most problematic ones) answer these selected survey questions?

5. How much control should parents have over the amount of homework their child has? (Check all that apply to your child.)

I should be able to request a limit on the amount of homework.

I should be able to request a limit on the *time spent* on homework.

I should be able to request *modifications* in the difficulty of assignments.

I should be able to request additional homework for my child.

I should be able to excuse my child from homework when I feel it is necessary.

The amount and type of homework is up to the teacher.

Other \_\_\_\_\_

6. How often do you understand the value of the homework assignment to your child's learning?

7. How often does the homework appear to be busywork?

13. How involved are you in your child's homework? (Check all statements that apply to you.)

I don't get involved in my child's homework.

I check to see that my child's homework is done.

I have corrected my child's mistakes on homework.

I have completed homework for my child just to get it done.

I sometimes have trouble helping my child because I don't understand the directions.

I sometimes have trouble helping my child because I don't understand the material.

I'm not sure *how much* I should help my child with homework.

I have occasionally prohibited my child from doing homework because it interfered with sleep or family time.

Other \_\_\_\_\_

[complete teacher, parent, and student surveys available at [www.homeworklady.com](http://www.homeworklady.com)]

## Obstacle #1 to talking to parents about homework reform

"The belief in the value of homework is akin to faith" (Kralovec and Buell, 2000)

I call it *Homework as superstition*-- The beliefs below share many traits with other common superstitions.

- *Homework superstitions are beliefs not based on reason or knowledge.*
- *Homework superstitions attach "super powers" to the practice.*
- *Homework superstitions maintain that future events may be influenced by one's behavior in some magical or mystical way. (Vatterott, 2011)*

Homework superstition	Alternative FACTS
Rigor=load	Rigor is not about the <b>amount</b> of homework. It's about the complexity of the task, use of higher level thinking skills.
Homework is the job of childhood	The job of childhood is wonder, curiosity, play, and hopefully developing a love of learning
Homework teaches responsibility	Homework teaches compliance/obedience—responsibility comes from empowerment—helping students to be responsible for actual learning, not just working
Homework is necessary to prepare kids for more homework in middle school, high school, college BGUTI (Kohn)	<p>1. The preparation most needed for middle and high school is reading and learning how to learn. Building the habit of homework can be easily done in primary with show and tell, in 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> grade with a few minutes a night.</p> <p>2. Kids adapt! Should we eliminate naps and recess? Should we have 6 teachers in the first grade? Practice should be based on what is developmentally appropriate for the age and need of the student</p>



**Some want fun, interactive,  
engaging choices**

**Some want familiar worksheets  
(what they are comfortable with)**



Options: Provide both formats for specific learning

Vary format based on the content (rote vs application)

Or defend your choice based on what you know about how the brain learns

**Some think homework  
should count in the grade  
(grades are pay for work)  
(Points are motivation)  
My kid doesn't test well**

**Some think homework  
should not count in the grade  
(it's practice, less stress)**



Rationale: # Grades are communication not compensation

# We want our students to chase learning, not points.

# We want it be safe to make mistakes/mistakes are how we learn/  
homework is for feedback about learning/we don't grade practice

# The remedy for kids who don't test well, lies in the manner of testing,  
not to inflate their grade with homework points.

**Parents who want to "help"  
take personal ownership,  
micromanage, relieve anxiety**

**It's not my job"/ don't want the burden  
Unable to help  
"I want YOU to be the homework police"**



Rationale: Over-involvement robs children of sense of mastery  
Breeds dependency and lack of confidence(this is whole parenting workshop!)  
(see college and career readiness above)  
Teacher needs an accurate picture of the child's knowledge and skill.

### Obstacle #3 to talking to parents about homework reform—clarifying their role

#### Overview of “What parents need to know about homework” workshop (complete parent handout available at [www.homeworklady.com](http://www.homeworklady.com))

##### Why is it important for my child to do homework?

*[develop skills, independent learners, identity as successful learner]*

##### What are the purposes of homework?

*[check for understanding, practice, preview, review for test or quiz]*

*Sometimes the teacher thinks it's practice, when it's really new learning!*

##### What is good homework? *[clear academic purpose, not busy work, not overly tedious]*

*Can be done without help/ Good homework makes a child feel smarter, not dumber*

##### How much homework should my child have? *[10-minute rule]*

##### How can I get my kids to do their homework?

- Explain to your child that It's not your job—  
“Mom and Dad aren't taking Algebra this year.”
- Talk with your child about your expectations and why homework is important.
- Help your child with organization. *[13 steps to completing homework]*
- Empower your child to take ownership of the homework process  
home study plan/negotiate where, when, and how.
- Rethink your child's schedule of outside activities.

##### How much should I help?

- Monitor, but don't hover or micromanage
- Ask to see/don't correct/send note to teacher if needed
- Jump in when frustration builds--before the “meltdown” stage
- Praise the effort

#### Suggested guidelines for parental involvement in homework

##### *Parents are encouraged to:*

Ask their child about what they are studying in school

Ask their child to show them any homework assignments

Assist their child in organizing homework materials

Help their child formulate a plan for completing homework

Provide an appropriate space for their child to do homework

##### *Parents may, if they wish:*

Help their child interpret assignment directions

Proofread their child's work, pointing out errors

Read aloud required reading to their child

Practice-quiz their child to help them prepare for tests

Help their child brainstorm ideas for papers or projects

Praise their child for completing homework

***Parents should not:***

Attempt to teach their child concepts or skills the child is unfamiliar with  
 Complete assignments for their child  
 Allow their child to sacrifice sleep to complete homework

**How do I communicate with teachers about homework?**

Parents need to be LESS INVOLVED with the homework task,  
 and MORE INVOLVED with communicating with the teacher.

Make an appointment to talk to the teacher if

- \*homework is causing distress for your child
- \*the amount of homework is crowding out sleep, play or family time
- \*homework is causing your child to hate school
- \*homework is causing your child to fail a subject or grade

Parents may want to ask for

homework assignments to be modified for amount or difficulty  
 a school sponsored homework support program for students who cannot work at home.

**Some advice, strategies from principals**

- ❖ Take your time, get parent feedback
  - Use parent and student surveys to find out parent and student concerns
  - Enlist your PTO to have a series of "listening meetings"
- ❖ Form committee of teachers, administrators and parents—start with common reading.
- ❖ Use your website or teacher webpage to share articles, vision, ask for feedback
- ❖ Use teacher or principals newsletter: "I've been reading....", "I now believe.....", "You might be interested in reading.....(links to articles)
- ❖ Start somewhere else—looking at assessment and grading for instance, which leads to examining the role of homework

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### **About the presenter**

Dr. Cathy Vatterott is a professor of education at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, where she trains preservice middle school teachers. She is a former middle school and high school teacher and middle school principal. She is the author of numerous articles about education, including "Homework Myths" and "There's Something Wrong with Homework," and four books: *Academic Success Through Empowering Students* (National Middle School Association, 1999), *Becoming a Middle Level Teacher: Student-Focused Teaching of Early Adolescents* (McGraw-Hill, 2007), *Rethinking Homework: Best practices that support diverse needs* (ASCD, 2009; 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, in press), and *Rethinking grading: Meaningful assessment for standards-based learning* (ASCD, 2015).

She first became interested in homework in the late 1990's as the frustrated parent of a 5th grader with learning disabilities. Since then, she has presented her homework research to more than 12,000 educators and parents in the United States, Canada, and Europe. Dr. Vatterott is considered an international expert on the topic of K-12 homework and is often interviewed by media such as the *New York Times*, *National Public Radio*, *Time.com*, *USA Today*, *BBC World News Service*, *The Globe and Mail*, and *The Guardian*, as well as by writers from parenting magazines and educational organizations. She also serves on the advisory board for *Parents Magazine*. She can be reached through her Web site at [www.homeworklady.com](http://www.homeworklady.com) or at [Vatterott@umsl.edu](mailto:Vatterott@umsl.edu).