

Engaging parents in the homework process

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Parent attitudes

Survey of parental attitudes about homework

- 85% of parents are positive about homework in kindergarten
- by 4th grade, 61% of parents are negative about homework
- 75% of parents say their kids have more homework than they did
- the more homework given, the more negative parent attitudes become
- only 20% of 5th grade parents thought homework was beneficial

General concerns

- expectations too high the child to accomplish
- directions unclear (even to parent)
- inadequate adaptations for ELL/SPED
- just too much (Cameron and Bartels, 2008)

AP-AOL poll

- 57% of parents felt they were spending about the right amount of time helping their children with homework
- 8% of teachers agreed
- 87% of teachers felt parents were not spending enough time helping their children with homework (www.eschoolnews, 2006).

Parents fears, misconceptions, and beliefs

Fear appearing unsupportive, being judged a bad parent

Fear the lack of homework completion will be "taken out on the kid"

Believe it's their job to "make it happen"

Believe they have no voice in the process—"just do it"

Believe not doing homework will reap dire consequences in child's adult life

Mindset for cooperation—rules of engagement

Parents choose to be involved with homework

Parent have choices in school life

- whether their child participates in activities
- whether their child buys or brings their lunch
- whether their child participates in fundraisers
- whether the parent attends PTA meetings or school events

(The child suffers no formal consequence as a result of those parental choices).

Respectful cooperation

Respect the right of parents to control their child's free time

Expectations of parents should not be demands ("You're not the boss of me").

Minimal expectations for some students may be—come to school, eat, sleep, read.

Parent friendly practices

Limit the number of subjects per night

Specify subject test days

Stop giving "daily" homework

Give weekly homework packets

Coordinate with other teachers

Give choices for rote learning

Go bookless

Kill the reading log

Leave the projects at school

Stop counting homework in the grade

Homework is the student's responsibility

First--the child (regardless of the age)

Second--the school (the teacher).

Power --Not teacher→parent→child

Teacher→child (hopefully with parent's support)

Parents are not subcontractors but adjuncts (voluntary ones at that).

Parents are observers not enforcers.

5 steps to engaging parents in the homework process

- Do your homework
- Work with parents together to create expectations of parental support.
- Establish formal methods of parent-teacher communication
- Teach parents what they need to know about homework
- Give parents options

STEP 1: Do your homework

- Establish your "theoretical framework" (read!)
- Survey parents, teachers, and students
- Decide on your guiding principles

Four suggested Basic Homework Guidelines

- The amount of homework assigned should be appropriate for the grade level to allow children playtime, downtime, and adequate sleep.
- Homework should be designed so that children can complete it without help. If they cannot complete homework without help, re-teaching or modified assignments should be provided.
- A child's academic grade should not be put in jeopardy because of incomplete homework. In-school or after school homework support programs should be made available for children who are unwilling or unable to complete homework at home.
- Families should be free from the intrusion of homework on weekends and holidays.

Calgary Catholic's guiding principles(paraphrased)

Teachers must apply the following guiding principles:

Ensure homework is purposeful and meaningful.

Plan and differentiate assignments to ensure students are able to complete each type of homework independently or with minimal support.

Consider and be sensitive to the impact of homework on family life and balance the benefits of homework with respect for the value of family time.

Encourage students & parents to communicate challenges students may face in successfully completing homework.

Seek student input into the structure of homework that best supports their learning & success.

Strive to identify interesting, engaging learning tasks for homework assignments.

Cooperate and coordinate with other staff to identify best homework practices and to avoid potential overload at any one

time.

STEP 2: Work with parents to create guidelines for parental support.
(see Calgary Catholic's process below)

Parent "Guidelines" or "Options" are preferable to "Expectations."

Guidelines or *Options* suggest a voluntary process, that parents have choices in what they will or will not do. *Expectations*, however, indicate teachers *expect* parents to do certain things, meaning that if parents *don't* do those things—they are their children may be judged poorly. (Vatterott, 2009, p. 49-50)

Sample Parent Guidelines

(Vatterott, 2009)

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

From Davis Joint Unified School District, Sacramento, California

Administrative regulation 6154 Homework

Available at www.djUSD.net see Hot Topics/New homework policy

The family shall be encouraged to:

1. Read in the family's first language at least throughout the elementary years of their children's education;
2. Provide a suitable environment, i.e. workplace, block of uninterrupted time, usually in the home or in an alternative setting such as a homework club for the homework to be done;
3. Provide encouragement and support without doing the homework for their child;
4. Establish a healthy balance between homework, co-curricular activities, family commitments, and their child's need for personal free time;
5. Intervene and stop a child who has expended an excessive amount of time and/or frustration on the day's homework and then confer with the teacher;
6. Not allow students to sacrifice sleep to complete homework;
7. Communicate with the teacher(s) if the student is not consistently able to do the homework by him/herself or if challenges or questions arise. Families of older students should encourage the child to communicate with the teacher in order to foster independence and personal responsibility; and
8. Communicate with the teacher(s) if any of these family responsibilities cannot be met.

A Parent Report Card??

Proposal in Florida to grade parents

Satisfactory/needs improvement/unsatisfactory in four areas

- **Student attendance**
- **Responsiveness to communication from teacher**
- **Completion of homework**

- **Child's physical preparation for school**(ie:sleep,meals)

STEP 3: Establish formal methods of parent-teacher communication

- tell them your preferred method of contact(note, email, voicemail)
- ask them how they prefer to be contacted(note, email, voicemail)
- Copy of syllabus, materials, rubrics on teacher web page
- *"Do you wish to receive email alert about exams and due dates?"*

(You may unsubscribe at any time)

- *Student Home Schedule Card*
- *Parent Feedback Checklist*

STUDENT HOME SCHEDULE CARD FOR PARENTS

Child's name _____

Grade level _____

It would be helpful for your child's teacher to know how homework fits into your child's daily schedule.

Please complete the homework card by writing down how your child typically spends their time in the weekday hours when they are not in school (ie: homework, sports practices, music lessons, visitation with non-custodial parents, dinner, sleep, play, tv, computer.)

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
3:00-4:00 pm				
4:00-5:00 pm				
5:00-6:00 pm				
6:00-7:00 pm				
7:00-8:00 pm				
8:00-9:00 pm				

9:00-10:00 pm				
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Parent Feedback Checklist

Dear parent:

I estimate your child can complete this assignment in _____minutes.

It is not necessary for your child to work longer than____minutes on this assignment, even if they do not finish it. They will not be penalized.

How much time did your child spend on this assignment?_____

If your child did not finish the assignment, please check the reason or reasons why below:

____my child could no longer focus on the task

____my child was too tired

____my child did not understand the assignment

____my child did not have the necessary materials to complete the assignment

____my child did not have enough time due to other outside activities

____other reason (please explain)

parent signature

STEP 4: Teach parents what they need to know about homework

- If appropriate for your audience, schedule a viewing of "The Race to Nowhere" documentary (viewing at conference Monday)

- Insert your proposed policy specifics periodically throughout the parent handout

Overview of "What parents need to know about homework" workshop
(complete parent handout available at 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, Can be done without help]*

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.

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

Wean them off your help

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 complete homework at home.

Other tools for parents

---for students with organizational problems

The Homework Chain (Taylor, 2007)
For student self-diagnosis/Which links are weak or broken?

- [](1) Realize an assignment is being given
- [](2) Understand the assignment
- [](3) Record the assignment accurately
- [](4) Understand how to perform the assignment correctly
- [](5) Check to bring correct books home
- [](6) Arrive home with materials and the homework assignment
- [](7) Begin the homework time
- [](8) Complete all homework
- [](9) Check that it is complete, accurate, and neat
- [](10) Set completed homework in a special place
- [](11) Take completed homework to school
- [](12) Arrive at class with completed homework
- [](13) Turn completed homework in on time

Home Study Plan—for elementary/middle school students

We all have ways we like to work. These questions will help you figure out the best way to do homework. Circle the answer that is most like you.

1. My favorite position to do homework is
 - at a desk
 - sitting on the floor
 - standing
 - laying down

2. It is easiest for me to pay attention to homework
 - In a quiet place
 - With noise or music in the background

3. When I am working on homework
 - I need to have something to eat or drink
 - I don't need to have drinks or food

4. When I have more than one thing to do
 - I like to do the easiest thing first
 - I like to do the hardest thing first

5. After I start working, I like to
 - Work for a short time, take a break, then work more
 - Work for a long time before I take a break

6. WHEN is it easiest for me to do homework?
 - I like to work as soon as I get home from school
 - I need to play for a little while and then work
 - I need a long break after school before I am ready to work

7. WHERE will I do homework?
 - I can work in the same place every day and can keep my homework things there. That place is _____.
 - I have to work in different places on different days so I need to keep my homework things in a box that I can move. Some of the places I will work are _____.

STEP 5: Give parents options

- differentiate for the needs of students and parents
- provide options for homework to be completed in school and after school
- schedule academic labs or study halls during the school day
- negotiate parent contracts
- allow opt-outs for parents who want less homework
- provide challenge activities for parents who want more homework
- have an appeal process beyond the teacher

HOMWORK POLICIES

In the past, homework policies have been vague and general (or non-existent).
 “Our only policy was that we were supposed to have a policy”

Increasingly, homework policies are being created in concert with school wide assessment policies.

Those policies tend toward standards based practices—where homework is considered to be formative assessment and not graded.

Comprehensive homework policies should address the following:

- purpose of homework
- quality and non-quality assignments
- limits on the amount of homework
- how homework should be graded (or not graded)
- percentage homework should be counted in the grade
- procedures for late work
- guidelines for parental involvement
- restrictions on weekend, holiday, and summer homework

Note: Many districts refrain from recommending specific amounts of time to be spent by grade level. First, it is incompatible with differentiating for individual needs. Second, it detracts from a focus on the quality of the homework task.

Creating a homework policy with parental input --two different districts' processes(both 2 year processes)

Calgary Catholic School District, Calgary, Alberta, Canada(46,000 students)

The Calgary Catholic School District's regulation about homework is a comprehensive model for other districts because it is based on research and because it is respectful of individual learner needs and family needs.

Process

1. Created a theoretical framework—administrators read and discussed the research (*Rethinking Homework, Canadian Council on Learning study*)
2. Created a draft "regulation" (policy) which included
 - Definition of homework
 - Types of homework
 - Guiding principles
 - Holidays and weekends
 - Recommended times
 - Incomplete homework
 - Grading
 - Homework during extended absences
 - Parental options
 - Roles and responsibilities (Teachers, Parents, Students, Administration)
3. Provided a "Background" paper to parents prior to K-12 building level parent meetings
4. During K-12 building level parent meetings,
took formal feedback on three discussion questions(shown below)
5. Offered districtwide teacher inservice on homework policy
took formal feedback
6. Held district-wide parent homework workshop
Took formal feedback from parents
7. Completed final revision

Formal feedback was collected at parent meetings to the following questions

Question 1: If the best were to happen for your child in the area of homework, what would it look like?

Question 2: What are the issues around timing and scheduling of homework, including weekends and holidays? What would you propose to include in the new homework regulation related to timing and scheduling?

Question 3: Parents are the primary educators of their children, and as such, have important responsibilities regarding the personal and educational growth of their children. It is recognized that homework is one of the options parents have for inclusion in their child's personal and family time. Parents have a role to play supporting, encouraging, supervising and taking an interest in their child's education as they practice skills at home. What are your thoughts in regards to this description of the parents' role and what revisions would you recommend?

Selected Gems from the parents

General

Will anything be done with this information? When?

Homework should be part of a teacher's performance evaluation

Homework should be individualized

Food and venue were great

Question 1

Cap the amount of homework for each grade. Maximum, not a quota.

Nothing new that has never been seen or done in class.

Learning how to study.

More coordination between teachers.

No homework in grade 1-3.

No homework or projects on holidays or long weekends.

Question 2.

Advanced notice of due dates, assignments and test so we can practice homework budgeting.

Longer time frames for homework or projects to be completed—teaches children about managing their time as well as allowing time for other activities and down time.

Time limit to homework clearly communicated from school to home so that if a certain time limit is reached, homework stops.

Question 3

There should be a statement that parents should NOT have to introduce new skills at home.

Disagree with homework as part of family time—homework is the antithesis, because it is negative family time.

Selected quotes from the Calgary Catholic Regulation—inserted in parent workshop handouts

The Calgary Catholic School District recognizes meaningful, carefully-planned homework can support student success and be a complementary part of a student's overall learning program.....

Calgary Catholic believes:

Parents are educational partners with teachers. Homework is one of the options parents have to support learning happening at school. Homework may provide parents with opportunities to encourage and supervise learning as students practise skills at home. A key parental responsibility is to communicate to teachers concerns related to homework completion.

(What is good homework?)

Calgary Catholic believes:

In designing homework for students, teachers should strive to

- *Ensure homework is purposeful and meaningful.
- *Plan and differentiate assignments to ensure students are able to complete homework independently or with minimal support.
- *Seek student input into the structure of homework that best supports their learning & success.
- *Strive to identify interesting, engaging learning tasks for homework assignments.

Calgary Catholic believes:

Since homework is designed to support learning, and is not intended to provide instruction, parents are not required to take on the role of a professional teacher.

Calgary Catholic believes: Teachers should strive to

- Be sensitive to the impact of homework on family life and...respect the value of family time.
- Encourage students & parents to communicate challenges students may face in completing homework.
- Cooperate and coordinate with other staff to avoid potential overload at any one time.

(How much homework should my child have?)

Calgary Catholic believes:

Time Guidelines

Division I (K-3)	Occasional 5-10 minutes of homework per week
Division II (Gr. 4-6)	Maximum of 30 minutes of homework per school night.
Division III (Gr. 7-9)	Maximum of 60 minutes of homework per school night.
Division IV (Gr. 10-12)	Maximum of 120 minutes of homework per school night.

Calgary Catholic believes:

successful use of homework to support learning is not dependent upon the amount of time taken with homework but the degree to which it:

- engages students,
- connects to the students' individual abilities,
- links to the work undertaken in class.

It is recommended, and supported by stakeholders, that teachers refrain from assigning homework over long weekends or holidays

Wheaton 200 School District, Wheaton, Illinois USA (14,000 students)

1. Administrators identified issues

2. Electronic parent surveys

Surveys introduced at fall curriculum night—made available in English and Spanish

Bank of computers with human translators to help parents
(parents speak 68 different languages, and many are not good with technology)

Advertised that it was available on line

3. Students in grades 3-12 completed surveys in school. This "got the word out" that parents should complete the surveys as well.
4. Teachers completed surveys
5. Survey results were compared with research and teacher inservice was planned that focused on the gap between surveys and research.
6. Teachers started to change practice.
7. Although a vague policy was already in place, they designed recommendations for guidelines
8. Over about a 15 month period, they took feedback three more times from teachers and parents, and the administrative team continued to meet.
9. Final recommendations are forthcoming followed by more teacher inservice.

References

www.racetonowhere.com To find out about a screening near you, or to schedule your own screening. (See it Monday at this conference)

For more information about the Calgary Catholic District's process—
contact Bryan Szumlas at Bryan.Szumlas@cssd.ab.ca

Best practical articles for teachers

Brookhart, S. M. (2008). Feedback that fits. *Educational Leadership*, 65(4), 74-75.

Christopher, S. (2007-2008). Homework: A few practice arrows. *Educational Leadership*, 65(4), 74-75.

Cushman, K. (2010). Show us what homework is for. *Educational Leadership*, 68(1), 74-78.

Darling-Hammond, L. and Ifill-Lynch, O. (2006). If they'd only do their work!, *Educational Leadership*, 63(5), 8-13.

Vatterott, C. (2010). Five hallmarks of good homework. *Educational Leadership*, 68(1), 10-15.

Vatterott, C. (2009-2010). Homework: Renegotiating the parent-school partnership, *Our Children* (published by the National PTA), 35(3), 12-13.

Best thought provoking books about homework

Kohn, A. (2006). *The homework myth: Why our kids get too much of a bad thing*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press. (good website www.alfiekohn.org)

Vatterott, C. (2009). *Rethinking Homework: Best practices that support diverse needs*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD. (website www.homeworklady.com)

Best resources for parents of overworked kids

Bennett, S., and Kalish, N. (2006). *The case against homework: How homework is hurting our children and what we can do about it*. New York: Crown Publishers.
(Sara Bennett is interviewed in "Race to Nowhere")

Dolin, A. K.(2010). *Homework Made Simple: Tips, Tools, and Solutions for Stress-Free Homework*. Available at amazon.com. Ann can be reached at ann@ectutoring.com

Other books of interest to parents

Crain, W. (2003). *Reclaiming childhood: Letting children be children in our achievement-oriented society*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.

Honore, C. (2004). *In praise of slowness: Challenging the cult of speed*. New York: Harper Collins.

Louv, R. (2005). *Last child in the woods: Saving our children from nature-deficit disorder*. Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin.

Pope, D.C. (2001). *"Doing school": How we are creating a generation of stressed out, materialistic, and miseducated students*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
(Denise Pope is interviewed in "Race to Nowhere")

Rosenfeld, A. and Wise, N. (2000). *The overscheduled child: Avoiding the hyper-parenting trap*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

About the presenter

Dr. Cathy Vatterott is an Associate Professor of Education at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, as well as a parent and a former teacher and principal. She is the author of three 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), and *Rethinking Homework: Best Practices that Support Diverse Needs* (ASCD, 2009). She has presented her homework research to over 9000 educators and parents in the U.S., Canada, and Europe. She has been interviewed as a homework expert for radio and television, for articles appearing in such magazines as *Parents*, *Better Homes and Garden*, *Child*, and *Working Mother*, and for articles appearing in numerous U.S. newspapers and educational websites.