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THE IMPORTANCE OF HOMEWORK IN YOUR CHILD'S EDUCATION

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Homework is important because it is at the intersection between home and school. It serves as a window through which you can observe your children's education and express positive attitudes towards your children and their education. As children grow older, homework and the amount of time engaged in homework, increases in importance. For teachers and administrators, homework is a cost effective way to provide additional instruction in practice.

Lets examine the six constructive purposes for homework in the context of your child's educational experience. The first two are the most important and obvious. Through (1) practice and (2) participation in learning tasks, homework can improve your child's achievement. Thus, it would be expected that if homework were completed accurately, not only would your child's general knowledge and grades improve but your child would also increase mastery of basic academic skills, such as reading, writing, spelling and mathematics.

Homework can provide other benefits. Your child's ability to bring an assignment home, gather and organize necessary materials to complete the assignment, return the assignment and receive a grade, strengthens his or her sense of responsibility. Time management skills are learned. There is also improved (3) development of personal skills such as time management gained by completing homework. Further, when homework proceeds smoothly it can become (4) a positive aspect of your relationship with your child.

Finally, although we often do not consider that homework serves a school administrative role, it offers schools an opportunity to let parents know what their children are learning. Thus, homework can play a public relations role by (5) keeping parents informed about class activities and policies. Homework can also fulfill (6) an administrative role in helping schools achieve their overall mission of improving student's achievement.

Homework is a bridge that joins schools and parents. From the school's perspective there is the opportunity to monitor students' independent progress. For parents there is the potential to gain a greater appreciation of education and to express positive attitudes towards their children's achievement.

In this weekly column we will provide tips, guidelines, suggestions and solutions to common homework problems. Homework is an essential part of your child's education and can serve not only to enhance your child's achievement but also to enhance family relationships.

This column is excerpted and condensed from, **Seven Steps to Homework Success: A Family Guide for Solving Common Homework Problems** by Sydney S. Zentall, Ph.D. and Sam Goldstein, Ph.D. (1999, Specialty Press, Inc.), available from the <http://www.addwarehouse.com/ADD Warehouse>.



Does homework help students do better in school?

The research on this question is very mixed. Some studies show that homework is linked to better test scores and grades in school, while other studies show no links, and still others suggest a negative influence of homework. Homework does seem to improve achievement and grades for older students more than younger students. In fact, some studies suggest that homework may be detrimental to younger students.

If the research about homework is inconclusive, why do teachers continue to assign it?

Many parents, educators, and policymakers continue to support homework. There is a widespread belief that homework builds character, work habits, and academic skills. The focus on international competitiveness contributes to the idea that U.S. students should be working harder. There are also fears that without homework, children will spend their after-school time in unproductive ways, such as watching television, instant-messaging, or playing video games.

Are students today overburdened with homework?

In spite of recent media reports that U.S. students are overburdened with homework, the average amount of homework across all grade levels is less than an hour per night. This is only an average, of course. Students in some programs—such as advanced courses—may have much more homework than this and others may have less.

How much time should my child spend on homework each night?

Little is known about the “optimum” amount of time students should spend on homework. The available research indicates that the optimum amount of time for high school students is 1½ to 2½ hours per night; for middle school students, the optimum appears to be less than 1 hour per night. When students spend more time than that on homework, the positive connection with student achievement diminishes. There is less research on elementary students, but what is available suggests that smaller amounts of homework may help to develop work habits and study skills but do not directly affect student achievement.

What is the purpose of homework?

Homework can be assigned for instructional and noninstructional purposes. Instructional homework may be assigned to help students (1) practice what they did in class that day; (2) prepare for new material; (3) extend what they have learned by applying the information in new contexts; or (4) integrate separately learned skills by applying them on projects. Most homework assigned by teachers is for practice and preparation purposes. Noninstructional homework may be assigned to (1) help students develop time-management and work skills, (2) improve communication between parents and children, (3) encourage students to work with their peers, or (4) fulfill school or district homework requirements. Noninstructional purposes for homework are more common for younger students than older students.

What kind of homework is most beneficial to students?

There is not much research on this topic. Some studies have shown that homework that prepares students for new material or asks them to review or practice old material leads to higher test scores than homework that simply reviews what was covered in class that day. One study of science homework found that students were more likely to return homework that required them to interact with their parents. Also, students who were assigned this kind of homework received better science grades than students who were assigned homework to complete on their own.