ACADEMIC DEMANDS ON THE SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL HEALTH OF PRIMARY AND SECONDARY GRADE STUDENTS

A Project

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Hilary F. Sisson

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Graduate and Professional Studies in Education
Abstract

of

ACADEMIC DEMANDS ON THE SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL HEALTH OF PRIMARY AND SECONDARY GRADE STUDENTS

by

Hilary F. Sisson

With the authorization of No Child Left Behind, student performance on high stakes testing has moved to the forefront of the education political agenda. In particular, educators have felt added pressures to keep up with the tougher standards movement (Tokarski, 2011). As a result, educators often increase the amount of homework assigned to keep up with such political demands (Kohn, 2006). Despite this growing trend, there is little to no research to support this educational practice. Researchers, such as Cooper (1989), found that the effectiveness of homework depends on the grade level of students and time spent on homework. Research findings reveal that there is a positive correlation between homework and achievement at the high school level when students spent between one to two hours on homework. In middle school, Cooper found a positive relationship between homework and achievement when students spent up to one hour on homework. However, achievement significantly drops off after these one to two hour time frames at the secondary level. In elementary school, there was no correlation at all between the two variables.

Due to many parents, students and teachers normalizing increasing academic
pressure and homework demands as a part of school life. Few question the value of its content or fail to recognize the stress it may cause (Kohn, 2006). Parents and school personnel are also often unaware, or perhaps minimize, the social and emotional impacts such demands are creating for our youth. Now more than ever, local school districts and school psychologists are playing an integral role in assessing and intervening in the mental health needs of children. This comes at a time when there are also intense demands on our youth in their academics, including an increased focus on grades, standardized test scores, and larger amounts of assigned homework (Kohn, 2006).

The primary purpose of this project is to develop a workshop wherein participants are provided with a review of the literature surrounding the effects of academic demands on the social-emotional health of primary and secondary grade students. The secondary purpose of this project is to provide recommendations for developing research-based homework policies, and suggestions for implementing policy change within the school. Workshop participants will have the opportunity to work with other members from their district and/or school to develop a homework policy based on the training and recommendations provided. These goals will be met through a six-hour training workshop for teachers, administrators, and other related staff in school districts and/or school sites at the primary and secondary grade levels.

Melissa L. Holland, Ph.D.

5/14/15

Date
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Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

In 2001, the Program for International Student Assessment (PSIA) was administered to a third of a million teenagers in forty-three countries (Ripley, 2013) to measure student’s academic and critical thinking skills. Since the implementation of the PSIA, American students continue to fall behind academically in comparison to students around the world. In 2009, American students “ranked 26th on the PISA math test, 17th in science, and 12th in reading” (p. 24). With the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001, student achievement and performance on standardized test scores became tied to teacher salaries and bonuses. As a result, teaching strategies and pedagogical practices became increasingly focused on teaching to the test (Bennett & Kalish, 2006), particularly in the areas of mathematics, science, and English-Language Arts. With copious amounts of information to cover, over crowded classrooms, and other teacher duties, such as recess monitor and lunch duty, teachers find too few hours in the day to cover all the required information. As a consequence, teachers often assign homework to make up for what could not be covered in class.

With the elimination of county mental health services via AB 114, local school districts and school psychologists are playing an integral role in assessing and intervening in the mental health needs of children. This comes at a time when there are also intense demands on our youth in their academics, including an increased focus on grades, standardized test scores, and larger amounts of assigned homework (Kohn, 2006). This
interplay between the rise in anxiety and depression and scholastic demands has been postulated upon frequently in the literature (Kackar, Shumow, Schmidt, & Grzetich, 2011; Katz, Buzukashvili & Feingold, 2012); however, the amount of research examining the effects of increasing academic demands on children’s social-emotional health is rather sparse.

**Purpose of the Project**

The primary purpose of this project is to provide workshop participants with a review of the literature surrounding the effects of academic demands on the social-emotional health of primary and secondary grade students. The secondary purpose of this project is to provide recommendations for developing research-based homework policies, and suggestions for implementing policy change within the school. This goal will be met through a six hour training workshop for school districts and/or school sites at the primary and secondary grade levels. A power point presentation, an example homework policy and template, as well as a sample parent letter regarding the new homework policy will be provided as part of the workshop. Workshop participants will have the opportunity to work with other members from their district and/or school to develop a homework policy based on the training and recommendations provided.

**Description of the Project**

This research project involved the review of the related literature on academic demands, homework, achievement and social and emotional health and was developed into a six hour, training workshop. Workshop participants will be selected by each district and/or school site and comprise a multi-disciplinary team of general education
teachers, special education staff, including teachers, counselors, and school psychologists, as well as administration. A workshop manual was also created to allow the workshop to be delivered by any trained professional. Workshop attendees will become familiar with the literature on the effects that increased academic demands place on the social-emotional health of primary and secondary grade students, be provided with recommended homework policies and practices at both the primary and secondary level, and receive guidance on how to implement such policy changes within their district and/or school site. Additionally, attendees will have the opportunity to work with their team to develop a school-wide homework policy based on the training provided.

**Definition of Terms**

*Homework*: Tasks assigned to students that are to be completed during non-school hours.

*Primary Grade Student*: Students enrolled in kindergarten through 6th grade (California Department of Education).

*Secondary Grade Student*: Students enrolled in 7th grade through 12th grade.

*Achievement*: Student’s performance on standardized testing such as the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR).

**Limitations**

The author recognizes several limitations of this project. Given that this workshop was not field tested with participants, the effectiveness or practicality of the workshop is unknown at this time. Therefore, it can only be assumed that this workshop will have a positive impact on the audience for whom it is intended. In addition, the workshop is designed for professionals who have knowledge and/or an interest in
examining current academic demands on primary and secondary grade students and an interest in creating a research-based homework policy. Further, depending on the day and time of the workshop, as well as the districts ability to provide coverage for participating school administration and teachers, it may be difficult to get participants to attend the workshop given the length of the session.
Chapter 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

With the authorization of No Child Left Behind, and now the new Common Core requirements, educators have felt added pressures to keep up with the tougher standards movement (Tokarski, 2011). Limited time and resources have lead many educators to focus on test performance and good grades, and less about learning the material (Pope, 2009). Educators often increase the amount of homework assigned to keep up with such political demands (Kohn, 2006). Despite the growing anti-homework movement by Kohn (2006), Bennett and Kalish (2006), Kralovec and Buell (2000), and Abeles and Congdon (2010), there remain many misconceptions on the effectiveness of homework and student achievement. In fact, there is a significant body of research that demonstrates the lack of correlation between homework and student success. In a meta-analysis examining homework, grades, and standardized test scores, Cooper, Robinson and Patall (2006) found that there was little correlation between the amount of homework assigned and achievement in elementary school, and only a moderate correlation in middle school. Furthermore, Wolchover (2012) found an inverse relationship between the amount of time spent on homework and students’ standardized test scores. Due to many parents, students and teachers normalizing increasing academic pressure and homework demands as a part of school life, few question the value of its content or fail to recognize the stress that it may cause (Kohn, 2006). Parents and school personnel are also often unaware, or perhaps minimize, the social and emotional impacts such demands are creating for our youth.
The social-emotional health of students is moving to the forefront of our attention in schools. With the elimination of county mental health services via AB 114, now more than ever, local school districts and school psychologists are playing an integral role in assessing and intervening in the mental health needs of children. This comes at a time when there are also intense demands on our youth in their academics, including an increased focus on grades, standardized test scores, and larger amounts of assigned homework (Kohn, 2006). This interplay between the rise in anxiety and depression and scholastic demands has been postulated upon frequently in the literature (Kackar et al., 2011; Katz et al., 2012); however, the amount of research examining the effects of increasing academic demands on children’s social-emotional health is rather sparse.

**History of Homework**

While there is a growing trend amongst American schools to increase homework, attitudes toward homework have waxed and waned for and against it since the 1900’s. In fact, in 1901 homework was legally banned for children under age 15 and limited in public high school (Gill & Schlossman, 1996). The movement to abolish homework was a high priority for parents and organizations, like the Children’s Physicians group, who made the claim that children needed at least five hours of fresh air and sunshine each day. Others presented concern that over studying was threatening children’s health (Reese, 1995). Continuous shifts in policy and practice have changed the way leaders in politics and education view homework. Even Civil War hero Frances A. Walker, while serving as the head of the school board, worried that homework sapped children’s health - mentally and emotionally, as well as physically (Gill & Schlossman, 1996). In October
of 1957, the launch of Sputnik by the Soviet Union caused panic amongst American families and politicians fearing that American students were falling behind in the national race, specifically in the fields of mathematics and sciences. Rumors that Russian children were working harder than our American students were circulated, and homework seemed to be a logical, as well as cost-effective, solution in order to “accelerate knowledge acquisition” (Cooper, 1989, p. 85). Simultaneously, President Eisenhower enacted the National Defense Education Act on September 2, 1958, which encouraged increased enrollment in college science and mathematic fields (National Defense Education Act of 1958).

Views on homework shifted again during the Woodstock “free spirit” generation of the 1960’s and 1970’s. Parents and activists were again arguing against homework (Bennett & Kalish, 2006). With a push towards challenging traditional values, parents argued for America’s focus to cultivate children’s social experiences, outdoor recreation, and homework free nights. With this push, homework decreased. However, in A Nation at Risk (1983), a report by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, an urgent message was expressed to Americans that world competitors were challenging their commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation. To address these concerns, homework was increased to resolve mediocrity. Former President Bill Clinton emphasized the importance of parents’ spending more time helping their children with homework (Kralovec & Buell, 2000). On January 8, 2002, President George W. Bush, Jr. signed the No Child Left Behind Act in an effort of raising educational standards (Bennett & Kalish, 2006). With the push to get American students to pass their
standardized tests, increased amounts of homework were deemed necessary. Today, as we move in a new era of standardized testing with the implementation of Common Core State Standards, leaders and visionaries in education may battle again over the value of homework.

**National Achievement**

Due to political and public panic that American students were, and perhaps continue to, fall behind academically in comparison to students around the world, initiatives to increase homework, extend student time in school, and require more technology in the classrooms has been discussed amongst education leaders. However, as the United States continues to produce mediocre scores, researchers need to examine the pedagogical practices of higher-ranking countries (Ripley, 2013). Lawrence Baines, a professor of education at the University of Toledo, examined how other countries around the world implement their educational strategies, specifically those who continuously outrank American students in international comparisons of student achievement (Baines, 2007).

The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), was introduced in 2000, and administered to a third of a million teenagers in forty-three countries (Ripley, 2013). Designed by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, the goal of the PISA was to measure student’s critical thinking skills. In 2001, when the first results of the PISA were announced, the number one country was Finland. Since then the PISA has been administered in 2003, 2006, 2009, and 2012.
In his review, Baines examined time spent at school, amount of homework, access to technology, and schools as agents of social change on achievement. Results indicated that students in public schools in Western Europe, Canada, Mexico, Korea, Japan, and Singapore spent approximately “701 hours per year in school” while students in Finland spent only “600 hours in school” (p. 24). Compared to the academic performance of students in the United States, who spend approximately 1,100 hours in school each year, students in these countries performed significantly better. For example, based on 2012 PISA results, the top three ranking countries included Korea, Japan, and Finland, with Finland ranking 3rd behind Korea and Japan. America ranked 21st out of 34 participating countries. Korea, Japan, and Finland also assigned the least amount of homework (Bennett & Kalish, 2006). Countries who assigned the most homework, Greece, Thailand, and Iran, earned academic scores, on average, in the lowest range.

What is more, in Finland students begin school at 7 years old, have less homework, have shorter school days, and take only one standardized test during their final year of high school (Sahlberg, 2014). Additionally, Finland places more emphasis on play than in America. While almost 40% of schools in America have reduced, or even eliminated, recess. Finland follows every class with a 15-minute recess break. While many may argue that the effectiveness of homework and achievement are contingent upon culture (i.e., Japan and Korea are strict compared to America), a global study conducted by the Organization of Economic Cooperation, examined the effectiveness of homework and achievement in 30 countries. Results revealed there was no correlation
between achievement and amount of homework, a trend found in all 30 countries (Baines, 2007; Baines & Slutsky, 2009).

In his book, *Closing the Book on Homework*, John Buell (2004) discusses how critics blamed the failings of the U.S. economy on our school system. Buell goes on to state that “our major foreign competitors do a better job of educating their children and consequently outperform us in the workplace” (p. 104). Despite having one of the best-educated teaching staff, the U.S. does a poor job actually training teachers (i.e. lack on-the-job training and internships) than other countries (Buell, 1989). Ripley (2013) highlights that in 2009, American students “ranked 26th on the PISA math test, 17th in science, and 12th in reading” (p. 24). However, America ranked 2nd on spending per pupil (Ripley, 2013). Rather than do more of something that is not working (adding homework), perhaps it is time to examine the current educational practices in the classroom.

**Effects of Homework on Achievement**

As America falls further behind other countries, politicians and policies focus on homework as a cost-effective means to improve education. Parents also believe that homework is an effective tool to help their children get ahead (Kralovec & Buell, 2000). Homework is often assumed to be a tested and essential pedagogical practice for the purpose of improving academic success (Buell, 2004). With this assumption, the assignment of homework is rarely questioned, and often requested by parents. As a result, the practice of assigning homework is increasing, especially in our primary grades. Harris Cooper, a Professor of Education at Duke University, defines homework as “tasks
assigned to students by school teachers that are meant to be carried out during non school hours” (Cooper, 1989, p. 7). As well-known researcher, professor, and proponent of homework, Cooper conducted a study on the effects of homework. This study, funded by the National Science Foundation, included the review of 120 studies on homework (Cooper, 1989).

In his article “Synthesis of Research on Homework,” Cooper (1989), examines the relationship between homework and achievement. Through his review, Cooper found multiple sets of studies that address this question. In the first set of studies, Cooper examined 20 studies comparing achievement of students assigned homework to the achievement of students not assigned any homework. His findings revealed that the effectiveness of homework depended on the grade level of the student. His results revealed that for high school students, there was a positive correlation between homework and achievement. In elementary school, there was no correlation.

In another set of studies, Cooper (1989) examined 50 studies that looked at the amount of time students reported spending on homework with their achievement levels. Similarly, grade level played an important role in the effectiveness of homework. Cooper found that “for students in grades 3-5, the correlation between amount of homework and achievement was nearly zero, for students in grades 5-9 it was r = +.07, and for high school students it was r = +.25” (1989, p. 88-89). While grade level does matter when looking at achievement, the findings are statistically insignificant across grades. Cooper further investigated whether there was an optimal amount of time that produced a positive correlation. Once again, the results indicated that for elementary students, there
was no correlation. For junior high, Cooper found a (slightly) positive correlation between 1 and 2 hours of homework completed and achievement. Finally, in high school, achievement increased with up to two hours of homework completed per night, but then plateaued and plummeted, finding an inverse relationship between the two variables.

In his review of research, Cooper also examined the effectiveness of homework across various core subjects (i.e., Mathematics, History, English, etc.). Research results revealed "no clear pattern indicating an influence for subject matter" (1989, p. 89). Cooper did discover that homework "works best when the material is not complex or terribly novel" (Cooper, 1989, p. 89; Cooper, Lindsay, & Nye, 1998).

In a more current meta-analysis examining homework, grades, and standardized test scores, Cooper et al. (2006) found that there was little correlation between the amount of homework assigned and achievement in elementary school, and only a moderate correlation in middle school. Results indicated that the effectiveness in upper grades was $r = .25$ with a range of 0.05 - .28, dependent on subject. Additionally, the effects on grades 3-5, the correlation between the amount of homework and achievement was nearly zero. Furthermore, Wolchover (2012) found an inverse relationship between the amount of time spent on homework and students' standardized test scores. In children 3rd grade and below, there was a negative correlation found between the variables. Similar results were found by Hattie (2009). After completion of a 15-year research project aimed at discovering what works in improving achievement in schools, Hattie synthesized over 800 meta-analyses. Results of his synthesis resulted in a ranking
of factors that have the greatest impact on learning in the classroom. Based on his rankings, the top ten strategies included 1) self-reported grades/student expectations, 2) Piagetian programs (teaching methods based on Jean Piaget’s theory of cognitive development and his concept of children’s stages of learning), 3) response to intervention, 4) teacher credibility, 5) providing a formative evaluation, 6) micro-teaching, 7), classroom discussion, 8) comprehensive interventions for learning disabled students, 9) teacher clarity, and 10) feedback. On this ranking, homework placed 94th, with an overall effect size of 0.29; however, effect size varied by grade. Specifically, the overall effect size of homework for primary grade students was 0.15 compared to 0.64 at the secondary level. Hattie attributes this difference to the fact that younger students struggle with independent learning and filtering out environmental distractions. At the secondary level, Hattie found homework to be the most effective for rote learning, practice or rehearsal. It was less effective when homework was complex.

Given the voluminous amounts of information on the ineffectiveness of today’s current teaching strategies, namely homework (Baines & Slutsky, 2009), it is surprising how so many educators continue to believe homework provides any pedagogical value to students or to the educational system as a whole (Cooper, 1989).

**Characteristics of the Teacher and Assignment**

With the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act, student achievement and performance on standardized test scores became tied to teacher salaries and bonuses. As a result, teaching strategies and pedagogical practices became increasingly focused on teaching to the test (Bennett & Kalish, 2006), particularly in the areas of mathematics,
science, and English-Language Arts. With copious amounts of information to cover, over crowded classrooms, and other teacher duties, such as recess monitor and lunch duty, teachers find too few hours in the day to cover all the required information. As a consequence, teachers often assign homework to make up for what could not be covered in class.

While the assigning of homework is rather common practice amongst teachers, teacher training on how to develop, assign, and utilize homework is not. In his review of research, Cooper (1989) found that teachers “take varying amounts of time and effort setting up an assignment” (p. 87). For the few who were lucky enough to cover the theoretical purposes of homework in their graduate training (Cooper, 1989), such as practice, preparation, extension, and integration, few programs reviewed research showing the effectiveness, or rather ineffectiveness of homework, specifically in terms of amount and type across grade level (Bennett & Kalish, 2006; Cooper, 1989). Furthermore, Kohn (2006) asserts that many teachers assign homework so that students have something to do every night, rather than assign it only when it is absolutely necessary.

Bennett and Kalish (2006) point out that not only is the way in which teachers assign homework not consistent, but the grading of homework is inconsistent as well. They also point out that some teachers use homework as a way of evaluating skill deficits, while some are not grading it at all. Cooper found that “some teachers simply collect assignments, while others go over them in class and provide written feedback, evaluative comments, or grades” (1989, p.87). However, Cooper (1989) did not find any
studies that compared the varying feedback strategies of homework. Some teachers assert that homework is best used as a form of school-home communication. When students return daily homework, it may be recycled, as there is not enough time in the day to grade every piece of homework.

Even when teachers have an intended purpose for assigning homework, 85% of teachers report experiencing problems getting students to complete and turn in their homework (Cooper & Nye, 1994). Cooper and Nye report that when homework assignments do not match the learned skill, students can feel frustrated, stressed, and develop negative attitudes toward school. With the majority of teachers lacking the proper training and understanding of the value, or rather lack-there-of, of homework, it becomes questioned why it is used as a pervasive teaching device.

**Types of Homework**

Often, teachers report that the purpose of homework is to practice what the children learned in class. Drill and practice worksheets appear to be the most popular type of homework assigned to students (Trautwein, Kiggli, Schnyder, & Ludtke, 2009), often comprising 89% of assigned homework (Cooper & Nye, 1994). Interestingly, Trautwein et. al. (2009) found “drill and practice assignments were associated with comparatively negative developments in homework effort and achievement” (p. 184). Kohn (2014) discusses how this theory of practice does not always make perfect. Specifically, as Cooper (1989) and Hattie (2009) highlight, homework is only beneficial when it is not complex and when it reviews previously learned information. Kohn (2014) points out that when the focus turns to the depth of understanding and the student’s
ability to problem solve, that time on task doesn’t predict outcome. Further, Kohn states that it is not how much time you spend doing something, but rather how much you enjoy the activity that you are doing (2006). When children spend all day attending lectures, the motivation to spend another 2-3 hours on school work after school hours could leave kids bored and unmotivated. When there is an intrinsic motivation to learn about a particular subject, achievement increases.

Non-Academic Benefits of Homework

Kohn (2006) states that when individuals cannot rely on research to support homework’s influence on achievement, “people try to defend homework on other grounds instead” (p. 50). For example, Cooper and Nye (1994) state that homework may improve study skills and improve attitudes toward school, foster independence, build responsibility, and provide an opportunity to create a communication link between home and school by providing parents with the opportunity to help their children. However, Cooper and Nye (1994) contradict themselves by then asserting a major limitation with all of the studies reviewed is that they failed to look at non-academic effects such as study habits or participation in community activities. Bennett and Kalish (2006) state that many while there are many claims regarding potential benefits of homework, all claims appear to be judgments rather than facts. Furthermore, no research has critically examined the non-academic benefits of homework, such as responsibility, self-discipline, organization, etc. (Bennett & Kalish, 2006; Kohn, 2006).
Workforce Preparation

American teachers are forced to disregard all activity unless it is able to produce pedagogical benefits. With a shift in focus on mathematics and technology, American schools continue to decreased the amount of teaching time devoted to non-academic activities including art, music, physical education, recess, and lunch (Baines & Slutsky, 2009). Such an over emphasis on the core subjects has ignored research that shows play affects creativity, cooperation, openness, and intelligence positively (Hair & Graziano, 2003). With children enrolling in preschool and transitional kindergarten earlier and younger, children enter the classroom expected to demonstrate more academic skills than expected of children entering school 20, 10, and even 5 years ago (Baines & Slutsky, 2009). With concerns regarding America’s future economy, some political figures believe in the assumption that the more homework assigned to students means a boost in tests scores. A boost in test scores means a boost in business (Bennett & Kalish, 2006). However, Bennett and Kalish (2006) point out that there is no correlation between increased homework and economic success.

Interference with Other Commitments

College entrance requirements continue to become more and more competitive, requiring students to not only do exceptionally well in school, but to be “well-rounded.” Specifically, students should, in addition to performing well in school academically, be engaged in extra-curricular activities such as sports, clubs, and philanthropy. The assigning of homework produces extra stress on students who try to participate in these activities, yet are not able to due to increased homework demands. When this occurs, the
opportunity for students to learn “teamwork, socialize with other kids, and relieve the stress of their lives with something that they really enjoy, and build self-esteem by being good at something other than school” is taken away (Bennett & Kalish, 2006, p. 26). Students are expected to balance school, homework, sports, hobbies, and community service, all while trying to manage time spent with family and friends. This movement towards becoming a “super student” has produced negative effects on our youth. In her documentary “Race to Nowhere,” Abeles and Congdon (2010) highlights how this movement produces over worked, over stressed youth.

**Effects of Boredom and Heavy Workloads on Learning**

In Cooper’s (2001) review of the research, boredom was found to be a negative effect of homework. Baines’s Developing the Sixth Sense: Play (2009), reported that 70 percent of adolescent students are bored every day in school (Baines, 2009). Of those students who drop out of school, boredom was the primary reason stated. Achievement aside, business executives see homework as a way to “help acclimatize [individuals] to what corporations want now: workers who are used to, and will not complain about, the long working day” (Buell, 1989, p. 53). However, what this is preparing students for is work today, not for work that will be required of them in the future. Dorothy Suskind (2012), a 1st grade teacher and adjunct instructor for the University of Virginia and the University of Richmond, discusses how we need to prepare our students for jobs that require “creativity.” In her article, Suskind shares a story about Google employees who were allowed to dedicate 20% of their day to pursuing innovation. When engaged with intrinsic motivations, employees created Google News and Gmail (Suskind, 2012).
A long-standing mantra in America has been, “work hard, play hard.” Similar mantras are being placed on our youth. Children, particularly those in elementary school have no reprise. Greenfeld (2013), after growing concerns regarding his daughter’s increasing workload and decreasing hours of sleep, decided to complete his daughter’s homework for one week. As Greenfeld walks the reader through his daily work, and now homework routine, he becomes more exhausted and frustrated with the amount of homework assigned. Additionally, he discovered that with so much homework and so few evening hours available, it is no wonder students often resort to just memorizing information for tests (as opposed to understanding), cheating, and avoidance. For example, when trying to understand his daughter’s French homework, his daughter simply reminded him to “memorize, not rationalize.” At the end of the experiment, Greenfeld asks the reader “If your job required [this] kind of work after work, how long would you last?”

Many children are not allowed, or have time to read for fun, but rather are forced to read books assigned by the teacher or administration. Often, this leaves little time for children to pursue their own interests and foster excitement for learning. Children are required to know more and more earlier and earlier, often when they are not developmentally ready. Many kindergartners today are required to know their letters and numbers before they enter kindergarten (Bennett & Kalish, 2006).

While the goal of homework is to create these “super students” and raise the bar for America, there is no research that supports the notion that homework increases the desire to become a life-long learner. Buell (2004) shares in his book a comment by
Kathy Seal: “when kids play, they are free to experiment and to learn from their experiences without worrying about how well they’re performing…” (p. 23). Research has shown decisively that when children study because they enjoy it, their learning is deeper, richer and longer lasting (Kohn, 2006).

**Effects on Social Inequities**

Homework may exacerbate the achievement differences between students from high and low socio-economic status (Balli, Wedman & Demo, 1997). Cooper (1989) found in his review of research that individual differences, including environment, motivation, age, gender, family structure, etc. must be considered when assigning homework. School is often the environment wherein children feel the safest. Too many children experience violence, poverty, neglect, and emotional abuse at home (Brock, 2014). Given such difficult circumstances at home, it is unrealistic to expect children to fare as well academically (Cooper, 1989). Furthermore, recent economic demands and changes have created more stress on families, including parents working extra jobs and spending more time away from the house (Kralovec & Buell, 2000). Because of these constraints on the family, parents and caregivers often do not have the time to help with their children’s homework. As teachers assign homework, it is under the assumption that all students have the resources and tools available to adequately accomplish the task (Cooper, 1989). However, so many students and families lack the resources including computers, education, and money for school supplies to successfully complete the homework (Balli, Wedman & Demo, 1997; Kralovec & Buell, 2000).
Parent Involvement and Effects on the Family

The topic of homework is often a source of friction between parents and students, students and teachers, and teachers and parents. So often, the tired parent believes their child has completed all of the assigned homework, only to discover at the teacher parent conference that their child’s homework completion rate is below standard. In his review of research, Cooper (2001) found that parental involvement may actually interfere with their children’s learning of a particular subject, especially as new teaching strategies and philosophies develop. Kohn (2006) discusses in his book how homework has negative effects on the parent/child relationship, but equally negative consequences on the family including “nagging, whining, and yelling” (p. 12). Effects on the family are more common when children are struggling. Not only does homework negatively impact the family, but it interferes with how the family and children spend their evenings (Kohn, 2006; Greenfeld, 2013). For example, many children, especially from low-income families, work after school (Cooper, 2001), and many other children are involved in extracurricular activities and sports (Abeles, 2010).

Hofferth and Sandberg (2001) conducted a national survey on how American children spend their time and associations with achievement. Their survey found that 42 percent of families do not get a chance to sit down and eat dinner together on most weekdays. Additionally, the study found that family meals are the strongest predictor of better achievement scores and lower behavioral problems for children 3 years of age to 12. The act of spending time together preparing the meal, engaging in conversation over dinner, and cleaning up provides many benefits to children that homework cannot. For
example, enjoying dinner with the family provides an opportunity for students to learn how to engage in conversation and to learn responsibility by washing dishes or setting the table (Bennett & Kalish, 2006). So often, children lack the skills necessary to participate in a reciprocal conversation with others, which are necessary for employment, participating in social events, and making and maintaining relationships.

With so many parents normalizing homework, few challenge its benefits. Rather, parents often feel that schools and teachers know best (Bennett & Kalish, 2006). Rather than challenge the status quo and examine the impact homework has on children, parents and teachers use threats, bribes, and countless strategies to improve completion (Kohn, 2006). In order to avoid the numerous phone calls and emails sent home by teachers to inquire about missing homework assignments, parents often seek guidance on how to get their children to complete the homework. Homework Tips for Parents, a publication written by the Office of Intergovernmental and Interagency Affairs (2003) in support of No Child Left Behind, offers pages of bullet pointed homework tips and strategies for parents to help improve homework completion. Such tips include rewarding students for high work completion rates, setting up quiet workspaces, giving breaks frequently, helping when they need it, and staying away when they do not (United States Department of Education, 2003). Because homework is entrenched in our culture, few parents challenge the assignment of homework, but rather look to publications, teachers, and other parents for advice, tips, and suggestions on how to motivate children to complete the homework.
Risks to Physical Health

Not only does homework impact children’s emotional and mental health, it has significant negative effects on children’s physical health as well (Kohn, 2006). With increased academic demands comes an increase in work (i.e., text books, homework) to be taken home. According to Negrini, Carabalona, and Sibilla (1999), the average student carries a backpack weighing one fourth of his or her body weight. With this comes chronic back pain (Iyer, 2001). In fact, Iyer reports that six in ten students, ages 9 to 20 reported chronic back pain related to carrying heavy backpacks. Additionally, more than 7,000 emergency room visits in 2001 were related to students carrying heavy backpacks and book bags. Of those 7,000, half occurred in children ages 5 to 14 years old (U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, 2001).

Parents report that their overworked children also show physical signs of stress (Bennett & Kalish, 2006; Kohn 2006). Fearful of not studying enough for tests or doing a good job on assignments, students have a difficult time falling asleep (Abeles, 2010; Bennett & Kalish, 2006). Loss of sleep results in depression, impaired motor function, obesity, impaired cognitive function, disciplinary problems, sleepiness in class, and poor concentration (Bennett & Kalish, 2006; Carpenter, 2001; National Sleep Foundation, 2014). According to the National Sleep Foundation (2014), approximately seventy percent of students do not get the recommended 10-11 hours of sleep.

Social-Emotional Health of Children

As mentioned previously, Francis A. Walker, a political activist and war hero, focused his efforts on abolishing homework (Goodman, 2007). His anti-homework
movement focused on two main issues; the educational value of homework and the perceived threat of homework on the physical, as well as social-emotional, wellbeing of children (Buell, 1989). A review of the literature sufficiently addresses Walker’s first concern regarding homework – that is there is no educational value of homework. But now, his second concern regarding the social-emotional effects of homework must be addressed.

Homework is a one-size must fit all model that fails to take into consideration the fact that students have different abilities, developmental levels (both physically and emotionally), as well as various environmental factors. In particular, homework exacerbates variability amongst those who are privileged (have resources, parents, education, income) verses those that are not (Bennett & Kalish, 2006). Additionally, with an emphasis on tougher standards, teachers often ignore activities that do not directly teach what will be on the standardized tests. Alarmingly, schools and districts are also focusing their resources on the core academics at the expense of important experiences, such as play and socializing (Bennett & Kalish, 2006). With increasing levels of anxiety, stress, and depression amongst students, the shift of perspective must be on improving children’s social and emotional health. While academic achievement is an important component of life, it must not consume children’s lives to where play, fantasy, family, and friends are ignored. The long-term social and emotional effects of academics on children must be addressed.

Homework can have greater negative effects on some children more than others. While the research available regarding the relationship between homework and
achievement for children with learning disabilities and attention-deficit / hyperactivity disorder is sparse (Powers, Werba, Watkins Angelicci & Eraldi, 2006), available research shows that children with ADHD often have significantly more homework difficulties (Epstein, Polloway, Foley, & Patton, 1993). Children with ADHD struggle with homework in many ways, including forgetting to write down the daily homework assignments, rushing through assignments, difficulty to remain on task, and making careless mistakes (Epstein et al., 1993).

**Social-Emotional Health and Achievement**

In the United States, mental illness is a chronic, public health problem, affecting roughly twenty-five percent of adults (Department of Health and Human Services, 2011) and approximately 1 in 5 children and adolescents (Department of Health and Human Services, 1999). With depression, anxiety, and suicide rates on the rise for our youth (Department of Health and Human Services, 2011), now more than ever school districts and personnel must take the social-emotional health needs of all students seriously. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration (2005), approximately 2.2 million children and adolescents aged 12 to 17 reported depressive symptoms; however, 60% did not receive treatment. 5% of all children and adolescents suffer from depression (American Academy of Childhood Adolescent Psychiatry, 2014). Suicide is the third leading cause of death for children ages 15-24 (Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.) and the 6th leading cause of death for children ages 5-14 (American Academy of Childhood Adolescent Psychiatry, 2014). 16% of all students in grades 9th-12th have seriously considered suicide.
Students who have complex mental health needs often “struggle to attend to school, have difficulty completing assignments, and have more frequent conflicts with peers and adults” (Skalski & Smith, 2006). While many research studies have acknowledged the effect poor social-emotional health has on students’ academic success, few studies have examined the effect of academic pressure on children’s social-emotional health.
Chapter 3

METHODS

Research

The information for this project was gathered using several different sources, including electronic databases, books, documentaries, lectures, and websites. Both qualitative and quantitative journal articles were researched on two databases: the Elton B. Stephens CO. (EBSCO) host, the American Psychological Association (PsychINFO), and the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC). Keywords used for the search included “Homework” in combination with other terms such as “social-emotional health,” “achievement,” “best practices,” and others. Several websites were also searched for pertinent information on best practices, and state and federal mandates, current terminology. The websites included the California Department of Education (CDE), the U.S. Department of Education, and the Department of Health and Human Services.

Books that focused on the topic of homework and academics were also examined, including The Case Against Homework: How Homework is Hurting our Children and What We Can Do About It (Bennett & Kalish, 2006), Closing the Book on Homework (Buell, 2004), and The Homework Myth: Why Our Kids Get Too Much of a Bad Thing (Kohn, 2006). Books providing insight into the education system of other countries were also used, including The Smartest Kids in the Word (Ripley, 2013).
Development of the Workshop

This workshop was developed to provide participants with a review of the literature surrounding the effects of academic demands on the social-emotional health of primary and secondary grade students. The secondary purpose of this project is to provide recommendations for developing research-based homework policies and suggestions for implementing policy change within the school. This goal will be met through a six hour training workshop for school districts and/or school sites at the primary and secondary grade levels. Training power points, an example homework policy and template, as well as a sample parent letter regarding the new homework policy will be provided as part of the workshop. Workshop participants will have the opportunity to work with other members from their district and/or school to develop a homework policy based on the training and recommendations provided.

The workshop begins with a review of the literature on academic demands on the social-emotional health of primary and secondary grade students. Specifically, workshop participants will become familiar with the history of increased academic demands, namely homework, a review of international standings based on standardized tests, review of research highlighting the correlation between homework and achievement, and the negative effects of homework on the student-parent relationships, the student’s physical health, and the student’s social-emotional health. Next, workshop participants will watch the documentary, “Race to Nowhere” (Abeles & Congdon, 2010), and then participate in a guided discussion. Following the film, a brief training on developing a research-based homework policy, utilizing example homework policies at both the
primary and secondary level as guides, will be provided. Next, using a homework policy template, workshop participants will work with their team to develop and customize a policy for their district and/or school. Finally, workshop participants will review ways to implement the policy change at their school district and/or site and will be provided with a sample letter addressed to parents regarding the changes in the homework policy.
Chapter 4

RESULTS

The project, *Academic Demands on the Social-Emotional Health of Primary and Secondary Grade Students*, resulted in the creation of a six-hour workshop to be presented to a multi-disciplinary team of general education teachers, special education staff including teachers, counselors, and school psychologists, as well as administration. The information obtained through the literature review was used to develop three training PowerPoint presentations: 1) academic demands on the social-emotional health of primary and secondary grade students; 2) recommendations for developing a research-based homework policy; and, 3) strategies for implementing the new homework policy.

In addition to the training PowerPoints, an example homework policy, along with a sample letter addressed to parents regarding the policy change, was created.

The workshop materials contained in this research project are included in the appendices. This workshop is designed so that any trained school professional can administer it.

**Workshop Objectives**

The primary objectives of this workshop are: 1) to provide workshop participants with a review of the literature surrounding the effects of academic demands on the social-emotional health of primary and secondary grade students; 2) to provide recommendations for developing research-based homework policies; and, 3) to provide suggestions for implementing policy change within the school. These objectives will be met through utilizing the materials to provide a six-hour training workshop for school
districts and/or school sites at the primary and secondary grade levels. Training power points, an example homework policy, as well as sample parent letters regarding the new homework policy will be provided as part of the workshop. Workshop participants will have the opportunity to work with other members from their district and/or school to develop a homework policy based on the training and recommendations provided. Each training power point, including workshop materials, is contained in Appendix A through D, respectively.
Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

Despite the growing body of research demonstrating weak to no correlations between homework and achievement, homework continues to be a highly utilized pedagogical practice at both the primary and secondary grade levels. Additionally, this practice is being used with students as young as kindergarten, even though research shows it has no academic benefit. This comes at a time when there are also intense demands on our youth in their academics, including an increased focus on grades, standardized test scores, and larger amounts of assigned homework. This workshop reviews the research surrounding homework and achievement, as well as the mental-health needs of students as it pertains to this topic. It is clear that more research needs to be done on the effects of increased academic demands on the social-emotional health of both primary and secondary students. The author of this project hopes to implement this workshop in the future, as well as conduct research based on the review of literature, to expand the research in the field regarding the effects of increased academic demands on the social-emotional health of primary and secondary students.

Recommendations

This project provides a convenient and comprehensive workshop for school districts and/or school sites that are interested in developing a research-based homework policy at their school. The presenter of the workshop should take time to review the training PowerPoint presentations and material before leading the workshop.
This workshop is composed of both structured and unstructured activities. During the structured activities, the presenter may need to adapt or modify the content to meet the needs of whom it is designed. During the unstructured activities, the presenter is encouraged to circulate around to each group and offer guidance and support, as needed.

**Conclusion**

With the elimination of county mental health services, the social-emotional health of students is moving to the forefront of our attention in schools. This comes at a time when student’s performance on high stakes testing is at the top of the national and local agenda. Such added pressures to keep up with the tougher standards movement, educators may feel pressure to increase the amount of homework in response to such political demands. Despite increased amounts of homework assigned to primary and secondary students, there is little to no research to support this educational practice.

By way of this workshop, it is the author’s hope that schools at both the primary and secondary level will implement research-based homework policies that prioritize the social-emotional health of their students.
APPENDIX A

Workshop Manual
Academic Demands on the Social-Emotional Health of Primary and Secondary Students

Workshop Manual

Created by Hilary F. Sisson, M.A.

California State University, Sacramento
Introduction

With the authorization of No Child Left Behind, student performance on high stakes testing has moved to the forefront of the education political agenda. In particular, educators have felt added pressures to keep up with the tougher standards movement (Tokarski, 2011). As a result, educators often increase the amount of homework assigned to keep up with such political demands (Kohn, 2006). Despite this growing trend, there is little to no research to support this educational practice. Researchers, such as Cooper (1989) found that the effectiveness of homework depends on the grade level of students and time spent on homework. His results revealed that there was a positive correlation between homework and achievement at the high school level, when students spent between one and two hours on homework. In middle school, Cooper found a positive achievement when students spent up to one hour on homework. In elementary school, there was no correlation.

Due to many parents, students and teachers normalizing increasing academic pressure and homework demands as a part of school life, few question the value of its content or fail to recognize the stress that it may cause (Kohn, 2006). Parents and school personnel are also often unaware, or perhaps minimize, the social and emotional impacts such demands are creating for our youth. Now more than ever, local school districts and school psychologists are playing an integral role in assessing and intervening in the mental health needs of children. This comes at a time when there are also intense demands on our youth in their academics, including an increased focus on grades, standardized test scores, and larger amounts of assigned homework (Kohn, 2006).
This workshop manual and accompanying PowerPoint presentations are designed to provide school district and/or school site staff with a review of the literature surrounding the effects of academic demands on the social-emotional health of primary and secondary grade students. The secondary purpose of this workshop is to provide recommendations for developing research-based homework policies, as well as suggestions for implementing policy change within the school. The information provided in the presentations is based on a literature review performed between September 2014 and February 2015.

**Nature of the Workshop**

This workshop includes three PowerPoint presentations for school district and/or individual school staff, the showing of the documentary “Race to Nowhere” with guided question and answers, two breakout sessions for participants to begin drafting a homework policy, and developing a plan for implementing the new policy. This workshop is expected to last six hours with one 30-minute lunch break and two ten-minute breaks. Training power points, example homework policy, as well as sample parent letters on homework will be provided as part of the workshop.

Before beginning the workshop, the presenter(s) will need to make copies of the PowerPoint slide handouts. Materials provided to participants should include a copy of the PowerPoint presentation as well as any supplementary handouts. In preparation for giving this workshop, the presenter(s) should thoroughly read over the slides and the sample script included with each slide. Presenter(s) may include their own name and
contact information to the initial slide. Additionally, it is recommended that presenter(s)
become familiar with the information cited and referenced at the end of the presentation.

**Guidance for Presenters**

Training included in this workshop is presented as a series of Microsoft
PowerPoint slides. The slides are prepared with all of the information necessary for
presenting the workshops. Presenters may use their own language when presenting;
however, sample language has been provided on the notes section of each slide.

Presenter(s) are provided with a series of questions to guide participants through
after showing the film “Race to Nowhere.” Participants are also provided with a
homework policy template and sample letter to parents. During each breakout session,
the presenter(s) should check-in with each workshop group to answer questions and offer
suggestions, if needed. In addition, presenter(s) should encourage workshop participants
to adapt the template and sample letter to match the personality of their school and families.

The presentation can be performed with one to three presenters. If there are
multiple presenters, a natural place to transition is at each section break. There are no
strict guidelines regarding presenter transitions. A recommended timeline for the training
workshop follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Demands Training PowerPoint</td>
<td>60 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Break</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documentary “Race to Nowhere”</td>
<td>85 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guided Question and Discussion</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch Break</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Duration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Components of a Research-Based Homework Policy PowerPoint</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breakout Session: Draft Homework Policy</td>
<td>60 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Break</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementing Policy Change PowerPoint</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breakout Session: Professional Development and Implementation</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B

Presentation Slides: Academic Demands
Sample Script: *With the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001, student achievement and performance on standardized test scores has became a high priority for teachers. As a result, teaching strategies and pedagogical practices became increasingly focused on teaching to the test. With copious amounts of information, teachers often assign homework to make up for what could not be covered in class. This workshop was developed to provide participants with a review of the literature surrounding the effects of such increased academic demands on the social-emotional health of primary and secondary grade students.*
The History of Homework

- Prior to 20th Century: Pro; important "discipline" for the young student's mind

- 1901: Against: Movement to abolish homework. Emphasis on fresh air and sunshine (Gill & Schlossman, 1996)

- 1950s: Pro; Russians launched Sputnik

Sample script: While there is a growing trend amongst American schools to increase homework, attitudes toward homework have waxed and waned for and against it since the 1900's. In fact, in 1901 homework was legally banned for children under age 15 and limited in public high school. In October of 1957, the launch of Sputnik by the Soviet Union caused panic amongst American families and politicians fearing that American students were falling behind in the national race, specifically in the fields of mathematics and sciences.
- **1960s-1970s**: Against; Seen adverse effects on mental health. Emphasis on social experiences and outdoor recreation (Bennett & Kalish, 2006)

- **1980’s**: Pro; A Nation at Risk
  - Declining test scores / competition in global market

- **Today**: Mixed opinion (though the research tells a different story)

**Sample Script:** Views on homework shifted again during the Woodstock “free spirit” generation of the 1960’s and 1970’s. Parents and activists were again arguing against homework. With a push towards challenging traditional values, parents argued for America’s focus to cultivate children’s social experiences, outdoor recreation, and homework free nights. However, in A Nation at Risk, a report by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, an urgent message was expressed to Americans that world competitors were challenging their commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation. To address these concerns, homework was increased to resolve mediocrity.
Sample Script: Today, as we move in a new era of standardized testing with the implementation of Common Core State Standards, leaders and visionaries in education may battle again over the value of homework.
Sample Script: In 2001, the Program for International Student Assessment (PSIA) was administered to a third of a million teenagers in forty-three countries to measure student's academic and critical thinking skills. Since the implementation of the PSIA, American students continue to fall behind academically in comparison to students around the world. In 2009, American students "ranked 26th on the PISA math test, 17th in science, and 12th in reading."

Ripley, 2013
Sample Script: PISA results indicated that students in public schools in Western Europe, Canada, Mexico, Korea, Japan, and Singapore spent approximately 701 hours per year in school while students in Finland spent only 600 hours in school. Compared to the academic performance of students in the United States, who spend approximately 1,100 hours in school each year, students in these countries performed significantly better. For example, based on 2012 PISA results, the top three ranking countries included Korea, Japan, and Finland, with Finland ranking 3rd behind Korea and Japan. America ranked 21st out of 34 participating countries. Korea, Japan, and Finland also assigned the least amount of homework. Countries who assigned the most homework, Greece, Thailand, and Iran, earned academic scores, on average, in the lowest range.
Sample Script: In Finland students begin school at 7 years old, have less homework, have shorter school days, and take only one standardized test during their final year of high school. Additionally, Finland places more emphasis on play than in America. While almost 40% of schools in America have reduced, or even eliminated, recess, Finland follows every class with a 15-minute recess break.
Sample Script: Harris Cooper, a Professor of Education at Duke University, defines homework as "tasks assigned to students by school teachers that are meant to be carried out during non school hours." As well-known researcher, professor, and proponent of homework, Cooper conducted a study on the effects of homework. This study, funded by the National Science Foundation, included the review of 120 studies on homework. His findings revealed that the effectiveness of homework depended on the grade level of the student. His results revealed that for high school students, there was a positive correlation between homework and achievement. In elementary school, there was no correlation.
Meta-analysis of 50,000 research articles, 15 year study (Hattie, 2009)

Ranked 94th in impact on learning (3rd was RTI)

Overall effect between homework and achievement:
- \( d = 0.50 \) for high school
- \( d = 0.008 \) for elementary

Sample Script: Hattie synthesized over 800 meta-analyses. Results of his synthesis resulted in a ranking of factors that have the greatest impact on learning in the classroom. Based on his rankings, the top ten strategies included 1) self-reported grades/student expectations, 2) Piagetian programs (teaching methods based on Jean Piaget’s theory of cognitive development and his concept of children’s stages of learning), 3) response to intervention. On this ranking, homework placed 94th, with an overall effect size of 0.29; however, effect size varied by grade.
- **Highschool:**
  - + relationship did not appear < 1 hour
  - 1-2 hours, relationship increased, up to 2 hours
  - Beyond 2 hours, relationship declines

- **Middle School**
  - +, small relationship < 1 hour
  - No relationship after 1 hour

- **Elementary School**
  - No relationship/negative relationship

Cooper, 1989

Presenter(s) should review the relationship between amount of homework and grade level.


- Significant differences in effort setting up and planning homework assignments (Cooper, 1989)

- 85% of teachers report problems getting students to complete and turn in homework (Cooper & Nye, 1994)

- Few teacher credential programs review the research regarding the effectiveness of homework (Bennett & Kalish, 2006; Cooper, 1989)

**Sample Script:** While the assigning of homework is rather common practice amongst teachers, teacher training on how to develop, assign, and utilize homework is not. In his review of research, Cooper found that teachers take varying amounts of time and effort setting up an assignment. For the few who were lucky enough to cover the theoretical purposes of homework in their graduate training, such as practice, preparation, extension, and integration, few programs reviewed research showing the effectiveness, or rather ineffectiveness of homework, specifically in terms of amount and type across grade level.
89% of assigned homework appears to be drill and practice (Trautwein et al., 2009; Cooper & Nye, 1994)

Drill and practice assignments were associated with negative developments in homework effort and achievement (Trautwein et al., 2009)

Not effective when complex (Cooper, 1989; Hattie, 2009)

Intrinsic motivation is associated with improved achievement (Kohn, 2006).

Sample Script: Often, teachers report that the purpose of homework is to practice what the children learned in class. Drill and practice worksheets appear to be the most popular type of homework assigned to students, often comprising 89% of assigned homework. Interestingly, research found drill and practice assignments were associated with comparatively negative developments in homework effort and achievement. Other research showed that intrinsic motivation was associated with improved academic achievement.
Sample Script: Homework may exacerbate the achievement differences between students from high and low socio-economic status. Individual differences, including environment, motivation, age, gender, family structure, etc. must be considered when assigning homework.
Homework may improve study skills, foster independence, build responsibility, and provide communication link between home and school (Cooper & Nye, 1994).

No research has been done to date to critically examine the non-academic benefits of homework such as responsibility, self-discipline, organization (Cooper & Nye, 1994; Bennet & Kalish, 2006; Kohn, 2006).

While there are many claims that homework may do all of the above, they are judgments, not facts (Bennet & Kalish, 2006; Kohn, 2006).

Sample Script: Pro-homework individuals state homework may improve study skills and improve attitudes toward school, foster independence, build responsibility, and provide an opportunity to create a communication link between home and school by providing parents with the opportunity to help their children. However, other researchers find that research fails to look at non-academic effects such as study habits or participation in community activities. While there are many claims regarding potential benefits of homework, all claims appear to be judgments rather than facts. Furthermore, no research has critically examined the non-academic benefits of homework, such as responsibility, self-discipline, organization, etc.
Parental involvement may actually interfere with their student’s learning (Cooper, 2001)
- New teaching strategies and philosophies may be unfamiliar to parents.
- Results in nagging, whining, and yelling (Kohn, 2006)
- Affects the family, particularly if children need to work or parents work 2-3 jobs (Kohn, 2006; Greenfeld, 2013)
- Family meals are a strong predictor of achievement (Bennett & Kalish, 2006)

Sample Script: The topic of homework is often a source of friction between parents and students. Parental involvement may actually interfere with their children’s learning of a particular subject, especially as new teaching strategies and philosophies develop. Homework has equally negative consequences on the family including nagging, whining, and yelling. Effects on the family are more common when children are struggling.
Research shows when children study because they enjoy it, their learning is deeper, richer and longer lasting (Seal, 2001 as cited in Buell, 2004)

For primary grade students, play allows children to experiment and learn from their experiences (Buell, 2004)

Play allows children to be creative (Suskin, 2012)

Sample Script: While the goal of homework is to create these “super students” and raise the bar for America, there is no research that supports the notion that homework increases the desire to become a life-long learner. Research has shown decisively that when children study because they enjoy it, their learning is deeper, richer and longer lasting.
Sample Script: Not only does homework impact children’s emotional and mental health, it has significant negative effects on children’s physical health as well. For example, researchers find that when the assigned homework does not match the lesson, students may feel frustrated, stressed, and develop negative attitudes toward school. Additionally, for students who are involved in other activities, such as work, clubs, and/or sports, homework produces extra stress. Lastly, homework interferes with student’s ability to learn teamwork, socialize with other kids, and relieve stress and build self-esteem.
- Average backpack weighs one fourth of a student’s body weight (Iyer, 2000)
- 6 in 10 students, ages 9-20 report chronic back pain
- Sleep deprivation
  - Sleep deprivation results in depression, impaired motor function, obesity, impaired cognitive function, disciplinary problems, sleepiness in class, and poor concentration (Bennett & Kalish, 2006; Carpenter, 2001; National Sleep Foundation)

Sample Script: Parents report that their overworked children also show physical signs of stress. Fearful of not studying enough for tests or doing a good job on assignments, students have a difficult time falling asleep. Loss of sleep results in depression, impaired motor function, obesity, impaired cognitive function, disciplinary problems, sleepiness in class, and poor concentration.
25% of adults in the US has a diagnosed mental illness
1 in 5 children and adolescents have a diagnosed mental illness
Elimination of AB 114 puts responsibility of treatment child and adolescent mental illness on the school

(Department of Health and Human Services, 2011)

Sample Script: In the United States, mental illness is a chronic, public health problem, affecting roughly twenty-five percent of adults and approximately 1 in 5 children and adolescents.
- Stress
- Anxiety
- Cheating
- Disengagement / Dropping out
- Drug/alcohol Abuse
- Depression and suicide

(Kohn, 2006; Negrini, Carabalona, & Sibilla, 1999; Iyer, 2000)

Sample Script: Not only does homework have negative effects on student’s physical health, but it has a significant impact on their social-emotional health. With increasing levels of anxiety, stress, and depression amongst students, the shift of perspective must be on improving children’s social and emotional health. While academic achievement is an important component of life, it must not consume children’s lives to where play, fantasy, family, and friends are ignored. The long-term social and emotional effects of academics on children must be addressed.
• 2.2 million children and adolescents ages 12-17 reported depressive symptoms

• 60% of those did not receive treatment

• 5% of all children and adolescents suffer from depression

(American Academy of Childhood Adolescent Psychiatry, 2014)

Sample Script: According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration, approximately 2.2 million children and adolescents aged 12 to 17 reported depressive symptoms; however, 60% did not receive treatment. 5% of all children and adolescents suffer from depression.
Suicide is the third leading cause of death for children ages 15-24

Suicide is the 6th leading cause of death for children 5-14

16% of all students in grades 9th through 12th have seriously considered suicide

(Department of Health and Human Services; American Academy of Childhood Adolescent Psychiatry)

Sample Script: Suicide is the third leading cause of death for children ages 15-24 and the 6th leading cause of death for children ages 5-14. 16% of all students in grades 9th-12th have seriously considered suicide.
Students who have complex social-emotional health needs
- Struggle attending to class lecture
- Have difficulty completing assignments
- Have frequent conflicts with peers and adults

(Skaalski & Smith, 2006)

Research on effects of homework on social-emotional health is limited and should be furthered explored

Sample Script: Students who have complex mental health needs often struggle to attend to school, have difficulty completing assignments, and have more frequent conflicts with peers and adults. While many research studies have acknowledged the effect poor social-emotional health has on students' academic success, few studies have examined the effect of academic pressure on children's social-emotional health.
Presenter(s) should ask and address all questions. When all questions have been answered, allow workshop participants to take a 10-minute break before showing the documentary, Race to Nowhere.
APPENDIX C

Presentation Slides: Components of a Research-Based Homework Policy
Presenter(s) should welcome participants back from lunch. Inform them that this portion of the training will focus on developing examining components of a research-based homework policy. At the end of this PowerPoint, workshop participants will be working with their team to begin creating their own homework policy.
Schools that have eliminated homework, or limited homework to after-school reading:

- Bloomfield Middle School, Bloomfield Missouri
- Grant Elementary School, Glenrock, Wyoming
- Helendale Elementary and Middle Schools, Helendale, CA
- VanDamme Academy, Aliso Viejo, CA
- Nottingham East Academy, Nottingham, UK
- Oak Knoll Elementary School, Menlo Park, CA; and
- Tiffin Boys’ School in Kingston, London, UK

Sample Script: There are many schools across the nation that have adopted healthy homework policies. While we encourage no homework, with the exception of reading, for our primary students, the examples that follow will highlight how they implemented homework policies. Here are seven different schools who have eliminated homework, or limited homework to after-school reading.
- **Beacon Day School** (Oakland, California) states: "Beacon recognizes that families – however constituted – are partners in each child's education. It is important that children are able to participate in family activities and that parents and guardians determine how to spend time with their children instead of having to do schoolwork."

- **Raymond Park Middle School** (Indianapolis) states: "Perhaps the most important purpose homework can serve is to improve reading skills and develop an appreciation for reading. Much current and validated research shows that homework has little impact on improving achievement in the elementary grades. The one exception is reading."

Sample Script: Here are two examples of schools who have implemented homework policies. Beacon Day School specifically stated in their policy that they want children to be able to participate in family activities. Additionally, they note that parents and guardians have the ability to determine how they spend their time with their children. Raymond Park Middle School specifically addresses the research regarding the benefit of reading.
• **Sparkhawk School** (Massachusetts) eliminated homework up to second grade, delayed it for third grade until January and enacted time restraints for fourth through sixth grades.

• **Colchester School District** (Vermont) makes homework count for only 10% of a grade, instead of the previous 40%. In addition, under the district’s new policy, students are no longer kept in from recess if they do not do their homework.

Sample Script:  Here are two more examples of changed homework policies. Sparkhawk School in Massachusetts eliminated homework, but only up to second grade. Colchester School District set a limit on the weight of homework on a student’s grade. In addition, the district stated that students are no longer allowed to miss recess if they do not do their homework.
- Set limits on the amount of homework assigned by teachers
- Provide guidelines on the type of homework assigned
- Offer alternatives to homework for both teachers and parents
- Educate teachers, parents, and administration on the research findings regarding homework

**Sample Script:** Why is it important to develop a homework policy? A homework policy sets guidelines for administration, teachers and parents regarding your school or school district’s stance on homework. A homework policy sets limits on the amount of homework assigned by teachers. This will vary depending on the grade level of the student. It provides guidelines on the type of homework assigned. As you will see in the National PTA Resolution, as well as the Race to Nowhere Healthy Homework Tool Kit, homework should encourage the spirit of learning, be student directed, and promote a balanced schedule. A homework policy should also provide background on the issue of homework, along with the research influencing change. Lastly, a homework policy should offer alternatives to homework for teachers and parents. Alternatives will be discussed later in this PowerPoint.
Sample Script: Here is an example outline of a homework policy. This is just a suggested outline, your district and/or school may wish to include more or arrange the outline in a different order. You and your team will have an opportunity to lay out a homework policy outline after this training.
• **Purpose**
  - Introduce the topic – homework policy change
  - Describe the problem – increased academic demands effect the social-emotional health of students

• **History of Homework**
  - Provide a brief summary of the historical context of homework
    - Use information from today’s training
    - Use information from National PTA Homework Resolution

**Sample Script:** It is important to note in your homework policy the purpose of the policy as well as the history of homework. Here are examples of information to include under each section. Please refer to the National PTA Resolution for more examples.
• Research
  - Educate parents, teachers, and administration regarding the research on the effects of homework on achievement.
  - Highlight the effectiveness per grade level.
  - Provides a rationale for making a change in homework policy.

Sample Script: It is important to include a review of the research regarding the effectiveness of homework. Please reference the first training PowerPoint, as well as the National PTA Resolution.
- **Physical Health**
  - Important to note the effect homework and increased academic demands has on student's physical health.
  - Examples may include, but are not limited to:
    - Stress
    - Sleep Deprivation
    - Physical Injuries
    - Drug Use
    - Inattention

**Sample Script:** *Again, utilizing the first training PowerPoint, as well as the provided resources, highlight in your homework policy the impact homework has on the physical health of students.*
Social-Emotional Health

- Important to note the effect homework and increased academic demands has on student's social-emotional health.

- Examples may include, but are not limited to:
  - Depression
  - Anxiety
  - Suicide
  - Mental illness

Sample Script: Include in your homework policy the effect of homework on students' social-emotional health. This section should include statistics on depression and suicide rates of students, dependent on the grade level of your students. It may be important to discuss your school's role in providing mental health services to students.
- No homework for students grade kindergarten through 6th grade
- Encourage, but not mandate, 20-30 minutes of reading every night
- Should homework be assigned, it should be the exception – not the rule
- Loss of recess should not be a consequence for missing homework/reading

Sample Script: Here are example homework guidelines for primary grade students. These are suggested guidelines that you may include in your policy. These should be expanded upon in your policy. Each school district and/or school may wish to develop your own guidelines that differ from the ones provided above. While they may differ, they should continue to be research-based.
"I want to be a lawyer - they still get recess."

Presenter(s): Read quote out loud to participants
• Students grades 7th and 8th grade should not have more than 60 minutes of homework each night

• Students grades 9th – 12th should not have more than 120 minutes of homework each night

• Homework should not be assigned over the weekend

• Homework should not be assigned over holiday breaks

• Parents should have an “opt-out” opportunity

Sample Script: Here are example homework guidelines for secondary grade students. These are suggested guidelines that you may include in your policy. These should be expanded upon in your policy. Each school district and/or school may wish to develop your own guidelines that differ from the ones provided above. While they may differ, they should continue to be research-based.
• **Family Time**
  - Help prepare the dinner
  - Help with chores around the house
  - Watch a movie together then discuss main characters, theme, how they connect with film, etc.

• **Current Events**
  - Read an article about a national or local current event and report on it

**Sample Script:** Many parents and educators often worry about what children will do if they have “homework free nights.” The next two slides offer alternatives to homework that may be implemented for both primary and secondary grade students. This is not a complete list. Each district and/or school is encouraged to add to this list.
- Extra-curricular Activities
  - Encourage students to join an after school activity of interest, such as a sports team, club, hobby, playing music, volunteering, etc.

- Friendships and Play
  - Encourage students to spend time with their same aged peers, playing games or hanging out
  - Encourage (especially for primary grades) students to spend time outside playing with peers
Sample Script: At this time, we would like for each team to work together to begin drafting a homework policy based on the information you have received so far. In addition, an example homework policy has been provided for you from the National PTA. Furthermore, each team may wish to visit the Race to Nowhere website for more information and to browse their Health Homework Tool Kit. Each team has 60 minutes. I(We) will be walking around the room if anyone has questions regarding the activity.
APPENDIX D

Presentation Slides: Implementing Policy Change
Implementing Policy Change
• Start with School Staff
  - General Education Teachers
  - Special Education Teachers
  - Administration
  - Support Staff

• Screening of Race to Nowhere

• Guided Questions and Discussion

Sample Script: Prior to introducing the new and/or revised homework policy, it may be helpful to host a professional development day in which all school staff, including general education teachers, special education teachers, administration, and support staff are invited for a screening of the documentary Race to Nowhere. After the movie screening, guide participants in a discussion and question session regarding their response to the film (see Appendix E).
Introduce the Reason for the Homework Policy
- Background of the Problem
- History of Homework
- National Achievement
- Research Highlighting the Effects of Homework on Achievement
- Risks to Physical Health
- Social-Emotional Health of Children

Know the Facts
- Be Prepared to Answer Questions from Participants

Collaborative Efforts
- Ask for Participants for their Help

Sample Script: It is important to set up the problem, or reason, for the change of policy. This would include the background of the problems, history of homework, national achievement, research highlighting the effects of homework on achievement, risks to physical health, and the effects on the social-emotional health of children. Slides reviewed earlier in the workshop may be used and/or edited for your own training purposes. Once the problem, or reason, has been reviewed, take some time to take questions and concerns from participants. Be prepared for tough questions. After all questions have been answered, presenters should ask for volunteers to review the homework policy before it is fully implemented. By asking for others to participate, you increase your chances of buy-in.
- **Know What is Going on in Your Community**
  - What is your school's and/or district's homework policy?
  - Which districts have implemented homework policies?
  - How do teachers and parents feel about this issue?
  - What are the facts/arguments for the "pro-homework" side?

**Sample Script:** When introducing the topic to staff and parents, it may be helpful to become familiar with the homework policy of other schools and/or districts in your area. Before giving this training to staff and parents/guardians, do some research to see what schools in your community already have homework policies, and ask them for recommendations for implementation.
Introduce the Homework Policy to Parents/Guardians

- Once the policy change has been introduced to school staff, introduce the change to parents/guardians and students (high school)

Host a screening of “Race to Nowhere”

Lead parents/guardians through a guided question and answer regarding the film

Sample Script: Once the new homework policy change has been introduced to school staff, it is important to also introduce the homework policy change to parents/guardians. Invite parents/guardians to a screening of the film, “Race to Nowhere.” High school students may also be invited to the movie screening. After the showing of the film, lead parents/guardians through a guided discussion regarding their response to the film.
Introduce the Reason for the Homework Policy
- Background of the Problem
- History of Homework
- National Achievement
- Research Highlighting the Effects of Homework on Achievement
- Risks to Physical Health
- Social-Emotional Health of Children

Know the Facts
- Be Prepared to Answer Questions from Participants

Collaborative Efforts
- Ask for Participants for their Help

Sample Script: It is important to set up the problem, or reason, for the change of policy. This would include the background of the problems, history of homework, national achievement, research highlighting the effects of homework on achievement, risks to physical health, and the effects on the social-emotional health of children. Slides reviewed earlier in the workshop may be used and/or edited for your own training purposes. Once the problem, or reason, has been reviewed, take some time to take questions and concerns from participants. Be prepared for tough questions. After all questions have been answered, presenters should ask for volunteers to review the homework policy before it is fully implemented. By asking for others to participate, you increase your chances of buy-in.
• Have a Voice – encourage parents to talk with their child’s teacher regarding their “homework policy.”

• Set limits on time allowed on homework (if assigned)

• If homework is to be assigned, require quality over quantity

Sample Script: Often, parents rarely challenge the assignment of homework by their children’s teacher. When introducing the homework policy to them, encourage parents/guardians to have their own homework policy. For example, if a teacher continues to assign homework, parents may wish to set limits on the time allowed on homework and the amount of homework assigned. A good time for parents to discuss this is during back to school night.
Prior to implementing the homework policy, review grades, disciplinary records, and test performance (both National and per class).

After implementation of the changed policy, continue to collect and chart data collected.

**Sample Script:** In order to gain more buy-in and determine the effectiveness of the homework policy, your school and/or district may wish to collect data on grades, disciplinary records, and test performance before and after implementation of the policy.
Be "okay" with small changes – still a step in the right direction.

Listen to suggestions generated by teachers and parents – helps with buy-in

Solutions may look different for each grade level, teacher, parent, and student.

**Sample Script:** When implementing a new policy, it is important to not get discouraged if there is push back or resistance to change. Be "okay" with small changes. This could look differently per school and per teacher. Perhaps one teacher reduces her nightly homework from 20 minutes to 10 minutes, another teacher stops assigning homework on the weekend, and your kindergarten teacher stops holding kids in from recess for forgetting homework. In addition to being "okay" with small change, it is important to create buy-in with both teacher and parents by listening to their suggestions.
- Check-in with Teachers and Parents/Guardians Frequently
  - Staff Meetings
  - Surveys
  - Emails

- Examine Student Progress on National and Classroom Tests/Quizzes

- Revise Homework Policy, If Necessary

Sample Script: Following the implementation of the homework policy, it is important to check-in with your teachers, administration, parents/guardians, and even the students to monitor its effect on all. This may be completed via staff meetings, surveys, emails, and stepping inside classrooms to talk with staff and students. It is also important to ensure that student progress has not declined. This may be done by monitoring students’ performance in the classroom.
End the Race – Facilitation Guide and Companion Resource to the Film Race to Nowhere by Vicki Abeles (2011)


**Sample Script:** Here are resources you may share with teachers, staff, and parents/guardians.
APPENDIX E

Guided Questions for “Race to Nowhere”
Guided Questions and Discussion following “Race to Nowhere”
(Activity and questions adapted from the book: End the Race – Facilitation Guide and Companion Resource to the Film Race to Nowhere by Kim Westheimer, Vicki Abeles, and Sara Truebridge)

Time: 15 minutes following the film Race to Nowhere

Objective: Increase dialogue among workshop participants regarding academic and social-emotional health issues raised in the film.

Instructions: After the film, have workshop participants discuss the following questions with other members of their team. Presenter(s) should walk to each group to help facilitate question and answers.

Question: What resonated for you in this film?

Question: Do you think any of the situations described by the individuals interviewed are similar to the students or staff at your school? Why or why not?

Question: How, if at all, did watching this film motivate you to make changes in your school?

Question: After watching this film, what changes would you like to see in your school or school district’s homework policy?
APPENDIX F

Sample Change in Homework Policy Letters for Parents
Sample Letter to Parents of Primary Grade Students

To the Parents of ___________ ___________,

The purpose of this letter is to inform you of ______________. Elementary School’s updated homework policy for primary grade students. As of ______________, our district/school initiated a policy of no homework for all primary grade students, with the exception of daily reading.

Our decision to implement a no homework policy was guided by research. Available research indicates that there is no correlation between homework and achievement for students at the primary grade level.

In an effort to improve the overall well being of our students, we encourage parents to think of alternatives to homework. Alternatives could include being involved in sports or clubs, cooking dinner, playing word/cards/board games with family, and helping out with chores.

For more information on this updated policy change, please contact me directly at ________________.

Thank you,

Teacher/Principal
Sample Letter to Parents of Secondary Grade Students

To the Parents of __________________________,

The purpose of this letter is to inform you of _______________ Middle/High School’s updated homework policy for secondary grade students. As of ____________________________, our district/school initiated the following homework policy for all secondary students:

- Grade 7 and 8 up to 60 minutes each night
- Grades 9-12 no more than two hours each night

We have initiated communication structures among teachers to ensure this limit is not exceeded. In addition, we are working with teachers so that they coordinate project deadlines and testing dates so students do not have multiple assignments and/or tests on a single day or following school holidays or breaks.

Our decision to implement a no homework policy was guided by research. Available research indicates that there is a minimal correlation between homework and achievement for students at the secondary grade level.

In an effort to improve the overall well being of our students, we encourage parents to think of alternatives to homework. Alternatives could include being involved in sports or clubs, cooking dinner, playing word/cards/board games with family, obtaining an after school job, or helping out with chores.

For more information on this updated policy change, please contact me directly at ____________________________.

Thank you,

Principal/Super Attendant
APPENDIX G

Homework Policy Example
National PTA Resolution

Adoption of Healthy Homework Guidelines

July 24, 2012

“People [ask], ‘Doesn’t doing more homework mean getting better scores?’ The answer quite simply is no.”

—Professor Gerald LeTendre, Pennsylvania State University
Co-author of National Differences, Global Similarities: World Culture and the Future of Schooling
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SUMMARY

Today, there is a growing national discussion about homework among education stakeholders, which questions the ability of take-home schoolwork to measurably support, reinforce or augment classroom learning. Over the last decade, a number of credible, academic studies have shown that homework is not only limited in its utility as a tool for increasing a student's subject-matter retention or enhancing his or her test performance, but that it is also a source of acute stress and academic disengagement for students across grade levels.

The research further demonstrates that time required for homework is time made unavailable for other activities that are critical to a child's health, learning and development. This includes time for family engagement, physical exercise, community activities and reading for pleasure.

We urge the PTA to adopt a series of guidelines that will assist educators in improving their approach to designing and assigning homework in our classrooms. With the support of the National PTA, we can embrace—nationally, and with one voice—a set of homework guidelines that re-prioritize student learning, health and engagement.
HISTORICAL CONTEXT FOR HOMEWORK

"Unlike many other central components of American schooling, which remained largely unchanged over long periods of time, homework has been distinguished by major shifts in policy and practice over the course of the century."¹

Over the course of the last century, the validity and usefulness of homework to learning, childhood health and development and academic performance has repeatedly been questioned:

• In 1901, California Civil Code was updated to state, “No pupil under the age of 15 years in any grammar or primary school shall be required to do any home study.”²

• The Physicians Against Homework organization in the 1920s and 1930s recommended that children receive between 6-7 hours a day of fresh air and sunshine to be healthy.

• By 1930, the anti-homework movement had grown so strong that the Society for the Abolition of Homework was founded, largely galvanized by the writings of Edward Bok, editor of the Ladies Home Journal.³

• In 1957, the launch of Sputnik increased attention to homework and education policy. The National Defense Education Act was passed in 1958 to promote math and science education, and longstanding policies concerning limits on the amount of homework that could be assigned in schools were overturned.⁴

• In 1966, the National Education Association recommended that, “[...] children in the early elementary school period have no homework; limited amounts of homework – not more than an hour a day – for upper elementary and junior high and in secondary school no more than one and one half hour.”⁵

• In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education released a report entitled “A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform”. The report noted the sub-standard test scores of US students in relation to global counterparts, and identified a decrease in the amount of homework. As a result, the commission recommended "students in high schools should be assigned far more homework than is now the case".⁶

• A study that looked at the amount of homework assigned between 1981 to 1997 found that:
  - The amount of homework assigned to students age 6 to 9 nearly tripled during that time
  - Assigned homework increased from about 44 minutes a week to more than 2 hours a week
  - Homework for children ages 9 to 11 increased from about 2 hours and 50 minutes to more than 3 and one half hours per week.\(^7\)

• In the last dozen years, passage of No Child Left Behind and national emphasis on standardized test scores have ratcheted up the pressure for students and teachers. At the same time, high-achieving high school students are taking more Advanced Placement courses to earn extra points and push past a 4.0 grade point average so they can get a seat at increasingly competitive universities. This means long hours of homework, often into the wee hours.\(^8\) Duke University's Professor Harris Cooper suggests that educators may feel pressure to assign more homework in order to maintain test scores.\(^9\)

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THE FACTS ABOUT HOMEWORK

1. Whereas: Homework has Damaging Effects on Children and Families

Emotional and Physical Consequences

- **Sleep deprivation:** Excessive homework forces students to choose between completing assignments and sleep. 80% of teens don’t get the recommended 9.25 hours of sleep each night. 70% of children ages 5 to 12 don’t get the recommended 10 to 11 hours of sleep.10

- **Stress:** 9- to 13-year-olds said they were more stressed by academics than any other stressor—even bullying or family problems.11 And according to a study in 2005 by the Lucile Packard Foundation for Children’s Health, 70% of Bay Area parents reported that their 9- to 13-year-olds suffered “moderate to high levels of stress,” and that schoolwork or homework was the most significant contributor.12

- **Loss of downtime and play time:** Homework limits the time students can spend on leisure, physical activities and community activities that can impart important academic and non-academic lessons.

- **Compromised mental health:** Academic stressors are associated with increases in depressive and aggressive symptoms in adolescents.13 In contrast, according to research published this year by the American Psychological Association, reducing academic pressure increases cognitive ability and academic success in students.14

- **Drug use:** In a recent *New York Times* article, Alan Schwarz collects over 200 personal stories of students using “study drugs” such as Adderall. Most state that their struggle with study drugs is “a problem rooted not in drugs per se, but with the pressure that compelled some youngsters to use them.”15

Cheating and Academic Disengagement

- Any activity can remain rewarding only for a limited time. It follows that if students are required to spend too much time on academic material, they eventually will become bored with it and disengage.

- Despite several studies that suggest reading for pleasure is a better predictor of test scores than quantity of homework, a 2006 Scholastic study found that reading for pleasure decreased dramatically after age 8. Furthermore, parents identified homework as the number one reason their children didn’t read more.16

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• Cheating: Homework—in particular when it is graded—can lead to cheating, either through copying of assignments or receiving assistance with homework that involves more than tutoring.17

Exacerbation of Social Inequalities
• Students from lower-socioeconomic homes are likely to have more difficulty completing homework than their more affluent peers.
• Poorer students are also more apt to work after school or may not have a quiet place to do assignments.18
• “Students whose parents understand the homework and can help them with it at home have a major advantage over students whose parents are unable or unavailable to help.”19
• A review of more than 50 studies on parent involvement in homework found little evidence of benefits from homework when parents are involved with the work.20

2. Whereas: Homework Lacks Many Benefits Commonly Attributed to it

While the research is mixed, most studies fail to show that homework positively impacts academic performance. Furthermore, in studies in which a relationship between homework and academic performance has been established, only correlation has been found; causality has yet to be established.

Conflicting Data; No Proven Causal Relationship Between Homework and School Achievement
• It is extremely difficult to isolate the effects of homework on school achievement. Studies rely on self-reporting and parental reporting and often include “hidden” variables that are difficult to control for.
• Much of the current debate around homework focuses on the quantity of time spent on it, rather than the quality of homework being done. Furthermore, much of the research on homework is ambiguous and depends largely on the students tracked and for how the study tracks them.21
• A late 1970s report identified that “exceptional” teachers (based on recommendations, awards, or media coverage) tended to give their students less homework and more choice about their assignments than average teachers.22
• Duke University’s Dr. Harris Cooper, a leading researcher on homework, has found that the association between time spent on homework and academic achievement is not as strong and he and other researchers once concluded.23

A 2006 study by Duke University's Program in Education found:
- No academic benefit of homework in elementary school
- Diminishing returns for middle and high school students as the hours spent doing homework increased\(^{24}\)
- According to a 2011 study, homework in science, English, and history has "little to no impact" on student test scores\(^{25}\)

**Homework Does Not Improve Test Scores**

- A recent Australian study shows too much homework can actually lower test scores. Data indicates an inverse relationship between the time spent on homework and scores on a standardized test called the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA)\(^{26}\).
- Numerous countries that outperform the United States on the international TIMMS exam, which assesses student performance in math and science, typically assign their students far less homework than we do here\(^{27}\).
- In an analysis of test results on the TIMMS 2003, there is a correlation between higher mathematics test scores in a given country and less homework being assigned to students in that country. Conversely, students in countries that assigned the most homework tended to score lower on the TIMMS math test\(^{28}\).
- Anecdotally, a number of AP teachers who have reduced or eliminated homework have seen their students' AP scores increase.
- A Menlo Park, CA principal who runs a "no homework school" continues to see standardized test scores rise.

**Current Homework Recommendations Do Not Reflect Research**

- A commonly embraced guideline for assigning homework is the so-called "10-minute rule", originally developed by Duke University's Dr. Harris Cooper, who suggests that the amount of time spent on homework should increase by 10 minutes per night per grade level, beginning with 10 minutes assigned per night in first grade.
- This guideline is not grounded in research, as Dr. Harris Cooper has openly stated.
- This guideline is grounded in the questionable (but often unquestioned) premise that homework must be assigned each day, and therefore must be limited.
- Furthermore, this guideline fails to recognize that time spent on a given homework assignment can vary substantially from one child to the next; what is a 10-minute assignment for one child may be a 30-minute assignment for another.


3. Whereas: Homework is Inconsistent with the “Whole Child”

- Homework often reduces a child’s opportunity to spend after-school hours pursuing crucial developmental tasks of non-academic life: sleep, friendship, family time, play, exercise and downtime. Furthermore, homework often precludes the kind of social connection and community involvement that prepares students for a more balanced, fulfilling adult life – activities like playing with siblings, contributing to family chores or volunteering in the neighborhood. 29

- If homework causes stress, it does not create a healthy sense of self. As Dr. David Elkind suggests, “The best preparation for a bad experience is a good experience. The best defense against stress is a healthy sense of self. [...] What children need at home is time for exploration and emotional development, and too often what they are getting is academic work. Parents should not spend their time or their children’s time duplicating what the schools do.” 30

- Unstructured play and downtime enhances brain development and learning. 31

- Between 1981 and 1997, children lost 12 hours of weekly free time, while time spent on homework increased by 50 percent. 32

- Learning to play a musical instrument, joining a club, playing a sport, and volunteering are all beneficial to children’s development as a person. However, if there is too much homework, it follows that there is no time for these types of activities. As Bill Damon notes, young people often find their calling in life through these extra-curricular activities, so having time to engage in them is crucial. 33

4. Whereas: Homework is an Encroachment on Parental Rights

- Children spend 6 to 7 hours per day in school; parents need flexibility in determining how their children should spend the remainder of their day.

- Too much homework squeezes out time for other activities. As teacher Steve Phelps states, “In all honesty, the students are compelled to be in my class for 48 minutes a day. If I can’t get done in 48 minutes what I need to get done, then I really have no business intruding on their family time.” 34

- Homework often encroaches on family mealtimes. According to a study conducted by Columbia University, teens who have fewer than three meals per week with their families are one and a half

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times more likely to report getting mostly Cs or lower grades in school than teens who have five to seven family dinners per week.\textsuperscript{35}

- The same Columbia University study also found that children who consistently report having dinner with their parents are less likely to smoke, drink or use drugs.

- Shared family meals are forums for developing ideas, conversational and critical thinking skills, and aptitude in social and relational situations. As Yale Wishnik, past director for the California Teachers Association Institute for Teaching and author of the new book \textit{From a Culture of Dependency to a Culture of Success}, writes: "We learn more at the kitchen table than anywhere else.".

BENEFITS TO CREATING A NEW FRAMEWORK FOR HOMEWORK

1. Reduced Homework Improves Health, Learning, Engagement, and Integrity
   • According to research published this year by the American Psychological Association, reducing academic pressure increases cognitive ability and academic success in students. 36
   • Students who are not academically burned out tend to have higher grades and better self-esteem. 37
   • If homework is not seen as valuable or meaningful, it may turn students off from school and learning, potentially decreasing graduation rates. 38 It follows that reducing homework may increase graduation rates.
   • A reduced workload at home values integrity. It’s difficult to monitor how often or to what extent parents are helping their children with homework. This can often blur the lines between what level of help is appropriate, and can lead to cheating. Studies show that as many as 75-90% of high school students cheat. 39

2. A new framework for homework helps develop well-rounded children ready for the global challenges of the 21st century
   • Less homework means increased time for family meals and conversation, community, arts, and downtime, all essential for developing creative adults.
   • As education researcher Yong Zhao states, “To cultivate creative and entrepreneurial talents [...] requires a paradigm shift — from employee-oriented education to entrepreneur-oriented education, from prescribing children’s education to supporting their learning, and from reducing human diversity to a few employable skills to enhancing individual talents.” 40
   • Countries that outperform the US on the TIMMS exam assign less homework: “Finland has ranked at or near the top in all three competencies on every survey since 2000. [...] Finland’s success is especially intriguing because Finnish schools assign less homework and engage children in more creative play.” 41

3. Reduced Homework Benefits the Classroom
   • Changing policies encourages schools to rethink the practice of assigning homework to cover the lesson.
   • Limiting homework assignments frees up class time for instruction and engagement, rather than assigning and checking homework.

4. Keeping Academics at School Promotes Greater Social Equity

- We can narrow the achievement gap by ensuring that instruction, rehearsal, mastery and remediation happen primarily at school and in the classroom, rather than at home, where resources and instructional support are less equitably distributed.\textsuperscript{42}

5. Homework Enhances Family Engagement

- A new homework policy framework enhances family engagement with schools and students by providing parents and caregivers more opportunities to influence and collaborate on homework policy and practice.

- Purpose
- History of Homework
- Review of the Research
- Effects of Homework on Students Physical Health
- Effects of Homework on the Social-Emotional Health of Students
- Homework Guidelines
- Alternatives to Homework

- Purpose
  - Introduce the topic – homework policy change
  - Describe the problem – increased academic demands effect the social-emotional health of students
- History of Homework
  - Provide a brief summary of the historical context of homework
    - Use information from today's training
    - Use information from National PTA Homework Resolution

References


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