

DAC Homework Discussion

At the December and January DAC meetings, parents and teachers discussed their views on homework at the **elementary and middle school levels**. The views are the personal views of DAC members and others they talked to outside of the meetings. As personal views vary from one extreme to the other, this write-up will summarize the average overall views. While there are many 'studies' on homework to be found online, our discussion revolved around how homework fits into the lifestyles of Elizabeth families.

Parent opinions varied from 'the current homework is fine' to 'there should be no homework at all'. However, the majority felt that while some limited homework is good, there is too much homework in the schools right now. Teachers, especially at the middle school level, believe that homework is necessary to prepare kids for High School and College, and that it reinforces study habits. But some teachers agree that homework should be for practice/reinforcement and not always be graded, as not all students have time or the support at home to get it done. For example, Frontier successfully uses homework as optional practice and review for tests.

Many studies believe that homework provides good bonding time for parents and their children. The parents we talked to overwhelmingly agreed that they do not consider doing homework together as family bonding time.

- Doing homework together often results in arguing. Parents may not know how to explain the subject in a way that the child understands, or the parent may not understand the subject themselves, for example algebra.
- Parents in the Elizabeth area would rather have the time to bond over dinner, walks, horse riding, and many other activities.
- Not all parents are at home in the evenings to help, or work long hours and don't have time to help even if they are home. Students in this situation are at a disadvantage.
- While many parents are involved, many students have uninvolved parents and no support at home. Home dynamics are different for each student.
- Students have sports practice, games (that at the middle school level often last until late at night)
- Students have outside activities that are important to the student and families such as riding lessons, karate, etc. Most students also have chores in the house or with animals in the evenings.

Parents DAC spoke with believed there is too much homework, especially at the middle school level. Some concerns are:

- Students should have class time, advisory time, and study hall time to complete homework. This frees up family time at home and student questions can be answered by the teacher.
- Parents do not believe ALL classes should assign homework, but they did agree some light reading and math homework may be necessary. Reading should be encouraged at all levels and young children should be read to by their parents. However, there should not be an expected amount done EACH night, as some nights are filled with activities. So, assign a set amount for a week, or the reading of a book over the course of a month. While some students may easily read 30 minutes each night, it must be recognized that for other students reading for 10 minutes may be a struggle and need to stop after that time.
- Parents do not like daily assigned homework that is due the NEXT day. Students who have sports or family activities that night are at a disadvantage. They often do not get the homework done or are up until very late hours, then at school the next day after little sleep. Parents would rather see homework assigned with a week to get it done. And include weekends if after school activities take up weekday evenings. Such as assigning homework on a Monday due the next Monday, or a Wed – Wed. This gives parents and students the chance to do the homework on a non-activity night or weekend if they choose.

Times when more homework may be necessary.

- Parents agreed that encouraging reading or being read to at home is a good thing, just not required nightly. Also, some math, but not more than 20-30 min. Some students are spending hours at night on math. Teacher must recognize that just because they, or students that easily get math can do the assignment in 20 minutes, doesn't mean all students can.
- Some students may have a hard time working in the classroom due to the noise and activity. These students and parents may choose to have their child do all work at home where it is quieter for the student.
- A larger project, such as a poster board or research/writing project may need time at home. Again, these are usually assigned over the course of a week, month, or semester. This gives the student the ability to work on it the times they have open, and not due the next day on an activity night.
- If the student fell behind in school, due to having trouble, or sickness, they will need to work at home to catch up.
- Involved parents who want more homework to help their struggling student may always ask the teacher for extra work. This is the individual parents/student choice to reinforce

with extra work at home. If a student needs extra work or private tutoring, it will be up to the parent and teacher on an individual basis.

- Students can choose to use time at home to review for tests.

Other thoughts that came up

- Parents would like to see better posting of homework assignments and support on the teacher's websites. Especially if homework can be assigned on a weekly basis and not nightly.
- Parents believe homework is for reinforcement and practice and should not be graded. This way a child who has sports, horse riding, etc., until late at night on a weeknight or out of town for a weekend is not hurt by not getting homework done or not having time to do it well, especially when nightly homework is expected.
- Hopefully schools can find ways to encourage students to use classroom and advisory time to complete homework. The teachers did explain to us that students cannot be forced to do homework during advisory time.
- Some homework does teach responsibility, but 2-3 hours each night is too much. Suggested times were 10-30 min at Elementary level (less for younger, maybe 30 min for 5th grade to prepare for middle school) And 30-60 min in middle school to prepare for High School. The 2-3 hours some middle schoolers are doing now is way too much. Many parents want no homework at all for K-2, and to only start it in 3th grade, except for reading.
- The typical family in Elizabeth lives out of the city because they value family time, animals, kids playing outside, etc. Homework every single night is not a part of that lifestyle. Students are already in school for 7 hours, a 9hr day for some if you include bus time.
- In high school, students who take college prep courses can start to get used to more homework for college. Elementary and middle school are not the places to prepare for college homework. Many kids do not plan on going to college.
- Homework should be sent home for a reason and not just 'busy work'.

Parent reaction to Pro's and Con's found online.

Pro's

Makes up for insufficient time in schools. Our parents believe most should be able to be done at school and only minimal sent home. Not hours' worth at the lower school levels.

Effective way for children to learn discipline. Our parents believe discipline can also be learned through chores at home, responsibility for animals, sports, and other activities.

Mastery of knowledge and skills depend on practice. Our parents believe that some students need practice and can ask for more homework if necessary. But for students who already have

mastered the work, homework is just 'busy work'. And every student is not going to master every subject. That is why 'C' is the average student. If every student were an 'A', that would be the average.

Parents can see what their child is doing in school and help with homework. Involved parents look at papers, talk to their child, and track Infinite campus whether homework is assigned or not. Uninvolved parents will not track their child no matter how much homework is given. Uninvolved parents do not help with homework, and often with math, even involved parents are unable to help. Our parents do not see homework as bonding time.

It can instill good study habits and reduce time spent on TV and video games. Some homework does help with study habits. But too much can also reduce time spent with family and important activities (that aren't TV and video games)

It prepares them for the real world. Again, minimal homework does this, but time spent on chores, bonding with family, and other activities also prepare students for the real world.

Con's

It can be stressful for the student. Agree, it is stressful when parents and children argue over homework, or a student is trying to do it at 10pm after a sporting event or other activity.

It is not effective as proponents say it is. There are studies both ways on this. And effectiveness can depend on the amount of involvement of the parent and family dynamics.

Homework doesn't necessarily result to improving school performance. Again, there are studies both ways on this. That is why homework is often an individual thing. If a student is struggling it can be a parent and teacher's decision to assign extra work at home.

Kids do not get enough down time to relax. Yes, too much homework can be a burden on the child and family.

Homework can cause conflict between parents and children. Parents agreed with this.

Teachers are busy and may not have time to grade piles of homework papers. This is a reason for homework be for practice/reinforcement and not graded. Grading it can be a burden on the teachers, and students who do not have time to do it or don't need the 'busy work' because they have mastered the skill are not hurt by not doing it. If a student does need more practice the parent can ask for additional homework.

Summary

Our parents agreed that some homework is a good thing, especially encouraging reading. However, most believe there is too much right now and it needs to be reviewed at the elementary and middle school level.