

REPORT to PARENTS

Putting School Work First

Never before has homework been so controversial. Busy parents and overscheduled children argue that either there is too much homework or that schoolwork should be done in school. Teachers and principals, however, view homework as a way to reinforce classroom lessons or give students needed extra practice. There are a lot of ways that parents, schools, and students, working together, can put homework first while making it seem like less of a burden.

What's the policy? Ask about the district, school, or teacher's homework policy. Is there a set amount of time your children is expected to spend on homework each night? Ask how often there will be special assignments or long-term home-based projects. Knowing the answers to these questions can help you and your child schedule the necessary time to complete the work.

Watch the time. Some children work faster than others and some assignments are longer than others. But if your child is spending hours every night on homework, check for:

- **Distractions.** Is your child studying in a quiet, well-lit place? Don't let television, phone calls, or siblings distract him or her from completing the work.

- **Advice.** Is there someone available to answer quick questions about assignments?

- **Tools.** Does your child have the tools (*i.e.*, paper, pen, calculator, dictionary) needed to complete the assignment?

- **Attitude.** The attitudes of children are often affected by the attitudes of parents and caregivers. Children need to see that you support your child's need to complete both schoolwork and homework.

Share concerns. An occasional homework overload is not grounds for a heart-to-heart with the teacher. Below are some signs that it's time for a conference or a note.

- **Busy work.** 15-20 multiplication problems or spelling words at a time is fine, but 50 is excessive.

- **Brain busters.** Talk with the teacher if your children consistently don't understand their assignments.

- **Brainless.** Is everything just too easy? Does your child mock the simplicity of the assignments? Let the teacher know.

- **Unpredictable.** If your child is overwhelmed with homework one day, and has none the next, find out why. Sometimes, kids put off projects until the last minute – which means you need to work with them on organizing their study time. Families should expect a relatively consistent homework load during the week.



Scale back. If your child's life is so full of after-school and weekend activities that he or she has no time or energy for homework, perhaps it's time to re-evaluate. These activities should never replace school as the primary focus of a child's life.

Stop yourself. Many parents "help" their children by doing some of their homework. This is never OK. It's far better to send a note to the teacher explaining why your child didn't finish the assignment.

Stay involved. Show your children that you care about what they're doing in school. Check their assignment books every day to help them keep track of what's due next and what projects are coming up. Review their homework, even checking in with them while they're working on it.

Most importantly, give your child credit. Praise the work they do. Compliment their study habits. Stay on them if they slack off, but give them credit for all they're doing and learning. Nothing could be more important.