

Students Spend More Time on Homework but Teachers Say It's Worth It

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Although students nowadays are spending significantly more time on homework assignments – sometimes up to 17.5 hours each week – the type and quality of the assignments have changed to better capture critical thinking skills and higher levels of learning, according to a recent survey of teachers conducted by the University of Phoenix College of Education.

The survey of 1,000 K-12 teachers found, among other things, that high school teachers on average assign about 3.5 hours of homework each week. For high school students who typically have five classes with different teachers, that could mean as much as 17.5 hours each week. By comparison, the survey found middle school teachers assign about 3.2 hours of homework each week and kindergarten through fifth grade teachers assign about 2.9 hours each week.

By comparison, a 2011 study from the National Center for Education Statistics found high school students reported spending an average of 6.8 hours of homework per week, while a 1994 report from the National Center for Education Statistics – reviewing trends in data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress – found 39 percent of 17-year-olds said they did at least one hour of homework each day.

“What has changed is not necessarily the magic number of how many hours they’re doing per night, but it’s the quality of the homework,” says Ashley Norris, assistant dean of the university's college of education. Part of that shift in recent years, she says, may come from more schools implementing the Common Core State Standards, which are intended to put more of an emphasis on critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

“You see a change from teachers ... giving, really, busy work ... to where they’re actually creating long-term projects that students have to manage outside of the classroom, or reading, where they read and come back into the classroom and share their findings,” Norris says. “It's not just about rote memorization, because we know that doesn't stick.”

For younger students, having more meaningful homework assignments can help build time-management skills, as well as enhance parent-child interaction, Norris says. But the bigger connection for high school students, she says, is doing assignments outside of the classroom that get them interested in a career path.

Moving forward, as more schools dive into more time-consuming – but Norris says more meaningful – assignments, there may be a greater shift in the number of schools utilizing the “flipped classroom” method, in which students watch a lesson or lecture at home online, and bring their questions

to the classroom to work with their peers while the teacher is present to help facilitate any problems that arise.

“This is already happening in the classrooms. And I think that idea, this whole idea where homework is this applied learning that goes outside the boundaries of a classroom – what can we use that actual class time for?” Norris says, “To come back and collaborate on learning, learn from each other, maybe critique our own [work] and share those experiences.”