

Some parents and schools say "no" to heavy homework load

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At home, (from left) Ryan, 10, Nick, 13, and Zach Masterman, 15, play fight with each other in Haverford, Pennsylvania, Oct. 23, 2015. Nick says he has three hours of homework a night. Photo: Aaron Windhorst/Philadelphia Inquirer/TNS

PHILADELPHIA, Pa. — Some parents are asking their children's teachers to say "no" to homework.

Amy Clipston's daughter is in first grade. Amy Clipston was the first parent in her school to ask that her daughter opt out of homework. The teacher agreed.

"I felt my child was doing quite fine in school," said Amy Clipston, a scientist. She said her daughter's school day was already long. "I felt 10 to 20 minutes of homework a night was not accomplishing anything."

More schools across the country are questioning and scaling back nightly homework. Some are even cutting it. Saying "no" to homework is surprising. Homework was once thought to be as American as school dances and lunchtime food fights.

Students Worry About Homework

People thought homework would help American students learn. Now, some people think stuffing kids' backpacks with math worksheets is a problem. People say too much homework causes students to worry and to lose sleep. Also, students may not learn more from extra homework.

Some schools are starting to listen. One school in Pennsylvania stated that homework should not disturb "the student's health and well-being."

In New Jersey, some schools give homework only on certain nights. They are not giving any on weekends.

A grade school in Maryland, has stopped giving homework altogether. Instead, the school requires 30 minutes of nightly reading. Stephanie Brant is the principal of the school. Brant was surprised that some parents wanted to keep homework.

More Schools Drop Worksheets

Brant said parents were worried that their kids would not be ready for middle school. Now, other schools in Maryland have dropped the worksheets. The head of a middle school thanked Brant for sending him good readers.

Vicki Abeles is happy that schools and parents are saying "no" to homework. Abeles just made a movie. The movie is about schools with different ideas on learning.

Abeles said students need a better balance between school and their lives. A lot has been written about grown-ups taking time off from work, Abeles said. Time off improves creativity. It also helps people do better work. However, "we're doing the ... opposite with kids. It's insanity."

Parents and teachers say homework can be harmful. Students sometimes email homework late at night. Kids may spend sunny weekends indoors, working on a laptop.

"The kids are overwhelmed," said Tom Di Giulio, a teacher at a school in Pennsylvania. "It's too much. I'm getting work sent in to me at 12 o'clock at night," and even sometimes later.

Hours More After A Full Day

Zach Masterman is 15 years old. Zach knows what Di Giulio is talking about. After putting in a full day of school and after-school activities, he comes home and dives into three hours of homework each night. "I'm really busy," he said. "I have a ton of things to do."

Some science reports agree with parents and teachers that homework can be harmful. In 2013, a report found that almost 5 out of 10 U.S. children were worried about school. Homework was the leading cause.

Alfie Kohn wrote a book about homework. Too much homework can cause harm, he argues. It raises levels of frustration and worry. At the same time, it robs kids of time for play and exercise. Most importantly, it stops students from getting excited about learning.

More parents feel the same. "Many feel homework has kind of taken over," said Cheryl Masterman, Zach's mother. Cheryl Masterman said that just the other night her fifth-grader "was up really late and totally freaking out" because of homework.

Quiz

- 1 Select the paragraph from the section "Students Worry About Homework" that explains how the type of homework has changed in some schools.

- 2 According to Vicki Abeles, in the section "More Schools Drop Worksheets," how does having less homework help students?
 - (A) Students with less homework are less creative.
 - (B) Students with less homework are more creative.
 - (C) Students with more homework are less creative.
 - (D) Students with more homework are more creative.

- 3 What is the MAIN idea of the section "Hours More After A Full Day"?
 - (A) Some people believe homework reduces stress and causes less worry.
 - (B) Some people believe homework increases stress and causes less worry.
 - (C) Some people believe homework reduces stress and causes more worry.
 - (D) Some people believe homework increases stress and causes more worry.

- 4 Which sentence BEST summarizes the article's main idea?
 - (A) More schools across the country are questioning and scaling back nightly homework.
 - (B) People thought homework would help American students learn
 - (C) Brant said parents were worried that their kids would not be ready for middle school.
 - (D) A lot has been written about grown-ups taking time off from work.