**Too Much Homework = Lower Test Scores**

*By Robert Roy Britt, 2005*

A … review of academic performance around the world gives bad marks to excessive homework.

Teachers in Japan, the Czech Republic and Denmark assign relatively little homework, yet students there score well, researchers said this week.

"At the other end of the spectrum, countries with very low average scores -- Thailand, Greece, Iran -- have teachers who assign a great deal of homework," says Penn State researcher David Baker.

"American students appear to do as much homework as their peers overseas -- if not more -- but still only score around the international average," said co-researcher Gerald LeTendre.

Baker and LeTendre examined the Third International Study of Mathematics and Sciences (TIMSS), which in 1994 collected data from schools in 41 nations on performance in grades 4, 8 and 12….

The homework burden is especially problematic in poorer households, where parents may not have the time or **inclination** [desire] to provide [a positive] environment … [for] good study habits, the researchers conclude. In particular, drills designed to improve memorization may not be suited to many homes.

"An unintended consequence may be that those children who need extra work and drill the most are the ones least likely to get it," Baker said. "Increasing homework loads is likely to **aggravate** [increase] tensions within the family, thereby **generating** [creating] more inequality and **eroding** [chipping away at] the quality of overall education."

The findings are detailed in a new book, "National Differences, Global Similarities: World Culture and the Future of Schooling" (Stanford University Press).

In the early 1980s, U.S. teachers began assigning more homework, the researchers say. The shift was in response to **mediocre** [not very good] performance in comparison to Japanese students. At the same time, the trend was going the other way in Japanese schools. The new study found U.S. math teachers assigned more than two hours of homework a week in 1994-95, while in Japan the figure was about one hour per week.

[Countries may waste time and energy on homework when it’s used as a quick fix.  Instead, Le Tendre says, the focus should be on the quality of instruction and ensuring equality for all students.]

The homework burden might also affect performance among children of higher-income parents.

"Parents are extremely busy with work and household chores, not to mention **chauffeuring** young people to various extracurricular activities, athletic and otherwise," LeTendre said. "Parents might sometimes see exercises in drill and memorization as **intrusions** [disruptions] into family time."