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**Why Homework is Good for Kids**

Lately there has been an outpouring of books and articles against homework. Critics call homework a form of child abuse and say that it prevents children from engaging in wholesome activities. Government surveys say that most students spend an hour a day or less on homework.

Yet the campaign against homework never seems to **abate** [stop].

Just this week came a new report from the National School Board Association's Center for Public Education saying that there is no conclusive evidence that homework "increases student achievement across the board."

...This is undoubtedly a true finding. For example, the study concluded that students who don't do their homework will not see any increase in their achievement in school. Also, students in the early grades who have not yet learned how to read are less likely to benefit from homework than students in high school. And students in low-income homes are less likely to benefit from homework than those in higher-income homes because they are less likely to complete it and less likely to have an adult in the home to help them.

The study found that Asian-American students were more likely to benefit from doing homework than students from other ethnic groups. This is not because of some ethnic gene, but because Asian-American students are more likely to complete the homework that is assigned to them.

While the latest study may fuel the fires of the anti-homework crowd, bear in mind that its bottom line is that homework doesn't help students who don't do it, but very likely does help students who actually complete their assignments. Duh.

But there is something else to be said in favor of homework.

When do students have time to read a book other than when it is assigned as homework? There is no time in school to read a book. A recent news article about the case against homework cited a high school teacher who said that she would tell her students to read no more than 15 minutes a day in their assigned novel (*Jane Eyre*). How stupid is that? How can anyone, young or old, get engaged in a novel if he or she spends no more than 15 minutes a day reading? At that pace, it seems like this class will be reading the same novel all year, if they manage to finish it at all.

When else do students have time to write an essay or write a research report? In school, students may be able to write a few paragraphs, but it takes time to write an essay that is longer than a page. If it is not done after school, it won't be done at all.

So consider where the anti-homework crusade will take us: to a time when students read no books, write no essays, and complete no research projects other than whatever can be fit into the school day.

Because I am a historian, I can't help but mention that this battle against homework first flared up in 1900, led by the *Ladies Home Journal*. The *Journal* described homework as "A National Crime at the Feet of American Parents" and claimed that children were "permanently crippled" by the pressure of schooling and homework. It urged that children under the age of 15 should not be in school more than four hours per day and should not be assigned any home study whatever.

So the campaign against homework goes on. Its success will guarantee a steady decline in the very activities that matter most in education: Independent reading; thoughtful writing; research projects.