

The Case for (Quality) Homework Why it improves learning, and how parents can help

by Janine Bempechat

Any parent who has battled with a child over homework night after night has to wonder: Do those math worksheets and book reports really make a difference to a student's long-term success? Or is homework just a headache—another distraction from family time and downtime, already diminished by the likes of music and dance lessons, sports practices, and part-time jobs?

Allison, the mother of two middle-school girls from an affluent Boston suburb, describes a frenetic afterschool scenario: “My girls do gymnastics a few days a week, so homework happens for my 6th grader after gymnastics, at 6:30 p.m. She doesn't get to bed until 9. My 8th grader does her homework immediately after school up until gymnastics. So she eats dinner at 9:15 and then goes to bed, unless there is more homework to do, in which case she'll get to bed around 10.” The girls miss out on sleep, and family dinners on weeknights are tough to swing.

Parental concerns about their children's homework loads are nothing new. Debates over the merits and harms of homework—a task or tasks that teachers ask students to complete during non-instructional time (Cooper, Robinson, & Patall, 2006)—have ebbed and flowed since the late 19th century (Gill & Schlossman, 2004), and today its value is again being scrutinized and weighed against possible negative impacts on family life and the well-being of children.

Are American students overburdened with homework? In some middle-class and affluent communities, where pressure on students to achieve can be fierce, yes. But in families of limited means, it's often another story. Many low-income parents value homework as an important connection to the school and the curriculum—even as their children report receiving little homework. And on average, American students do relatively little. At the high-school level, students relate that they spend less than one hour per day on homework, on average (Hansen &

Quintero, 2017), and only 42 percent say they do it five days per week (National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2011). Further, in one recent survey by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a minimal 13 percent of 17-year-olds said they had devoted more than two hours to homework the previous evening (NAEP, 2013) (see Figure 1).

Recent years have seen an increase in the amount of homework assigned to students in grades K–2 (Gill & Schlossman, 2004), and critics point to research findings that, at the elementary-school level, homework does not appear to enhance children’s learning. Why, then, should we burden young children and their families with homework if there is no academic benefit to doing it? Indeed, perhaps it would be best, as some propose, to eliminate homework altogether, particularly in these early grades.

On the contrary, developmentally appropriate homework plays a critical role in the formation of positive learning beliefs and behaviors, including a belief in one’s academic ability, a deliberative and effortful approach to mastery, and higher expectations and aspirations for one’s future. It can prepare children to confront ever-more-complex tasks, develop resilience in the face of difficulty, and learn to embrace rather than shy away from challenge. In short, homework is a key vehicle through which we can help shape children into mature learners.

The Homework-Achievement Connection

A narrow focus on whether or not homework boosts grades and test scores thus ignores a broader purpose in education—the development of lifelong, confident learners. Still, the question looms: *does* homework enhance academic success? As the educational psychologist Lyn Corno wrote more than two decades ago, “homework is a complicated thing” (Corno, 1996). Most research on the homework-achievement connection is correlational, which precludes a definitive

judgment on its academic benefits. Researchers rely on correlational research in this area of study given the difficulties of randomly assigning students to homework/no-homework conditions. While correlation does not imply causality, extensive research has established that at the middle- and high-school levels, homework completion is strongly and positively associated with high achievement (Cooper et al., 2006; Trautwein, Niggli, Schnyder, & Ludtke, 2009). Very few studies have reported a negative correlation.

As noted above, findings on the homework-achievement connection at the elementary level are mixed. A small number of experimental studies have demonstrated that elementary-school students who receive homework achieve at higher levels than those who do not (Cooper et al., 2006). These findings suggest a causal relationship, but they are limited in scope. Within the body of correlational research, some studies report a positive homework-achievement connection (Cooper, Lindsey, Nye, & Greenhouse, 1998; Valle et al., 2016), some a negative relationship (Cooper, 1989), and yet others show no relationship at all (Cooper et al., 2006). Why the mixed findings? Researchers point to a number of possible factors, such as developmental issues related to how young children learn, different goals that teachers have for younger as compared to older students, and how researchers define homework in their studies.

Certainly, young children are still developing skills that enable them to focus on the material at hand (Muhlenbruck, Cooper, Nye, & Lindsey, 2000) and study efficiently (Dufresne & Kobasigawa, 1998). Teachers' goals for their students are also quite different at the elementary school as compared to secondary school. While teachers at both levels note the value of homework for reinforcing classroom content, those in the earlier grades are more likely to assign homework mainly to foster skills related to self-regulation, such as responsibility,

perseverance, and the ability to manage distractions (Coutts, 2004; Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001; MetLife, 2007).

Most research examines homework generally. Might a focus on homework in a specific subject shed more light on the homework-achievement connection? A recent meta-analysis did just this by examining the relationship between math and science homework, and achievement. Contrary to previous findings, researchers reported a stronger relationship between homework and achievement in the elementary grades than in middle school (Fan, Xu, Cai, He, & Fan, 2017). As the study authors note, one explanation for this finding could be that in elementary school, teachers tend to assign more homework in math than in other subjects, while at the same time assigning shorter math tasks more frequently. In addition, the authors point out that parents tend to be more involved in younger children's math homework and more skilled in elementary-level than middle-school math.

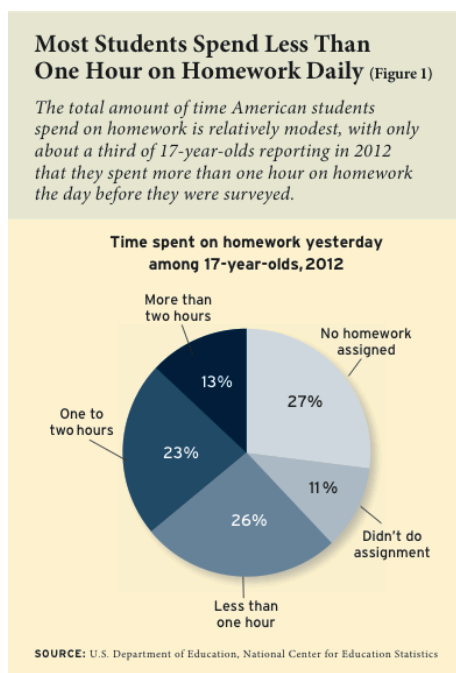
In sum, the relationship between homework and academic achievement in the elementary-school years is not yet established, but eliminating homework at this level would do children and their families a huge disservice: we know that children's learning beliefs have a powerful impact on their academic outcomes, and that through homework, parents and teachers can have a profound influence on the development of positive beliefs.

How Much Is Appropriate?

Harris M. Cooper of Duke University, the leading researcher on homework, has examined decades of study on what we know about the relationship between homework and scholastic achievement. He has proposed the "10-minute rule," suggesting that daily homework be limited to 10 minutes per grade level. Thus, a 1st grader would do 10 minutes each day and a

4th grader, 40 minutes. The National Parent Teacher Association and the National Education Association both endorse this guideline (Cooper, 1989), but it is not clear whether the recommended allotments include time for reading, which most teachers want children to do daily. And an estimate is just that: tasks that take some children 10 minutes to complete may take others much longer. Teachers recognize this and work to differentiate homework tasks for students with differing learning needs (Manninen, 2014).

For middle-school students, Cooper and colleagues report that 90 minutes per day of homework is optimal for enhancing academic achievement, and for high schoolers, the ideal range is 90 minutes to two and a half hours per day (Cooper et al., 2006). Beyond this threshold, more homework does not contribute to learning. For students enrolled in demanding Advanced Placement or honors classes, however, homework is likely to require an investment of time beyond that which we know to be beneficial, leading to concerns over the health and well-being of students who enroll in such courses.



Notwithstanding media reports of parents revolting against the practice of homework, the vast majority of parents say they are highly satisfied with their children's homework loads. The National Household Education Surveys Program recently found that between 70 and 83 percent of parents believed that the amount of homework their children were assigned was "about right." This high approval was expressed by parents across the board, regardless of social class, race/ethnicity, locale (city, suburb, town, rural), level of education, and whether English was spoken at home (McQuiggan & Megra, 2017).

Learning Beliefs Are Consequential

As noted above, developmentally appropriate homework can help children cultivate positive beliefs about learning. Decades of research have established that these beliefs predict the types of tasks students choose to pursue, their persistence in the face of challenge, and their academic achievement. Broadly, learning beliefs fall under the banner of achievement motivation, which is a constellation of cognitive, behavioral, and affective factors, including: the way a person perceives his or her abilities, goal-setting skills, expectation of success, the value the individual places on learning, and self-regulating behavior such as time-management skills. Positive or adaptive beliefs about learning serve as emotional and psychological protective factors for children, especially when they encounter difficulties or failure.

Motivation researcher Carol Dweck of Stanford University posits that children with a "growth mindset"—those who believe that ability is malleable—approach learning very differently than those with a "fixed mindset"—kids who believe ability cannot change (Dweck & Molden, 2017). Those with a growth mindset view effort as the necessary key to mastery. They see mistakes as helpful, persist even in the face of failure, prefer challenging over easy tasks, and

do better in school than their peers who have a fixed mindset (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007). In contrast, children with a fixed mindset view effort and mistakes as implicit condemnations of their abilities. Such children succumb easily to learned helplessness in the face of difficulty, and they gravitate toward tasks they know they can handle rather than more challenging ones (Blackwell et al., 2007).

Of course, learning beliefs do not develop in a vacuum. They are shaped by a variety of influences, the most important being the beliefs and behaviors of the adults in the children's orbit—parents and teachers. Studies have demonstrated that parents and teachers play a significant role in the development of positive beliefs and behaviors, and that homework is a key tool they can use to foster motivation and academic achievement.

Parents' Beliefs and Actions Matter

It is well established that parental involvement in their children's education promotes achievement motivation and success in school (see Bempechat & Shernoff, 2012, for a review). Parents are their children's first teachers, and their achievement-related beliefs have a profound influence on children's developing perceptions of their own abilities, as well as their views on the value of learning and education (Eccles, Roeser, Vida, Fredericks, & Wigfield, 2006).

Parental involvement can take many forms beyond helping with homework. Parents make a substantive difference in their children's learning through the messages they send about education. This can mean: 1) expressing interest in school activities and experiences (personal involvement); 2) attending school events (behavioral involvement); and 3) helping with homework when they are able and exposing children to intellectually enriching experiences (cognitive involvement) (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994). Most parents want to be engaged in

their children's schooling and view involvement as part and parcel of their role as parents (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001). They also believe that doing homework fosters responsibility and organizational skills, and that doing well on homework tasks contributes to learning, even if children experience frustration from time to time (Coutts, 2004; Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Burrow, 1995). Parents understand that teachers expect a certain amount of engagement from them and thus appreciate teachers' guidance in homework-related matters (Knopf & Swick, 2007).

Many parents support their children's homework in ways that come naturally to most of them: establishing routines for when and where homework should be done, eliminating distractions, communicating expectations that homework should be thoughtfully completed, helping children manage their time, providing reassuring motivational messages, and encouraging them to be aware of the conditions under which they can best do their work (Cooper, Lindsey, & Nye, 2000; Jeynes, 2010). These simple actions do much to foster the development of self-regulation, which is critical to school success (McCann & Turner, 2004).

Self-regulation involves a number of skills, such as the ability to monitor one's own performance and adjust strategies as a result of feedback; to evaluate one's interests and to realistically perceive one's aptitude; and to work on a task autonomously. It also means learning how to structure one's environment so that it's conducive to learning, by, for example, minimizing distractions (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2011). From elementary through high school, children encounter increasingly complex learning tasks and must develop skills and strategies such as these to help them organize and plan their work and learn independently. This is precisely where parental involvement makes a demonstrable difference in students' attitudes and approaches to homework (Xu & Corno, 2003).

Especially in the early grades, homework gives parents the opportunity to cultivate beliefs and behaviors that foster efficient study skills and academic resilience (Xu & Corno, 1998; Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008). Indeed, across age groups, there is a strong and positive relationship between homework completion and a variety of self-regulatory processes, including planning and delay of gratification (Ramdass & Zimmerman, 2011). However, the quality of parental help matters. Sometimes, parents with the best of intentions can unwittingly undermine the development of children's positive learning beliefs and their school achievement. Parents who maintain a positive outlook on homework and allow their children room to learn and struggle on their own, stepping in judiciously with informational feedback and hints, do their children a much better service than those who seek to control the learning process (Dumont et al., 2012; Pomerantz, Moorman, & Litwack, 2007; Viljaranta et al., 2018).

A recent study of 5th and 6th graders' perceptions of their parents' involvement with homework distinguished between supportive and intrusive help (Moroni, Dumont, Trautwein, Niggli, & Baeriswyl, 2015). The former included the belief that parents encouraged the children to first try to find the right answer on their own before providing them with assistance, and when the child struggled, the adult attempted to understand the source of the confusion. In contrast, the latter included the perception that parents provided unsolicited help, interfered when the children did their homework, and told them how to complete their homework assignments. Supportive help predicted higher achievement, while intrusive help was associated with lower achievement.

Researchers have also observed parents helping with homework-related tasks (for example, Else-Quest, Hyde, & Hejmadi, 2008). In one such study, caregivers (mostly mothers) were asked to help their children (6–10 years old) complete language arts worksheets. Parents' behavior was analyzed for various characteristics: whether it was controlling or supportive of

autonomy (for example, telling children how to do their work versus asking them how they might best approach it); whether it was supportive of relatedness (the sense of being connected to and accepted by others) through the display of negative or positive affect (for instance, expressing frustration versus using a warm tone of voice); and whether it demonstrated low- or high-quality support for competence (by offering no hints, expressing low confidence in the child's ability to do the work versus providing helpful feedback or relating the task to something the child had previously completed). Parental behaviors that were supportive of children's need for autonomy and relatedness were associated with high student engagement in the task, and support for autonomy and competence was especially central to students' reading scores (Doctoroff & Arnold, 2017).

Parents' attitudes and emotions around homework are consequential in shaping their children's attitudes and approaches toward homework. For example, parents who display positive attitudes and emotions during a homework task may be able to guide the development of their children's positive attitudes and emotions, which are more predictive of higher achievement than are negative attitudes and emotions (Else-Quest et al., 2008). Moreover, parents who view helping with homework as a satisfying aspect of parenting rather than an obligation display more positive emotions around homework, which in turn are associated with children's positive emotions and stronger perceptions of academic self-efficacy—confidence in one's ability to succeed (Moè & Katz, 2017). Children are more likely to focus on self-improvement during homework time and do better in school when their parents are oriented toward mastery. In contrast, if parents focus on how well children are doing relative to peers, kids tend to adopt learning goals that allow them to avoid challenge (Madjar, Shklar, & Moshe, 2016).

Homework and Social Class

Social class is another important element in the homework dynamic. What is the homework experience like for families with limited time and resources? And what of affluent families, where resources are plenty but the pressures to succeed are great?

Etta Kralovec and John Buell, authors of *The End of Homework*, maintain that homework “punishes the poor” (Kohn, 2006; Kralovec & Buell, 1991), because lower-income parents may not be as well educated as their more-affluent counterparts and thus not as well equipped to help with homework, and poorer families clearly have fewer financial resources to devote to home computers, tutoring, and other academic enrichment activities. Also, the stresses of poverty—and work schedules—may make some parents less available to help their children with homework, and immigrant parents may face language barriers and an unfamiliarity with the school system and teachers’ expectations.

Yet research shows that low-income parents who are unable to assist with homework are far from passive in their children’s learning. Their participation may not fit patterns of involvement that are typically associated with higher student achievement, but these parents nonetheless do help foster their children’s scholastic performance. In fact, parental help with homework is *not* a necessary component for school success, as a variety of studies have demonstrated.

Li and colleagues queried low-income Chinese American 9th graders’ perceptions of their parents’ engagement with their education (Li, Holloway, Bempechat, & Loh, 2008). According to these students, their immigrant parents rarely engaged in activities that are known to foster academic achievement, such as monitoring homework, checking it for accuracy, or attending school meetings or events. Instead, parents of higher achievers built three social

networks to support their children's learning. They designated "anchor" helpers both inside and outside the family who provided assistance when needed; identified peer models for their children to emulate; and enlisted the assistance of extended kin to guide their children's educational socialization. In a related vein, a recent analysis of survey data showed that Asian and Latino 5th graders, relative to native-born peers, reported that they were more likely to turn to siblings than parents for homework help (Lanuza, 2017).

Further, as Fox (2016) demonstrated, low-income parents, recognizing that they lack the time to be in the classroom or participate in school governance, view homework as a critical connection to their children's experiences in school. Her in-depth qualitative study found that mothers enjoyed the routine and predictability of homework and used it as a way to demonstrate to children how to plan their time. Mothers organized homework as a family activity, with siblings doing homework together and older children reading to younger ones. In this way, homework was not perceived as an individual practice that could foster independence, but rather as a collective practice wherein siblings could model effective habits and learn from one another. The mothers in this study expressed concerns about being able to help their children with homework as the children got older, and indicated that they would encourage their children to seek help outside the family.

In another recent study, researchers examined mathematics achievement in low-income 8th-grade Asian and Latino students. Help with homework was an advantage their mothers could not provide. They could, however, furnish structure (for example, by setting aside quiet time for homework completion), and it was this structure that most predicted high math achievement in these students. As the authors note, "It is equally important to help parents [of low socioeconomic status] realize that they can still help their children get good grades in

mathematics and succeed in school even if they do not know how to provide direct assistance with their child's mathematics homework or guide them in problem solving strategies for mathematics due to lack of knowledge or confidence in mathematics due to limited time and resources available to them" (O'Sullivan, Chen, & Fish, 2014, p. 182).

The homework narrative at the other end of the socioeconomic continuum is altogether different. Media reports abound with examples of students (mostly in high school) carrying three or more hours of homework per night. Such burdens can have deleterious consequences for students' learning, motivation, and well-being. In affluent communities, students experience significant and often unrealistic pressure at school and at home to cultivate a high-achieving profile that will be attractive to elite colleges (Leonard et al., 2015; Galloway, Connor, & Pope, 2013; Weissbourd, 2011). Heavy homework loads in such communities have been linked to unhealthy symptoms in young people, such as heightened stress, anxiety, physical complaints, and sleep disturbances. High-school students report feeling overwhelmed by homework and having less time for leisure and family activities. Like Allison's 6th grader mentioned earlier, many students can only tackle their homework after they do extracurricular activities, which are also seen as necessary for admission to highly selective colleges. Not surprisingly, many students in these communities are not deeply engaged in learning; rather, they speak of "doing school," going through the motions necessary to excel, and undermining their physical and mental health in the process (Pope, 2003).

Fortunately, efforts by researchers, educators, and parents in national intervention initiatives, such as Challenge Success, are heightening awareness of threats to well-being brought on by heavy homework burdens. Interventions aimed at restoring balance in students' lives (in part, by reducing homework demands) have resulted in students reporting an increased

sense of well-being, decreased stress and anxiety, and perceptions of greater support from teachers, with no decrease in achievement outcomes (Challenge Success, 2012).

What is good for this small segment of students, however, is not necessarily good for the majority. As Jessica Lahey wrote in *Motherlode*, a *New York Times* parenting blog, “homework is a red herring” in the national conversation on education. “Some otherwise privileged children may have too much, but the real issue lies in places where there is too little. When we do talk about homework, we shouldn’t forget that.”

My colleagues and I analyzed interviews conducted with a cross-ethnic group of lower-income 9th graders (African American, Mexican American, and European American) from two Northern California high schools that at the time were among the lowest-achieving schools in the state. Across the groups, we found that these students consistently described receiving minimal homework, perhaps one or two worksheets or assigned pages from a textbook, the occasional project, and 30 minutes of reading per night. Math was the only class in which they reported having homework each night. These students noted few or no consequences for not completing their homework (Bempechat, Li, Neier, Gillis, & Holloway, 2011).

Indeed, greatly reducing or eliminating homework would increase, not diminish, the achievement gap. As Harris M. Cooper has commented, those choosing to opt their children out of homework are operating from a place of socioeconomic advantage (Joyce, 2016). Children in higher-income families benefit from social capital that affords developmental privileges, including exposure to a larger range of language at home that may align with the language of school and access to all manner of learning and cultural experiences outside of school, all of which may be cost-prohibitive for lower-income families (for example, private tutoring or arts-related lessons; Lareau, 2003). Even if all homework were to suddenly disappear, affluent

parents would still have the luxury of seeking out myriad forms of enrichment, from STEM-related activity kits to individual tutoring to specialized private afterschool academies and math-focused summer camps. But for the 21 percent of the school-age population who live in poverty—nearly 11 million students ages 5–17 (National Center for Education Statistics)—homework is one tool that can help narrow the achievement gap.

Community and School Support

Often, community organizations and afterschool programs can step up to provide structure and services that students' need to succeed at homework. For example, Boys and Girls and 4-H clubs offer volunteer tutors as well as access to computer technology that students may not have at home. Many schools provide homework clubs at the end of the school day or integrate homework into the afterschool program.

Home-school partnerships have succeeded in engaging parents with homework and significantly improving their children's academic achievement in the process. For example, Joyce Epstein of Johns Hopkins University has developed the TIPS model (Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork), which embraces homework as an integral part of family time (Epstein, 1995). TIPS is an interactive program designed by teachers in which children and a parent or family member each have a specific role in the homework scenario. For example, a mathematics task on fractions asks children to show a family member how a triangle is divided into two parts, with one part shaded. Children then move to other shapes, again divided into shaded and unshaded areas, and translate shaded areas into fractions, explaining their reasoning along the way. Children are encouraged to review their thinking aloud if they are unsure. Each task ends with a

section for the family member to indicate whether the children understood the problems or might need more help with a concept.

Evaluative research has shown that elementary and middle-school students in classrooms that have adopted TIPS complete more of their homework than do students in other classrooms. TIPS students also report that their family members enjoy participating in their homework and contribute to their understanding of material (Epstein, 1995). Both students and parent participants have shown more positive beliefs about learning mathematics, and notably, TIPS students show significant achievement gains in writing skills and science report-card grades, as well as higher mathematics scores on standardized tests. (Van Voorhis, 2011).

More recently, an innovative randomized control study found that teachers' text messages to parents about their children's missing homework resulted in increased parental monitoring of homework, consequences for missed assignments, and greater participation in parent-child conferences and contact with the school (Bergman, 2015). Teachers reported fewer missed assignments and greater student effort in coursework, and students themselves noted that they were less likely to skip class or do their homework at the last minute. Math grades and GPA significantly improved for participating students as compared to non-participating students, and these better outcomes continued into the following year, after the program had ended.

Homework Quality Matters

Teachers favor homework for a number of reasons. They believe it fosters a sense of responsibility and promotes academic achievement (Brock, Lapp, Flood, Fisher, & Han, 2007; Xu & Corno, 1998). They also note that homework allows students to review classroom material and practice skills (Xu & Yuan, 2003) while also giving teachers feedback on areas where

students may need more support. Finally, teachers value homework as a way to keep parents connected to the school and their children's educational experiences (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001).

While students, to say the least, may not always relish the idea of doing homework, by high school most come to believe there is a positive relationship between doing homework and doing well in school (Coutts, 2004). To this end, students crave high-quality homework; both higher and lower achievers lament homework that is "busywork" and does not promote learning (Bempechat et al., 2011; Galloway et al., 2013). Students value assignments that are challenging (neither too easy nor too hard) and that reflect teachers' active selection of tasks that are interesting, enhance learning, and are well integrated into lessons (Dettmers, Trautwein, Ludtke, Kunter, & Baumert, 2010). This kind of homework has been associated with higher math achievement (Dettmers et al., 2010). Relatedly, the focus in mathematics learning is turning away from rote memorization and toward assignments that foster deep conceptual understanding by asking students to solve problems by reasoning, communicating, and making connections (Boaler, 2015; Wieman & Arbaugh, 2014). Teachers, though, still note the value of skills practice, which may inevitably require memorization (Walk & Lassak, 2017).

What constitutes high-quality homework? Assignments that are developmentally appropriate and meaningful and that promote self-efficacy and self-regulation. Meaningful homework is authentic, allowing students to engage in solving problems that have real-world relevance to them (Alleman et al., 2010). More specifically, homework tasks should make efficient use of student time and have a clear purpose connected to what they are learning (Vatterott, 2010). An artistic rendition of a period in history that would take hours to complete can become instead a diary entry in the voice of an individual from that era (Vatterott, 2010). By

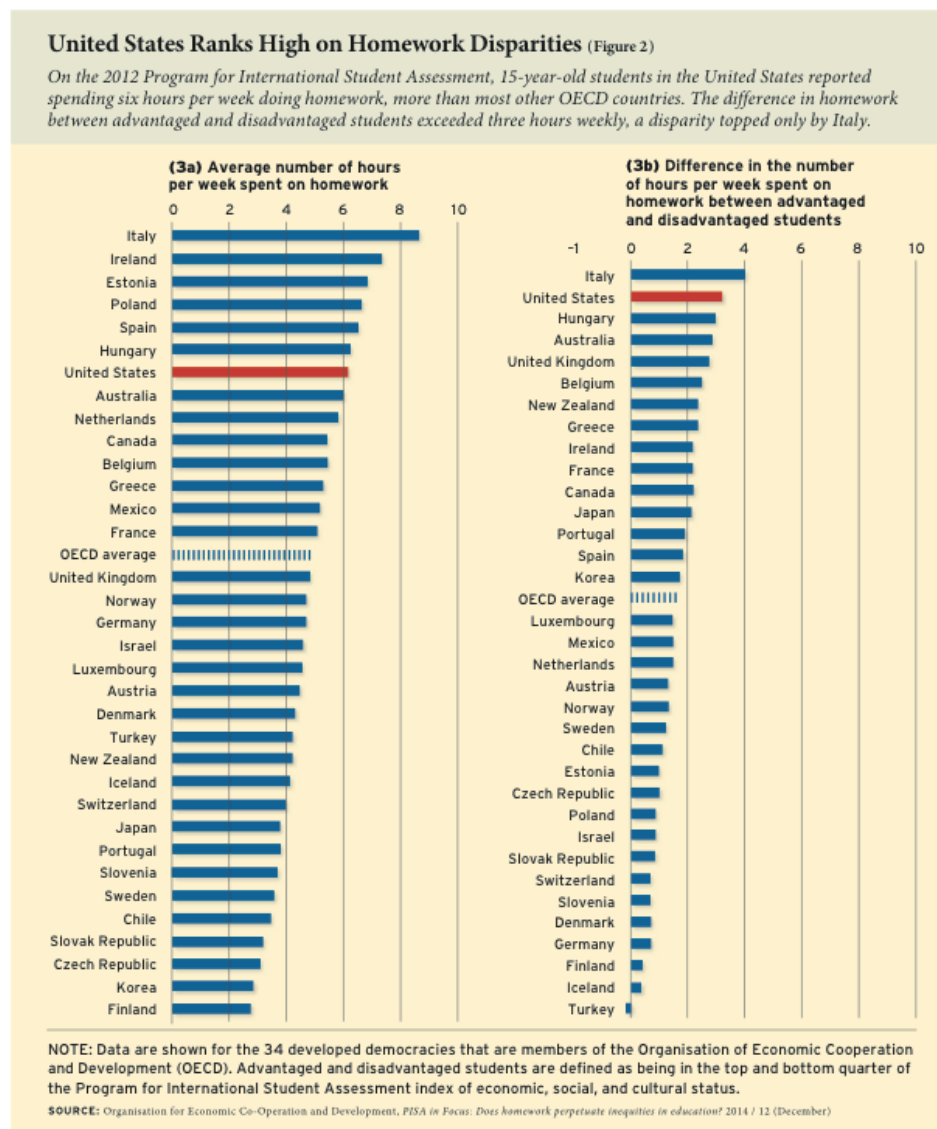
allowing a measure of choice and autonomy in homework, teachers foster in their students a sense of ownership, which bolsters their investment in the work (Vatterott, 2010).

High-quality homework also fosters students' perceptions of their own competence by 1) focusing them on tasks they can accomplish without help (Darling-Hammond & Ifill-Lynch, 2006; Protheroe, 2009); 2) differentiating tasks for diverse learning needs so as to allow struggling students to experience success (Katz, Kaplan, and Gueta, 2009; Van Voorhis, 2011); 3) providing suggested time frames rather than a fixed period of time in which a task should be completed; 4) delivering clearly and carefully explained directions; and 5) carefully scaffolding (modeling methods for attacking) lengthy or complex tasks (Vatterott, 2010). Indeed, research has demonstrated that teachers are invaluable in scaffolding self-regulating skills (Özcan & Erktin 2015). Students whose teachers have trained them to adopt self-regulation strategies for homework management (such as goal setting, self-monitoring, and planning) demonstrate a number of skills and positive qualities—improved time management, increased self-efficacy, greater effort and interest, a desire for mastery, and a decrease in helplessness (Stoeger & Ziegler, 2008).

Excellence with Equity

Currently, the United States has the second-highest disparity between time spent on homework by students of low socioeconomic status and time spent by their more-affluent peers out of the 34 OECD-member nations participating in the 2012 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) (OECD, 2014) (see Figure 2). Noting that PISA studies have consistently found that spending more time on math homework strongly correlates with higher academic achievement, the report's authors suggest that the homework disparity may reflect lower teacher

expectations for low-income students. If so, this is truly unfortunate. In and of itself, low socioeconomic status is not an impediment to academic achievement when appropriate parental, school, and community supports are deployed. As research makes clear, low-income parents support their children's learning in varied ways, not all of which involve direct assistance with schoolwork. By virtue of their position on the frontlines of student learning, teachers can deploy their expertise to orient both students and parents toward beliefs that foster positive attitudes toward learning. Indeed, where homework is concerned, a commitment to excellence with equity is both worthwhile and attainable (OECD, 2014).



In affluent communities, parents, teachers, and school districts might consider reexamining the meaning of academic excellence and placing a greater emphasis on modeling how to lead a balanced and well-rounded life. The homework debate in the United States has been dominated by concerns over the health and well-being of such advantaged students. As legitimate as these worries are, it's important to avoid generalizing the experiences of these children to those with fewer family resources. Reducing or eliminating homework, though it may be desirable in some advantaged communities, would deprive poorer children of a crucial and empowering learning experience. It would also eradicate a fertile opportunity to help close the achievement gap.

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