

A Nation at Rest: The American Way of Homework

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We use several national surveys to provide a 50-year perspective on time spent on homework. The great majority of American children at all grade levels now spend less than one hour studying on a typical day—an amount that has not changed substantially in at least 20 years. Moreover, high school students in the late 1940s and early 1950s studied no more than their counterparts did in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Changes in educational opinion on homework over the last half century have had little effect on student behavior, with only two notable exceptions: a temporary increase in homework time in the decade following Sputnik, and a new willingness in the last two decades to assign small amounts to primary-grade students.

Keywords: *Cold War culture, “excellence” movement, history of education, home and school, homework*

IN the 1980s and 1990s, few issues related to schooling were as universally endorsed as homework. Educators, parents, and policymakers of all political and pedagogical stripes insisted that homework is good and more is better—a view that was promoted most visibly in *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) and *What Works* (U.S. Department of Education, 1986).¹ Indeed, never in the history of American education was there a stronger professional and public consensus in favor of homework (see Gill & Schlossman, 1996; Gill & Schlossman, 2000).

Homework has been touted for academic and character-building purposes, and for promoting America’s international competitiveness (see, e.g., Cooper, 2001; Keith, 1986; Maeroff, 1992; Maeroff, 1989; *The Economist*, 1995). It has been viewed as a key symbol, method, and yardstick of serious commitment to educational re-

form. In 1995, when a maverick school board member in the small town of Half Moon Bay, California proposed to abolish homework from the local public schools, he was derided not only locally but in the national press (Gill & Schlossman, 1995). The consensus view was summed up two years later by the state superintendent of public instruction and the state school board president of California: “Our children are competing in a global economy,” they warned. “The extra hours spent after school on homework in Europe and Asia are giving those children an extra boost into the 21st century. We should not do less in California” (Eastin & Larsen, 1997).²

Indeed, recent news reports suggest that the pro-homework consensus is in danger of becoming a victim of its own success, based on descriptions of the woes of children and parents who are losing sleep, burning out, and entering therapy as a result of heavy doses of homework.

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According to a story in the *New York Times*, American students are increasingly “homework bound” by the “gross tonnage of today’s homework” (Winerip, 1999). Similarly, the *Raleigh News Observer* finds students and parents talking seriously about “surviving” the homework load of first and second grades; meanwhile, the sky is apparently the limit in high schools, as different subject teachers indiscriminately assign homework without concern for the overall daily load on students (Hui, 2000). *USA Today* reports that America is in the midst of a period of “homework intensification” (Hellmich, 2000). An op-ed piece by the former president of Pepperdine University concludes that homework “is at an all-time high” (Davenport, 2002). Even talk-show host Oprah Winfrey has joined the debate, devoting a show to discussing the “onslaught of homework.”³

The perception that homework has increased in recent years is supported by the results of a research study that is often cited in newspaper reports. The Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan found that time spent on home study by 6- to 8-year-old children more than doubled between 1981 and 1997 (Hofferth & Sandberg, 2000).⁴ The Michigan study is cited not only in news reports, but also in a recent book advocating “the end of homework”—provocatively subtitled, “How Homework Disrupts Families, Overburdens Children, and Limits Learning” (Kralovec & Buell, 2000). *The End of Homework*, like many of the recent press reports, laments “the enormous homework burden borne by our students and their families” (Kralovec & Buell, 2000, p. x).

Given the strength of the pro-homework consensus over the last twenty years, it would not be surprising if the homework burden for typical American students today was indeed substantial, and substantially more than that of earlier decades. But the perception of a heavy and growing homework load has been based almost entirely on anecdote (with the notable exception of the Michigan study). Scholars have shown little interest in seriously examining issues as mundane as the amount of time that students spend on homework, whether homework increases with grade level, or how homework loads have changed over time.

That homework is mundane does not make it unimportant. Homework engages the child-family-school interface on a daily basis—more so than any other school practice (for elabora-

tion on this theme, see Gill & Schlossman, 2003). Furthermore, homework is a barometer of the success—or the limits—of movements to raise academic standards. To succeed, academic excellence movements ultimately require students to invest effort in their studies; time spent on homework is a ground-level indicator of this effort. Analysis of historical trends in homework can therefore illuminate the effectiveness of broader education reform movements, both past and present.

In this article we reverse the standard chronological organization of historical argument. We begin with the present and work our way back to the late 1940s, when the first systematic national data on homework time were collected.

Time Spent on Homework Today

The most systematic evidence on homework time at multiple grade levels across the country comes from background questions given to students undertaking the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). In 1999, students taking NAEP tests at three different ages—9, 13, and 17—were asked, “How much time did you spend on homework yesterday?”⁵ Figure 1 compares the proportion of students doing less than one hour of homework with those doing more than two hours, at each age level.⁶

The results for 9-year-olds are unsurprising. These are students who are in third or fourth grade, when we would not expect large quantities of homework. It seems clear that very few of these students are seriously overburdened with homework: only 5% reported spending more than two hours the previous night. While the 13-year-olds (surveyed in the fall, when most would have been in eighth grade) are doing more homework, their loads likewise do not seem excessive: only 8% spent more than two hours studying the night before.

What is perhaps most surprising is the homework load for 17-year-olds. Surveyed in the spring, most were in grade 11. The time they spent on homework differed only marginally from that of 13-year-old students. Although two hours has long been considered an appropriate amount of study for a high-school junior—especially for those who plan to attend college—only 12% spent more than that the night before the survey.⁷ Nearly two-thirds of both 17- and 13-year-old students spent less than one hour on homework.

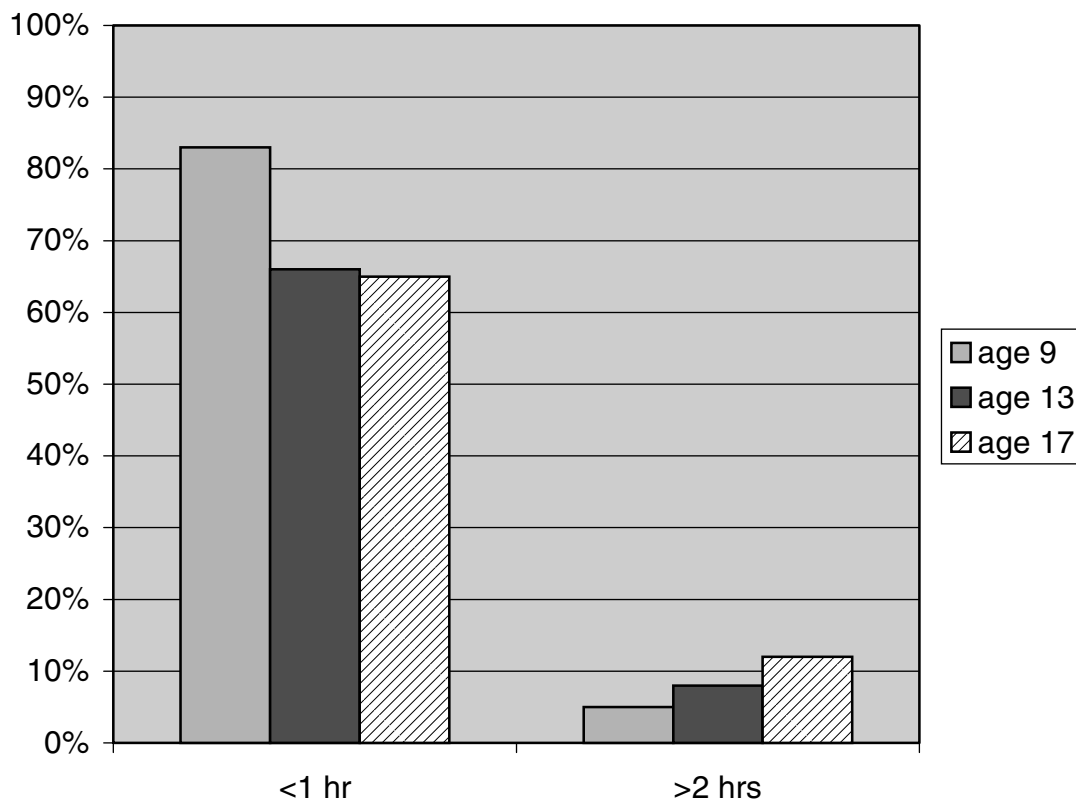


FIGURE 1. *Time spent on homework, 1999.*

The limited amount of homework done by most 17-year-olds is underscored by an examination of the low end of the scale: the proportion of students who do no homework at all on any particular school day. These include students who had no homework assigned and those who failed to do assigned homework. Figure 2 compares these groups at all three age levels.

As Figure 2 indicates, on any particular school day, 17-year-olds are less likely than 13-year-olds or 9-year-olds to do any homework. On any particular school day, nearly two high-school juniors in five are doing no homework at all. At all age levels, one quarter of students say they had no homework assigned yesterday. High school students, however, are far more likely than younger students to ignore homework that is assigned—a finding that will surely come as no surprise to high-school teachers.⁸

Variations in time spent on homework—within and between schools—are undoubtedly large. Although scholars have rarely assessed the differences systematically, it is clear that many schools have higher expectations, and many individual

students do indeed devote substantial amounts of time to study.⁹ Nevertheless, these figures seriously undermine any claims that homework today involves a large time commitment for most American students at any grade level.

Homework Trends Over the Last 25 Years

Even if homework loads are not especially large for most students today, have they increased since the academic excellence movement that began in the late 1970s made homework central to the goals of educational reform? In fact, the evidence from NAEP shows only small increases since that time period, many of which were not sustained through the 1990s.

The clearest evidence suggesting that the pro-homework consensus of the last quarter century had a positive effect can be found in the probability that teachers will assign homework on any given day. Figure 3 charts the proportion of students aged 13 and 17 who had homework assigned yesterday.¹⁰ Here we omit the 9-year-olds because NAEP began asking them about homework only in 1984, when the academic excellence

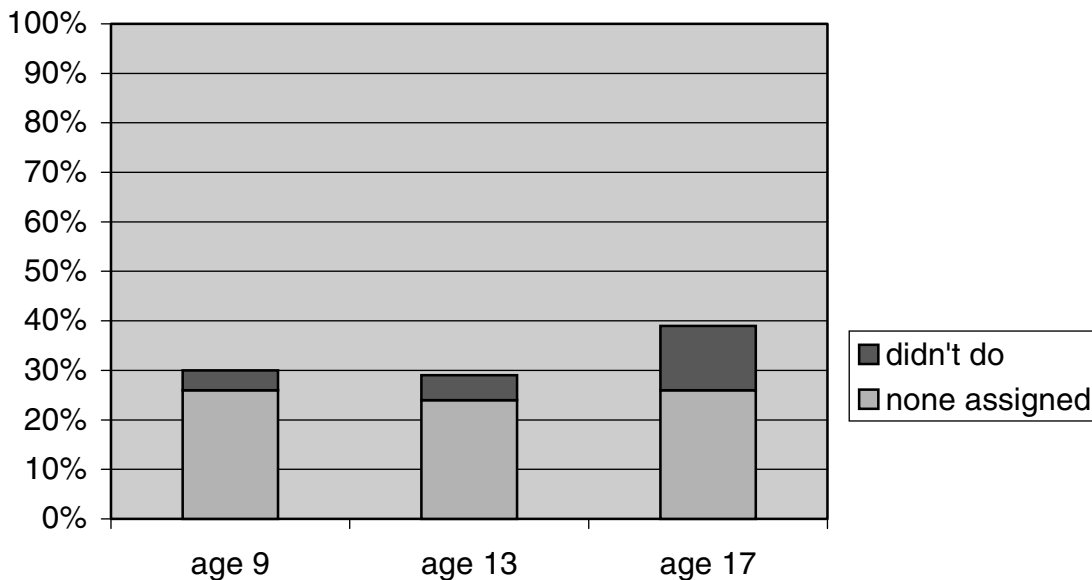


FIGURE 2. *Students doing no homework yesterday, (1999).*

movement was already underway. We discuss the data on 9-year-olds separately in a subsequent section.

Figure 3 suggests that teacher behavior changed in the 1980s: both in middle school and high school, the proportion of students with daily homework assigned increased measurably.¹¹ At

the beginning of the decade, just over two thirds of middle school and high school students had homework assigned on a typical day; this proportion increased to about four fifths by the end of the decade.¹² Trends in the likelihood of having homework assigned were very similar for 13-year-olds and 17-year-olds.

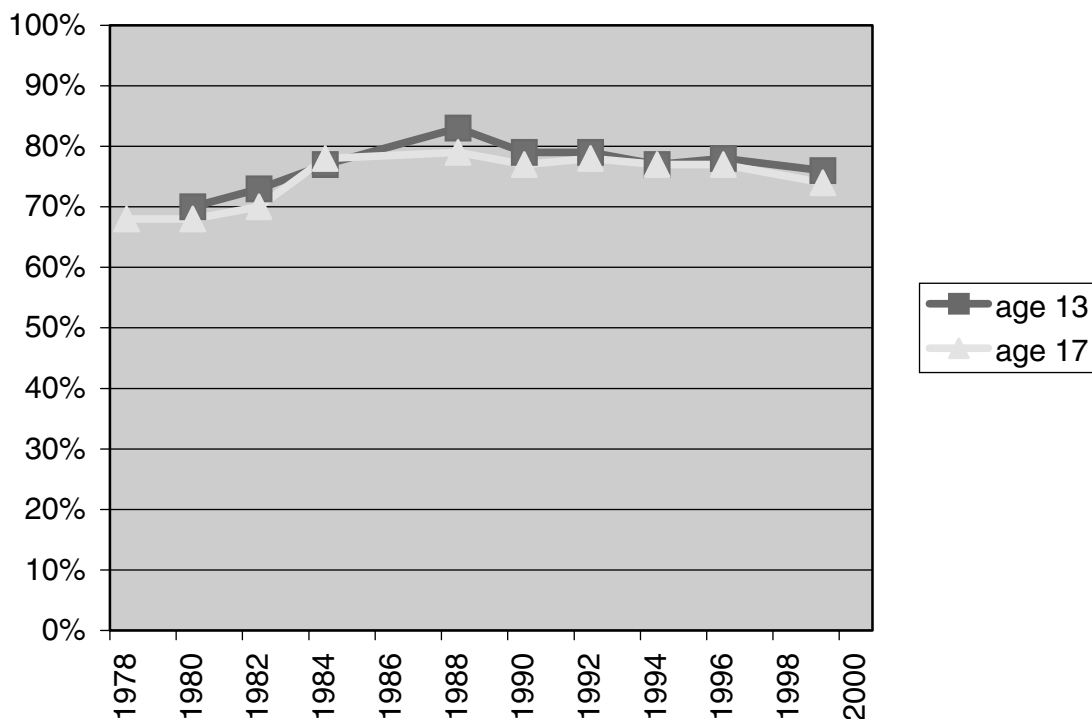


FIGURE 3. *Proportion of students with homework assigned yesterday.*

As Figure 3 indicates, during the 1990s, homework assignment trends moved very gradually in the other direction: the likelihood that high school and middle school students would be assigned homework on any evening declined from approximately four fifths to approximately three fourths.¹³ At the end of the century, however, teachers in both middle school and high school remained somewhat more likely to assign homework daily than they had been 20 years earlier.¹⁴

As homework assignment became more common during the 1980s, the probability that students would spend more than an hour daily on homework also increased, but not by large amounts. Figure 4 shows the changes between 1978 and 2000 in the proportion of 13- and 17-year-olds who spent at least one hour on homework the night before the survey.

As with the trends in homework assignment, the trends in students doing one hour or more of homework closely parallel each other at ages 13 and 17. Indeed, since 1980 (the first year that the measure is available for 13-year-old students), there have been virtually no notable differences between 13- and 17-year-olds in the proportion spending at least one hour on homework. The common-sense expectation that there should be a progressive escalation of homework load as students proceed from middle school to high

school does not appear to be the general practice in American schooling.

In addition, the trends in this chart are a bit flatter than those representing the likelihood of a student receiving a homework assignment in Figure 3. While some increases were evident in the early to mid-1980s, they were not large. The proportion of 13-year-olds doing at least one hour of homework increased by only 10% from 1980 (31%) to its peak in 1988 (41%), while the proportion of 17-year-olds in the same category increased by only 7% from 1978–1980 (33%) to its peak in 1984 (40%).¹⁵

During the 1990s, the trends in Figure 4 mirror those in Figure 3, indicating a very gradual decline in the proportion of middle school and high school students doing at least one hour of homework. By 1999, the figures in both age groups declined to numbers approaching what they were in 1980—shortly after the academic excellence movement had begun.

Trends similar to those found in the NAEP data can be found in two other major national data sets. *Monitoring the Future* is an annual survey of high-school seniors conducted by the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan (Johnston, Bachman, & O'Malley, 2001). Every year since 1976, it has asked the same question about homework loads to a

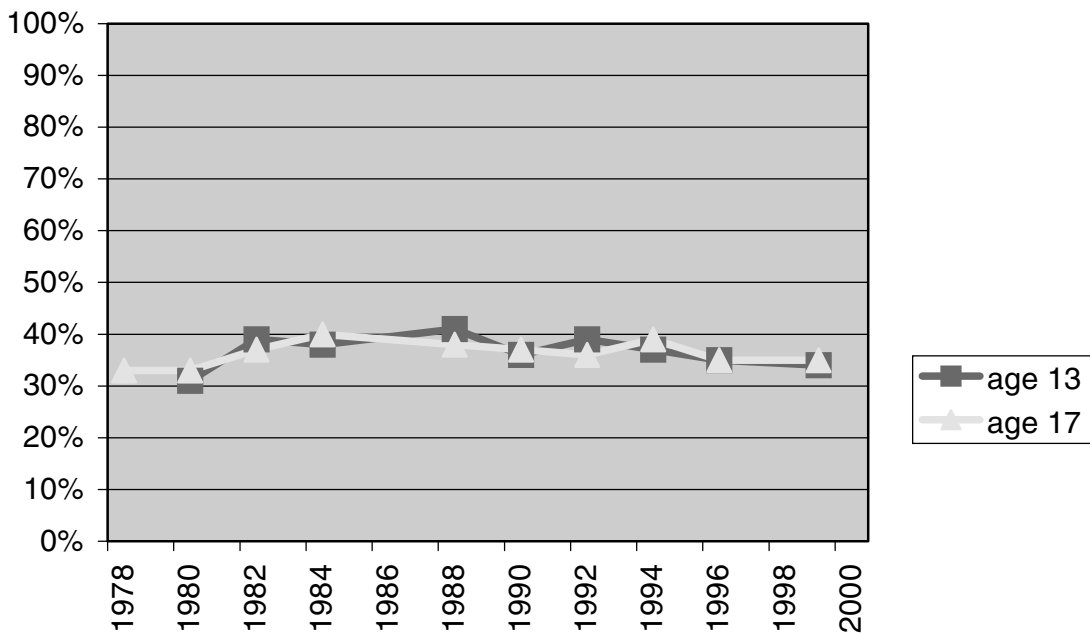


FIGURE 4. *Proportion of students doing 1 hour or more of homework, 1978–1999.*

nationally representative sample of high school seniors. The results are not directly comparable to the NAEP data, because the question asks about weekly (rather than daily) homework time and specifically tells students to include in-school study time. Nevertheless, the time trend is generally consistent with that of NAEP: a slight increase in the early 1980s followed by a gradual decline since then (Johnston et al., 2001) (see also Freedman-Doan & Libsch, 1997; Zill, Nord, & Loomis, 1995). Similarly, the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA conducts an annual survey of first-year college students that asks how much time they spent studying during their final year of high school. This, of course, is a select sample of high school seniors, who would probably have studied more than those who did not go on to college. Again, however, the trend is consistent with the NAEP data: the percentage of respondents who studied six or more hours weekly as seniors gradually declined from 47% in 1987, when the question was first asked, to 33% in 2002 (Sax, Lindholm, Astin, Korn, & Mahoney, 2002).

In sum: the 1980s saw a measurable but small increase in the amount of homework done by middle school and high school students. The increase was most evident in the likelihood that teachers would assign a minimal amount of homework, and somewhat less evident in the likelihood that students would spend at least one hour daily on homework. The only measurable increases occurred in the early- to mid-1980s, coinciding with the height of the public effort to promote academic excellence and increase homework.¹⁶ *A Nation at Risk*, the academic excellence movement's symbolic call to arms, was published in 1983 (Secretary of Education Terrell Bell commissioned the group that authored it in August, 1981), followed by *What Works* in 1986 (sponsored by Bell's successor, William Bennett). Since 1988, however, despite continuing public support for academic excellence generally and homework specifically, the amount of homework done by middle school and high school students has not increased, and in fact has slowly and gradually declined.

Homework in the Elementary Grades Since the 1980s

Although the NAEP data demonstrate that homework loads for middle and high school students were not substantially greater in the late 1990s than 20 years earlier, homework loads for

elementary-grade students deserve further analysis. As noted earlier, the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan found a 146% increase between 1981 and 1997 in the time that six- to eight-year-old children (generally in grades K-3) spent on home study (Hofferth & Sandberg, 2000, Figure 6). The ISR study is based on time diaries that cataloged all of the activities undertaken by a nationally representative group of children over the course of a week. Time diaries are generally considered the most accurate way to measure time use (Juster & Stafford, 1985; Juster & Stafford, 1991; Larson & Verma, 1999). The children's time diaries used in this ISR study were collected only twice, in 1981 and 1997.

While the home study increase measured by ISR was proportionally huge for six- to eight-year-old children, in absolute terms it was less dramatic. In 1981, time diaries indicated that primary-grade children spent an average of 52 minutes studying per week; this figure increased to 128 minutes per week in 1997 (Hofferth & Sandberg, 2000, Table 2).¹⁷ [*The End of Homework* dramatically overstates the load for primary-grade students by mistakenly reporting weekly home study times as daily times (Kralovec & Buell, 2000, p. 20)]. The proportional increase seemed very large because the baseline measurement—time spent on study in 1981—was very small.

Moreover, *the ISR study found no substantial increase in home study time over the same period for nine to twelve-year-old children* (generally third to sixth graders). Their average weekly home study time was 3:22 in 1981 and 3:41 in 1997—a difference that was not large enough to achieve statistical significance (Hofferth & Sandberg, 2000, Table 2).

In this context, we return to the NAEP data on 9-year-olds (in third or fourth grade). Figure 5 presents NAEP trend data from 1984 (the first year the question was asked of 9-year-olds) through 1999 on two indicators: rates of homework assignment and the proportion of students doing more than one hour of homework the night before the survey.

Although we lack 9-year-old data prior to 1984, when rates of homework assignment were increasing for middle school and high school students, assignment rates increased for 9-year-olds between 1984 and 1988.¹⁸ It seems likely that this followed an earlier increase consistent with that found for older students. Interestingly, however, rates of homework assignment for 9-year-olds

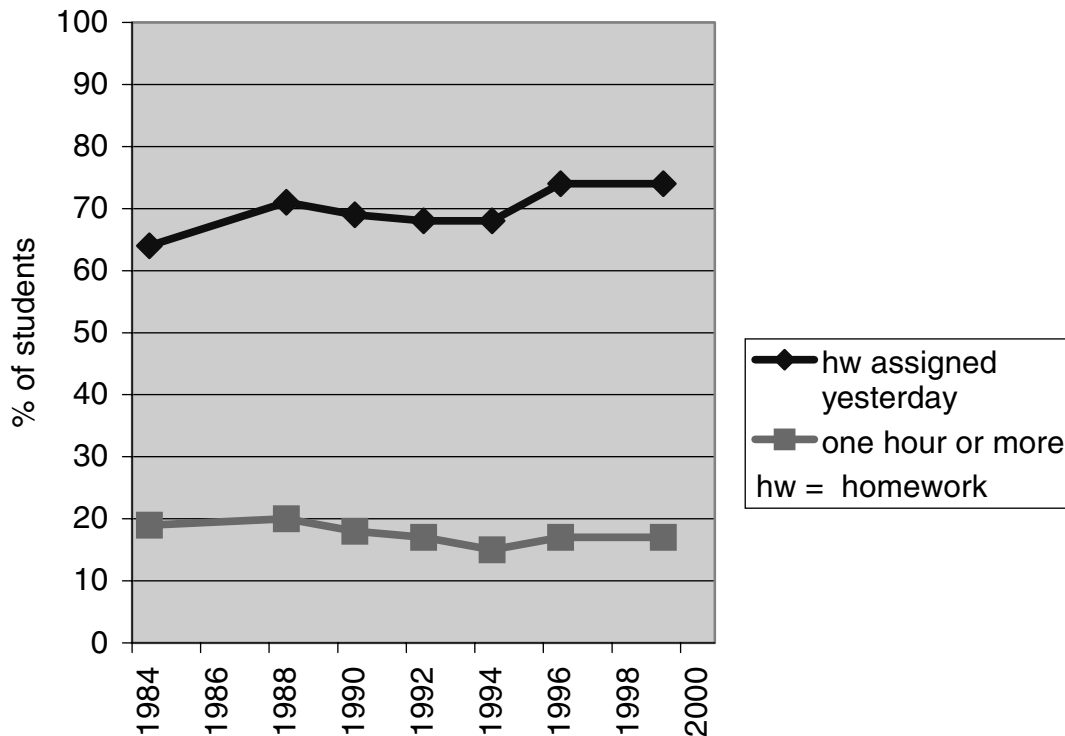


FIGURE 5. Homework trends for 9-year-olds, 1984–99.

increased still further in the 1990s, unlike the rates for 13- and 17-year-olds.¹⁹ This suggests that the ongoing academic excellence movement has been more successful in changing the practice of homework in the elementary grades than in middle school or high school. It is also consistent with the ISR finding that study time increased for younger children but not older children.²⁰

Even so, the “one hour or more” trend line undermines any claim that the increase in homework for 9-year-olds was large. The line is virtually flat throughout the period from 1984–1999, suggesting that *the increase in homework assignment for 9-year olds usually involved only nominal quantities of homework—less than an hour daily.*²¹ It is possible that this line would have shown an increase prior to 1984, but nothing we have seen suggests that any such increase would have been large. Given the small minority of 9-year-old children studying at least one hour in 1984 (and since), the increase could not have been huge.

The Failed Movement to Increase Homework Over the Last 25 Years

The data presented in the preceding pages paint a clear picture of homework practice in America

over the last quarter-century, at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Although the period represents a high point in terms of homework’s reputation among educators and the public (i.e., the consensus that homework is good and more is better), it has hardly been a high point in terms of the amount of time that students actually spend on homework. Claims about recent large increases in the homework load carried by most students are seriously overstated. Indeed, while *A Nation at Risk* invoked America’s challenges in keeping up with international competition, international comparisons of homework loads suggest that U.S. students spend far less time studying than many of their counterparts in Europe and Asia. In those regions, a number of studies have found that teenagers study an *average* of two to three hours or more daily (for a summary, see Larson & Verma, 1999). Several prominent findings related to the American data may be surprising to educators and policymakers alike:

- For the great majority of students at all ages, the total amount of time spent on homework is quite limited. Indeed, *over the past quarter century, the majority of students at all grade levels spent less than one hour daily on homework.*

- Time spent on homework does not consistently increase as students age. The likelihood that a student will have homework assigned on any particular day is essentially the same at ages nine (74% in 1999), thirteen (76%), and seventeen (74%). Because they are more likely to ignore homework assignments, 17-year-olds are actually less likely to be doing homework on any particular day than are 13-year-olds and 9-year-olds. While the proportion of students studying at least one hour per day increases from elementary (age 9) to middle school (age 13), *most 17-year-olds spend no more time on homework than do most 13-year-olds.*²²

- *Time spent on homework has not increased substantially over the last 25 years.* Teachers are more likely to assign homework than in the past, and there is some evidence of an increase in homework quantity for elementary-grade students (from low baseline levels). But the pro-homework movement has not succeeded in producing a substantial and sustained increase in the proportion of students studying at least one hour daily, at any age level.

These empirical findings raise a broader question: Can major changes in cultural preference and educational policy affect practice? The changes evident in the early- and mid-1980s suggest that the academic excellence movement probably did affect practice, but that the magnitude of the effects on homework was small, and increases were difficult to sustain over time. Indeed, if current trends continue, homework levels may dip below the levels measured before the academic excellence movement began. Educational reformers have reason for concern that the ratcheting up of academic standards over the last twenty years—as seen in increased graduation requirements and the proliferation of Advanced Placement courses, for example—has not led to a substantial increase in time spent on homework.

High School Homework in the 1970s

The academic excellence movement exemplified by *A Nation at Risk* and *What Works* was motivated in large part by a perception that, since the cultural revolution of the late 1960s, American schools had demanded too little of their students (Guttek, 2000; Honig, 1985; Ravitch, 2001). Although systematic data on homework time are less available in the 1970s than in the later periods, the best available evidence suggests that, at the high school level, few students did substantial amounts

of homework during the 1970s. Nevertheless, as we will discuss below, it does not appear that the high school homework load in the 1970s was dramatically lower than in the 1980s and 1990s.

NAEP's long-term trend data provide a consistent series on homework only as far back as 1984 for 9-year-olds, 1980 for 13-year-olds, and 1978 for 17-year-olds. Prior to 1980, we have been able to find nationally representative homework time data only for high school students. Data from the 1970s are not directly comparable to the NAEP data from the 1980s and 1990s because survey questions asked about weekly, rather than daily, homework time. Nevertheless, an overlap of daily and weekly questions in a single year (1980) makes it possible to connect the trends in the 1970s to the later period.

In 1972, 1976, and 1980, three nationally representative surveys (the National Longitudinal Survey, or NLS, in 1972; NAEP in 1976; and High School and Beyond, or HSB, in 1980) asked high school students, "Approximately what is the average amount of time you spend on homework a week?"²³ Unfortunately, response categories were slightly different in 1980 than in 1972 and 1976.²⁴ We have confidence in comparing across all three years only the results in the highest category—more than 10 hours weekly, which was identical in all three surveys.²⁵ Change between 1972 and 1980 was minimal: 6% of high school students reported studying over 10 hours weekly in 1972 and 1976, compared with 7% in 1980.²⁶ These results are displayed in Figure 6.

While these data demonstrate that homework loads were stable at low levels during the mid-to late-1970s, they also suggest that homework loads of the period were not dramatically lower than those of the 1980s and 1990s. Although we cannot directly compare these weekly homework figures with the daily figures from the NAEP surveys of 1978 and later years, the overlap in the weekly and daily series in the 1980 data permits us to determine that the only notable changes occurring over the last 30 years (at the high school level) were the modest increases of the early 1980s. The weekly data demonstrate that the high school homework load was not notably different in 1980 than in 1972 and 1976. The daily data demonstrate that the high school homework load varied only modestly after 1980, and was little different in 1999 than in 1980. Therefore we can be confident that *the high school homework load was little different in 1999 than in 1972.*

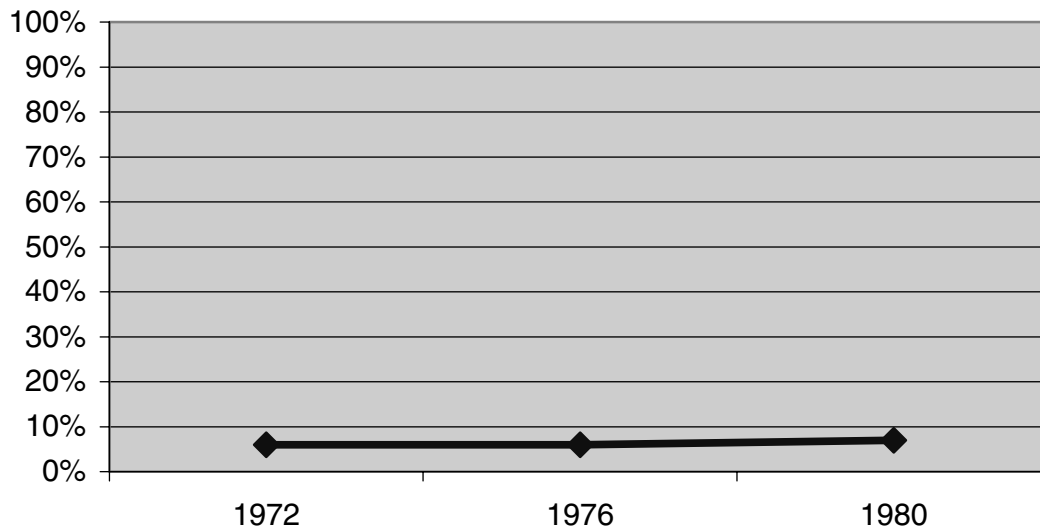


FIGURE 6. *Percent of high school students studying more than 10 hours weekly, 1972–1980.*

This finding further confirms that the academic excellence movement had minimal effect on the investment by high school students in study. While the homework loads of the 1970s might be considered low, they were nearly indistinguishable from homework loads today, and not dramatically lower than those experienced by high school students at the peak of the academic excellence movement in the mid-1980s. With the last 30 years characterized more by continuity than change, we must ask the longer-term question: was there ever a time when most American high school students were doing substantial quantities of homework?

Homework trends among high school students: the 1960s, 1950s, and 1940s

If the last 30 years have not seen a “golden age” of homework, what about the 1960s—or at least that portion of the decade prior to 1968, the symbolic year which historians commonly use to mark a major shift in American politics, culture, and education (Goetz, 2002; Hodgson, 1976; Kaiser, 1988; Matusow, 1984; O’Neill, 1971)?

To explore this question empirically, we have analyzed homework data collected by the Purdue Opinion Panel between 1948 and 1967. Begun shortly after George Gallup and others pioneered scientific opinion research at the national level, the Panel, under the leadership of H. H. Remmers, began surveying the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of American high school youth in 1943 (Converse, 1984, 1987). Over time, the Panel

“accumulated the most extensive and thoroughly analyzed storehouse of data on the attitudes of adolescents in the United States,” according to its creator (Remmers & Gage, 1955).

Homework was not one of the Panel’s more frequently investigated topics. However, the four surveys on homework that it conducted between 1948 and 1967 offer the only nationwide overview of high school homework practice prior to the 1970s, encompassing grades 9–12 in 1948 and 1952, and grades 10–12 in 1962 and 1967.²⁷ Our present goal is not to analyze all of the information on homework that the Panel gathered. Rather, we select Panel data from the 1940s–1960s that can be compared most reliably with our data from the 1970s–1990s.

Like the NAEP surveys of the last 30 years, the Purdue homework surveys generally asked about daily homework time rather than weekly homework time. But unlike the NAEP surveys that asked about yesterday’s homework, the Purdue surveys asked students to estimate the “average” amount of time spent on homework daily. One might guess that these two questions would lead to different results. Fortunately, another set of NAEP survey questions permits us to determine how the results differ.

Over the past two decades, different NAEP surveys have included different questions about homework. In some years, NAEP has asked questions both about yesterday’s homework and about average daily homework—in different nationally representative surveys. The question, “How

much time do you usually spend on homework each day?" leads to far fewer students in the "no homework" category than the question about yesterday's homework. This makes sense: if students have homework three nights out of five, then 40% will have had no homework yesterday, but the answer to the "usually" question is more than zero.

In general, we think that the question about yesterday's homework is likely to produce more accurate responses because it is less subject to bias. Fortunately, however, the NAEP results demonstrate that, while the wording of the question has a large effect at the low end of the scale, it makes no difference at the high end—i.e. for students doing more than 2 hours daily. Results for both questions are available in five different years for 17-year-olds. In three of those five years, the results are identical, while in the other two years, the difference in the "over 2 hours" category is only one percent.²⁸ Given the fortuitous consistency of the responses in the highest category across the two varieties of questions (i.e., yesterday vs. usual/average), we think it is appropriate to compare results from the Purdue Opinion Panel (1948–1967) with the later NAEP results (1978–1999) in that category only ("over 2 hours").

Thus, the most consistent statistical indicator of homework trends over the last half century, and the one that speaks most directly to whether there was a "golden age" of homework in an earlier era, concerns a subset of students in each time period who did the most homework. For present purposes, we define students who said that they did over two hours (> 2hrs) of homework per day as those who do *substantial homework*. This definition of *substantial homework* enables us to combine most reliably the several data sets we have used, and thereby to chart change over time in the share of high school students willing to "work hardest" between the 1940s and the 1990s.

According to the Purdue Opinion Panel, a significant minority of high school students—20%—was doing over two hours of homework daily in 1967 (Leidy et al., 1967). This is a substantially higher share of students than at any point in the 1970s–1990s, when approximately 10% to 13% of high school students were studying over two hours daily.²⁹ The 1967 data are reinforced by the Purdue Panel's survey of high school students five years earlier, in 1962, when a comparable

share of students—23%—reported doing over two hours daily (Blumenfeld, Franklin, & Remmers, 1962b).³⁰ Thus, we can conclude with some confidence that during the early- and mid-1960s—prior to the symbolic start of the cultural revolution and the advent of "radical school reform"—more high school students were devoting over two hours daily to homework than at any point between 1972 and 1999.

The 1960s homework data seem quite plausible when viewed against the backdrop of major changes in American politics and education at the time. This period was one of the most tumultuous in American educational history. It was punctuated by unprecedented expansion in public schooling due to the "baby boom"; the emphasis, in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), on equal educational opportunity as the solution to America's festering racial divisions; and the launching of Sputnik in 1957 and the passage of the National Defense Education Act in 1958, which substantially increased the federal role in education and reconceived student achievement as an instrument of Cold War (Cremin, 1961; Crowse, 1981; Divine, 1993; Dow, 1991; Lora, 1982; Ravitch, 1983).

Through the 1950s, a growing array of critics accused American public schools of being soft and anti-intellectual. The demise of the Progressive Education Association in 1955 (and the collapse of its journal, *Progressive Education*, in 1957) symbolically marked the most successful challenge to the reign of "progressive education" philosophy in over a half-century. Educators and politicians alike united behind tough-minded pedagogical reforms designed to impart a re-intellectualized curriculum that affirmed the virtues of homework and consciously rejected such "progressive" ideas as the experiential curriculum, child-centered learning, and individualized instruction. The new standard was "excellence." Although most curricular and pedagogical reforms focused on the teaching of science and math, teaching in the social sciences was also substantially transformed (Divine, 1993; Dow, 1991; Goetz, 2002; Graham, 1967; Gutek, 2000; Ravitch, 2001).

In short, in the late 1950s education moved onto the *nation's* political agenda as never before. As Gallup and Hill (1960, p. 63) observed in a comparative survey of educational attitudes and practices in 1960, "we have blamed our

educators because the United States was not first in orbiting a space satellite.” The academic excellence reformers, Gallup and Hill (p. 76) noted, expected kids to study hard in the post-Sputnik era: keeping up with the Soviets was going to require more homework, a longer school year, and higher educational standards, among other changes.

When the Purdue Panel surveyed high school students in 1962, America was in the midst of that era’s academic excellence movement. It was also perhaps the high point of the nation’s Cold War fears regarding the Soviet threat to American democratic institutions.³¹ This was a propitious time for persuading high school students to study hard: how well they performed in school and matched up against their Soviet counterparts mattered in ways that transcended their individual happiness, social adjustment, or vocational preparation.³² The forces that reshaped American politics and culture in the post-Sputnik era seem consistent with efforts by teachers to demand, and by students to complete, substantial homework in the early to mid-1960s.³³

But were the 1960s—when around one fifth of high school students completed over two hours of homework daily—the “golden age” of American homework? Was this the hardest that American high school students ever studied, at least in the last half of the 20th century? Or were students in the decade following World War II (the late 1940s and early 1950s) even more likely to study hard than their counterparts in the post-Sputnik era? The Purdue Panel conducted surveys on homework in 1948 and 1952 that allow us to address these questions empirically.

The data clearly indicate that following World War II, high school students were *not* inclined to study very hard. Only a small share of students—8%—were doing more than two hours of homework daily in 1948 (Remmers, Gage, & Shimburg, 1948). This figure not only indicates that postwar high school students were doing substantially less homework than their counterparts in the 1960s, but also suggests that they were doing no more (and perhaps slightly less) than high school students at any point in the 1970s–1990s. The amount of homework that high school students are doing today is neither the highest nor the lowest amount that they have done since World War II.

The low homework pattern evident in 1948 appears to have remained stable for at least the

next several years. When the Panel next surveyed homework in high schools in 1952, it did not ask pupils how much time they spent studying (Remmers, Horton, & Scarborough, 1952).³⁴ Instead, it asked how much time they thought they *ought* to study. Fortunately for us, the survey had included both questions in 1948. Not surprisingly, students in 1948 had reported that they ought to study a bit more than they in fact studied (Remmers et al., 1948). Between 1948 and 1952, the amount that students said they ought to study declined slightly. This suggests to us that the amount of time they actually studied probably did not increase. Doing substantial homework continued to remain a rarity for high school students into the early 1950s.

Figure 7 charts the proportion of students doing more than two hours of homework daily as measured by the Purdue Opinion Panel between 1948 and 1967 (including an estimate for 1952, based on calibrating the question about how much homework “ought” to be done with 1948 data). Unfortunately, it is impossible to specify with any precision the precise chronological point after 1952 and before 1962 when the share of students doing substantial homework increased to 23%. The era’s academic excellence movement was well underway by the early 1950s (Crowse, 1981; Dow, 1991; Gutek, 2000; Lora, 1982). Nonetheless, given the growing confidence and political urgency that the reform movement gradually acquired during the decade—especially the riveting fear raised by Sputnik’s launching in 1957 that the nation was being “outsmarted” by the Soviets, and the passage one year later of unprecedented levels of federal support for curricular innovation via NDEA—it makes sense that homework would have increased beginning in the late 1950s.

In sum, data from the Purdue Opinion Panel support four general conclusions about the goals and results of educational reform from the late 1940s through the 1960s:

1. Substantial increases occurred in the homework load of American high school students, probably starting in the late 1950s;
2. These increases were supported by political and cultural forces that promoted academic excellence as a matter of *national* import. In an increasingly competitive global setting, declining school performance was seen as weakening America’s stature, security, and economic power;

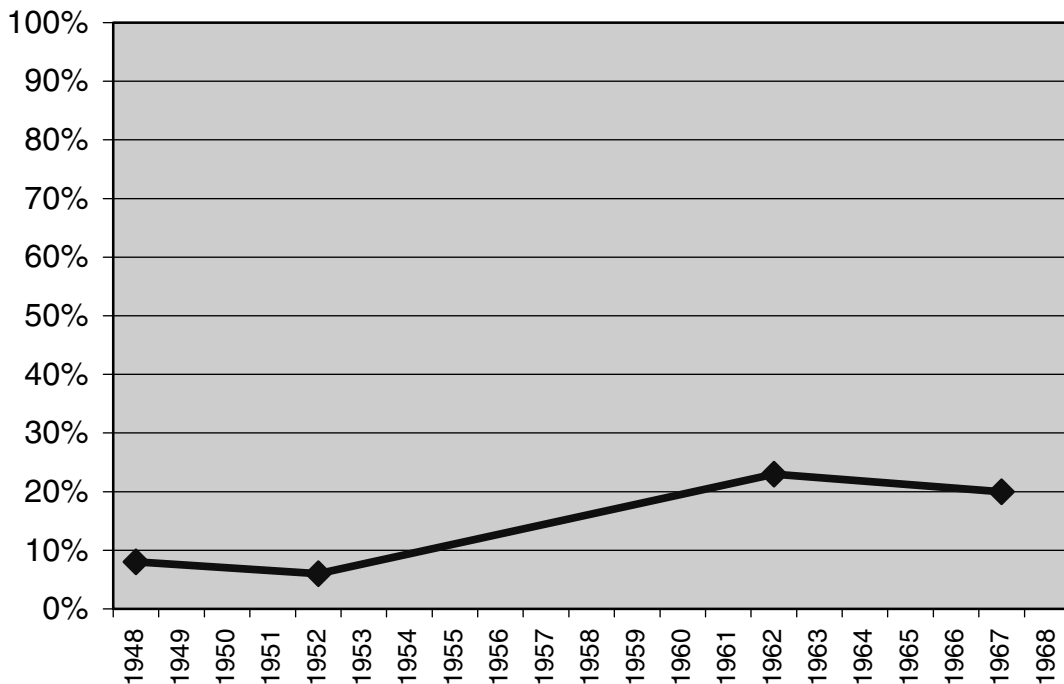


FIGURE 7. *Percent of high school students spending more than 2 hours on homework daily, 1948–1967.*

3. Homework loads declined precipitously between 1967 and 1972; and

4. Even at homework’s peak in the post-Sputnik years—the “golden age” if ever there was one—the great majority of high school students were spending less than two hours nightly on home study.

Homework in the United States: A Long-Term Perspective

Our review of the homework load of American students since World War II produced a number of interesting findings, some that are fairly predictable but others that are quite surprising. The basic story is one of historical continuity. While the amount of homework that students do has occasionally shifted upward or downward, the variations have been relatively small, even in periods of major educational foment. Whatever our country has achieved educationally since World War II, it had little to do with variations in how much homework children were assigned or completed.

Both of the two major academic excellence movements of the past half-century produced measurable increases in homework, but the substantive importance of the increases is debatable. The excellence movement that began in the late 1970s produced only marginal (dare we say triv-

ial?) increases, while the excellence movement that began in the 1950s produced larger increases that nevertheless left the great majority of American high school students studying less than two hours daily. In neither case were the increases sustained a decade later. The American way of homework has mainly been at rest: on the one hand, students at all grade levels did very little homework throughout the second half of the 20th century; on the other hand, concerted attempts to raise homework levels had little immediate impact and virtually no lasting effect. As a result, high school students in 1999 had approximately the same homework load as those in 1980, 1972, or 1948. This finding is clearest in Figure 8, which charts the proportion of students doing substantial homework over the half-century from 1948 though 1999, combining all of the data sets available to us, including Purdue Opinion Panel data from 1948–67, National Longitudinal Survey data from 1972, and NAEP data from 1976–1999.³⁵

It is evident that the academic excellence movement of the past two decades—at least with regard to homework—has largely failed. Average homework time has increased very little, with the most substantial and sustained increases occurring in the elementary grades. Homework has increased at precisely the lower grade levels

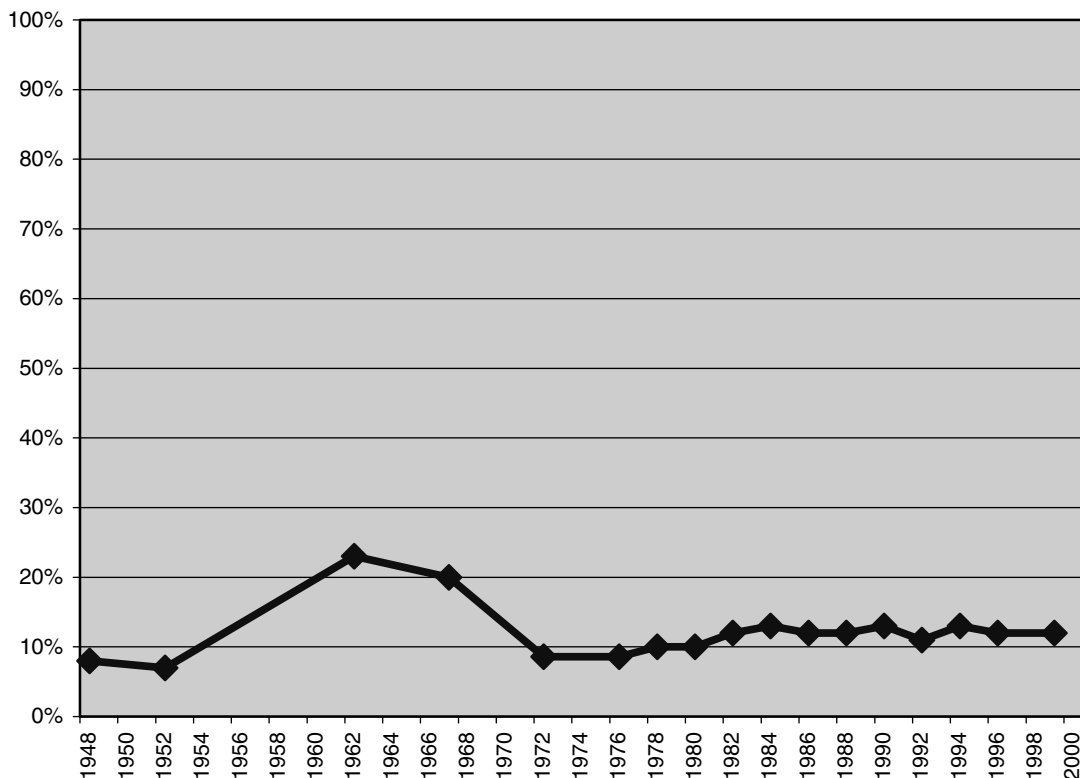


FIGURE 8. *Proportion of high school students doing substantial homework (more than 2 hours daily), 1948–1999.*

where researchers believe it matters least for academic achievement (Cooper, 1989), and where there is the least public consensus that more is necessarily better.

Research indicates that homework matters a lot for achievement at the high school level (Cooper, 1989). Moreover, the public is solidly behind the effort to increase the homework level of high school students. Unfortunately, it is precisely at the high school level that the failures of homework reform have been most evident. Today, the majority of American students are doing only modest amounts of homework: less than one hour per day, in all grade levels—elementary, middle, and high. For most students, the homework load increases only modestly between elementary and middle school, and not at all between middle school and high school. The expectation that students ought naturally to do more homework as they advance in grade, and particularly as they prepare for college and for head-to-head competition with international students in a global economy, has not assimilated into the culture of the American high school.

Our historical research does demonstrate, however, that it is not impossible, even in America, to persuade high school students to do more homework. High school students spent more time studying in the early- to mid-1960s than they do today.³⁶ We have not investigated the local mechanisms of change in policy and practice that made homework reform more successful in the post-Sputnik era than in recent times. But it seems clear that in both periods, the effort to effect change was conscious and deliberate at the national, state, and local levels, reflecting values and cues that were widely shared and articulated by political and educational leaders. In both periods, a global threat of major proportions (“a nation at risk”) was invoked to motivate educational change; in neither period did serious philosophical or political division weaken the new push for excellence. Indeed, if anything, homework was more central to the campaign for academic excellence in the 1980s than in the 1950s. Hence, the failure to raise homework levels during the past quarter century stands out all the more. The gap between the rhetoric

and the reality of homework reform has never been greater than it is today.

Yet we should not be nostalgic about past triumphs in homework reform. The achievements of the Sputnik-era academic excellence movement should not be exaggerated, at least with regard to homework. Even at homework's peak during the mid-1960s, less than one quarter of high school students studied more than two hours daily. These levels were well above those of a decade or two earlier. But even at their height, the post-Sputnik homework levels hardly constituted a true "golden age" of homework. Some of the leading homework scholars in the 1950s and 1960s considered two hours per day as normal and appropriate, not an unusual amount of time for high school students to study—much like their academic counterparts do today (Cooper, 2001; Goldstein, 1960). Indeed, even in 1960, in the midst of the post-Sputnik excellence movement, a Gallup study lamented that American students were studying far less than their counterparts in Germany, France, and Norway (Gallup & Hill, 1960). Most American high school students in the post-Sputnik era ignored the homework imperative articulated by educational reformers.

Regardless, there is no denying that the increases in homework that took place in the post-Sputnik period were anomalous. *The main historical trend over the past half-century is that of continuity.* American high school students in the late 1940s and early 1950s studied no more than their counterparts did in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Since World War II—whether prevailing educational opinion opposed or supported homework as a cure for the nation's educational ills—the American way of homework has largely rested at levels comfortably below those of the post-Sputnik peak. Just as in the late 1940s, less than one hour per day is the norm today.

Homework Reform: Toward a More Fruitful Policy Discourse

Is there something distinctive to American culture, or to our policymaking process in education, that undermines periodic efforts to increase homework? That intriguing question, alas, is beyond the ability of our empirical evidence to address. But we do believe that there is something peculiar to the American discourse on homework that future reformers will have to address if they hope to make homework a more integral and valued part of the high school experience, as we think it should be.

Historically, homework has been one of the most emotionally charged topics in American education. Opinions on homework have tended toward extremes, with one viewpoint or another dominating for relatively lengthy periods of time. For example, between 1900 and 1940 a crusade against homework led by "progressive" educators achieved considerable support among academics, school officials, and parents alike. Throughout the 20th century, proponents and opponents have linked their views on homework to broader political and ideological agendas, and regularly derided contrary views as unfounded or even un-American (Gill & Schlossman, 1996).

In the clash of ideological discourse, the most common focus has been on time, i.e. how much homework ought students at different grade levels to do? One side has idealized homework: the more the better. The other side has demonized homework and even demanded its abolition. Over the past century, it is remarkable how narrowly focused on issues of time the controversies over homework have been and continue to be today. Debate centers on how much to require of a given product, rarely on rethinking homework itself to obtain stronger student and parental buy-in or to make it more effective pedagogically (see Kohn, 1999).

Seriously neglected, too, have been thorny implementation problems regarding the content and scheduling of homework that must guide any concrete effort to change practice. Mundane though they may seem at first, issues of scheduling cut to the heart of class management, administrative norms, and principal-teacher power relations. This is especially true at the high school level, where teaching is divided by subject areas and supervised by separate academic departments.

Future reformers, we suggest, might learn from a long-forgotten strand of the discourse on homework that occurred during the middle decades of the 20th century. At that time, a number of scholars and practitioners seriously tried to transform homework into more interesting, challenging, and diverse educational experiences for students. Moreover, they sought to establish practical guidelines for administering homework in order to maximize buy-in from teachers, students, and parents (Gill & Schlossman, 2000).³⁷ As was true at mid-century, issues of "what?" and "how?" should become as important to future policy discourse on homework as the narrow issue of "how much?"

Homework can and should serve a variety of important purposes in the educational process, especially when it is thoughtfully designed and implemented. Homework can promote academic achievement (Cooper, 1989), particularly in the current era of standards-based reform and high-stakes accountability; it can inculcate habits of self-discipline and independent study (Goldstein, 1960); and, not least, it can help inform parents about and excite their interest in the educational agenda of the school (Gill & Schlossman, 1995). Gaining leverage on homework, however, inevitably requires significant reforms of educational practice (Gardner, 1999; Kohn, 1999). The largest increases in homework time during the last half century occurred during the post-Sputnik era, a period of pedagogical fervor when educational practice changed considerably, especially at the high school level. These increases, rather than resulting from a focused effort to expand homework per se, were incidental to major efforts to transform the content of the curriculum and methods of instruction. Without this level of serious interest in promoting major and complementary reforms in educational practice, mere exhortations to spend more time on homework will come up against limits imposed by students, teachers, and sometimes parents as well.

Notes

¹ In *A Nation at Risk*, the National Commission on Excellence offered the following observations and recommendations regarding homework (pp. 19, 21, 29): “The amount of homework for high school seniors has decreased (two-thirds report less than 1 hour a night) . . . time spent . . . on homework is often used ineffectively . . . schools are not doing enough to help students develop either the study skills required to use time well or the willingness to spend more time on school work . . . Students in high schools should be assigned far more homework than is now the case.” *What Works*, however, was more emphatic and narrowly focused in identifying homework as key to raising student achievement, and in citing ostensibly conclusive research evidence in support of its claim. According to the leading academic authority on homework, Harris Cooper, *What Works* was, in the early 1990s, “the most popular publication ever printed by the U.S. government” (Cooper, 1994, p. 36). In a second edition of this study (2001, p. 52), Cooper refers to *What Works* as still “one of the most popular publications ever printed by the U.S. government.” In both editions, Cooper raises serious questions about how the research evidence was used in *What Works?* and in other policy documents of the 1980s.

² Notably, the state school board president, Yvonne Larsen, had been the vice-chair, under David Gardner, of the National Commission on Excellence in Education that wrote *A Nation at Risk* in 1983.

³ Televised on 1 April 1999.

⁴ The ISR findings have been cited in the *New York Times* (Winerip, 1999), *Time* (Ratnesar, 1999), and *The End of Homework* (Kralovec & Buell, 2000).

⁵ These results come from the NAEP Long-Term Trend Reading surveys. NAEP also asks about homework on other surveys, sometimes using different questions and different response categories. We believe the question on the Long-Term Trend Reading assessment is the best of the NAEP homework questions, and it also has the longest history, dating back to 1978 in the case of 17-year-olds (when it was asked on the Long-Term Trend Math survey).

⁶ The “less than one hour” category in Figure 1 includes those students who did no homework and those who had none assigned. Five response categories were given in the survey: “No homework was assigned”; “I had homework but didn’t do it”; “Less than 1 hour”; “1 to 2 hours”; and “More than two hours.”

⁷ Although this was not dramatically more than 13-year-olds (at 8%), the difference is statistically significant ($p < .01$).

⁸ The difference in the proportion of students who said they did not do assigned homework between 17-year-olds (13%) and 13-year-olds (5%) is statistically significant ($p < .01$), as is the difference between 17-year-olds and 9-year-olds (4%) ($p < .01$).

⁹ Twenty years ago James Coleman and colleagues found substantial variation in average homework load across school sectors, with Catholic, private, and high-performing public high schools demanding substantially more homework than conventional public schools (Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1982). Such differences would surely be evident today as well, but we have not sought to examine them here. Future scholarship should seek to examine variations within and between schools, including any changes over time in the distribution of homework loads.

¹⁰ This chart is derived by subtracting from 100% all of those who said they had no homework assigned.

¹¹ A reader might wonder whether homework had already been increasing in the 1970s. Unfortunately, evidence from the 1970s is less consistent than that from later periods and was produced using different survey questions, making direct comparisons problematic. As we show later in the essay (see Figure 6), however, the best available evidence shows no notable increase in high-school homework in the 1970s.

¹² The difference between 1980 and 1988 is statistically significant at both age levels ($p < .01$ for 17-year-olds and $p < .01$ for 13-year-olds).

¹³ The difference between 1988 and 1999 is statistically significant at both age levels ($p < .01$ for 13-year-olds and $p < .01$ for 17-year-olds).

¹⁴ The difference between 1980 and 1999 is statistically significant at both age levels ($p < .01$ for 17-year-olds and $p < .01$ for 13-year-olds).

¹⁵ Differences at both age levels are statistically significant ($p < .01$ for 17-year-old differences between 1980 and 1984; $p < .01$ for 13-year-old differences between 1980 and 1988). Note that this chart combines results from two response categories on the original surveys: one-to-two hours and over two hours. NCES tables, however, report standard errors for individual response categories. We did not have access to raw data from which to calculate standard errors of combined categories. We therefore estimate p values using standard errors from both categories, which should produce a conservative p value.

¹⁶ Moreover, these increases did not merely represent the continuation of a pre-existing trend. As we describe in a subsequent section, homework loads were flat during the 1970s, at levels similar to those seen in 1980.

¹⁷ Note, however, that these figures represent year-round averages, including summertime, when most children are not in school. They therefore probably understate the average study time during a typical school week.

¹⁸ The difference between assignment rates in 1984 and 1988 is statistically significant ($p < .01$).

¹⁹ The difference between assignment rates in 1990 and 1999 is statistically significant ($p < .05$).

²⁰ To be sure, the age groups in the two data sets are not quite consistent. ISR grouped 9-year-old children with those aged 10 to 12, a group which showed only a small (nonsignificant) increase. But given the substantial increase found for 6- to 8-year-old children in the ISR study, it seems likely that 9-year-olds, measured separately, would have also seen an increase.

²¹ Indeed, for 9-year-olds studying one hour or more, the overall trend for the period shows a slight decline, from 19% to 17%. This difference is statistically significant ($p < .05$). Again, note that this chart combines results from two response categories on the original surveys: one-to-two hours and over two hours. NCES tables, however, report standard errors for individual response categories. We did not have access to raw data from which to calculate standard errors of combined categories. We therefore estimate p values using standard errors from both categories, which should produce a conservative p value.

²² At the high end of the scale—more than two hours daily—there are more 17-year-olds than 13-year-olds, as we showed in Figure 1. But the proportion of all students doing this much homework is quite small, amounting to only 12% at age 17 and 8% at age 13 in 1999. As Figures 1 and 4 demonstrate, the majority of 13- and 17-year-olds are doing less than one hour of homework daily, and the proportions are virtually identical at age 13 (66% in 1999) and age 17 (65% in 1999).

²³ The NLS survey in 1972 polled high school seniors while the NAEP survey in 1976, like later NAEP

surveys, polled 17-year-old students—who would have been largely high school juniors. Evidence from other surveys that include students at multiple grade levels, however, demonstrates that there are no notable differences in homework time between grades 10 and 12. (See Blumenfeld, Franklin, & Remmers, 1962b; Leidy, Karasick, Smart, Remmers, & Starry, 1967; Remmers, Gage, & Shimberg, 1948). Moreover, the HSB survey itself found only small differences between grades 10 and 12, with no clear pattern evident.

²⁴ In all three years, response categories included “No homework is ever assigned” and “I have homework but don’t do it.” In 1972 and 1976, the other three response categories were each equivalent to a multiple of five times the daily categories used in later NAEP surveys: “Less than 5 hours a week”; “Between five and ten hours a week”; and “More than ten hours a week.” In 1980, the “less than 5 hours” category was expanded into three categories: less than 1 hour, 1 to 3 hours, and 3 to 5 hours. We do not think it is safe to assume that the sum of responses in the three new categories would be equivalent to the response received in a single category of “less than 5 hours.” The expansion of this intermediate category in the scale seems likely to have pulled in some responses that might otherwise have been in the immediately adjacent categories, notably the 5–10 hours category.

²⁵ Notably, the immediately adjacent category—5 to 10 hours weekly—was also the same in all three surveys. While the 5 to 10 hour category may have been artificially deflated by the expansion of the “less than 5 hours” category into three separate increments, we do not believe the “over 10 hours” category should have been substantially affected.

²⁶ Standard errors are not reported in the document providing 1976 results, but even if the figures are statistically different, the change they represent is substantively small.

²⁷ Differences in homework time across grade levels in the various Purdue surveys are small and follow no consistent pattern (see Blumenfeld, Franklin, & Remmers, 1962a; Blumenfeld et al., 1962b; Leidy et al., 1967; Remmers et al., 1948).

²⁸ For the “yesterday” question, the “over 2 hours” category drew 12% in 1990, 11% in 1992, 13% in 1994, 11% in 1996, and 12% in 1999. Meanwhile, the same response to the “usually” question drew 13% in 1990, 11% in 1992, 13% in 1994, 12% in 1996, and 12% in 1999.

²⁹ The directly comparable estimates of 10% to 13% come from the NAEP surveys from 1978 to 1999. While we do not have directly comparable data from 1972 and 1976, the consistency of those results with 1980 weekly results strongly suggests that the proportion of students studying over 2 hours daily would have been comparable to the 1980 figure of 10%. The Purdue reports, unfortunately, do not include standard errors that would permit us to assess the statistical sig-

nificance of these differences. Given that the Purdue studies included a representative sample of 3,000 high school students across the country, however, we have some confidence in the precision of the results.

³⁰ The question and response categories were slightly different in 1962 and 1967. In 1962, students were asked, “What is the average amount of time you actually spend on homework outside of school each day?” Response categories included “no time,” “less than 1 hour,” “1–2 hours,” and “more than 2 hours” (Blumenfeld et al., 1962b, p. 17a). In 1967, students were asked, “How long each day, on the average, do you spend working on school assignments after school hours?” Response categories included “less than one hour,” “one to two hours,” “three to four hours,” “five to six hours,” and “more than six hours” (Leidy et al., 1967, p. 5a). Although we do not believe the slight difference in question phrasing would have affected the result, the change in response categories might have made a difference. One possibility is that the addition of high-end categories might have inflated results in 1967. Alternatively, however, the fact that the new categories were not continuous could have deflated results: A student who studied 2.4 hours per day might choose the “one to two hours” category rather than the “three to four hours” category, when the same person would have responded in the “more than 2 hours” category in 1962. It is impossible to know definitively whether one or both of these effects existed, and if so, whether one dominated the other. We are reassured, however, by the fact that, of the 20% of students in the top three categories, only 2% checked “five to six hours” and 1% checked “more than six hours.”

³¹ Recall that the Cuban Missile Crisis took place in 1962. In the Purdue Panel’s 1962 survey, the only other sustained line of questioning (in addition to homework) involved students’ opinions on fallout shelters.

³² The Panel devoted far more questions in 1962 than in 1948 or 1952—an astonishing 24—to issues relating to study and homework, further suggesting the centrality of homework to the era’s academic excellence movement. One of these questions concerned the amount of time that students spent on study *at school*. By distinguishing carefully between home-based and school-based study time, the Panel, we believe, ensured a more accurate and discriminating set of responses.

³³ Our interpretation is loosely reinforced by several surveys of parental opinion on homework that George Gallup administered between 1954 and 1965 (Gallup, 1972). In 1954, only 39% of American adults felt that high school students should be given more homework. By 1958 and 1959, this share had risen to 51%. That homework was becoming increasingly central to public discussion of education reform is suggested by a significant decline in the share of respondents who recorded no opinion: from 27% in 1954 to 12% in 1959.

As the academic excellence movement increased in influence nationwide and raised the homework load in

American high schools—as reflected in the 23% of students recorded as doing more than two hours daily in 1962 by the Purdue Opinion Panel—adult opinion became more sharply divided about how much homework was enough. In the 1961 poll, 46% favored and 44% opposed increasing the amount of homework for high school students, while only 10% recorded no opinion. Thus, fewer adults actually supported increases in homework in 1961 than in 1959 (46% vs. 51%). We suggest that this small shift probably occurred not because Americans were turning their backs on homework in the early 1960s—an explanation that we find implausible, given the broader political and cultural climate—but rather because actual homework loads had recently risen and some adults were beginning to conclude that additional increases were undesirable or unrealistic.

This interpretation is reinforced by the survey data from 1965. Now, opponents of additional homework led supporters by a margin of 47% to 39%. Notable, too, was the breakdown that the survey provided between respondents with and without children. A plurality of the latter group still favored assigning more homework (41% to 40%), whereas a solid majority (54% to 37%) of the former—those who would feel the brunt of rising homework loads more directly in their own households—opposed further increases in the amount of homework. Again, we suggest, this was not because political and cultural support for homework were beginning to decline by 1965; recall that, according to the Purdue Opinion Panel, 20% of students were still doing substantial homework in 1967. Rather, we believe, more American adults, and especially parents with children, understood that homework expectations had already risen significantly in the high schools, and they were beginning to doubt the wisdom of never-ending increases in homework load.

All poll figures are from Gallup (1972). For 1954, see vol. 2, p. 1282; for 1958, see vol. 2, p. 1582; for 1959, see vol. 3, p. 1612; for 1961, see vol. 3, p. 1715; and for 1965, see vol. 3, p. 1945.

³⁴ Starting in 1952, the Panel stopped surveying 9th graders as part of the high school population, doubtless due to the rapid proliferation of junior high schools. But a consistent finding of the surveys was that there was no appreciable increase in the time that students spent on homework as they progressed through the high school grades. Hence, the elimination of 9th graders from the surveys probably did not reduce their comparability over time to the original 1948 survey of homework.

³⁵ In this chart, all data except 1972 are for grade 11 or age 17, to maintain as much comparability as possible. 1972 data are for grade 12. The 1952 figure is an estimate based on the results of a question on normative homework, calibrated with 1948 data, as described earlier in the text. 1972 and 1976 figures are estimates based on the results of questions on weekly

homework time, calibrated with 1980 data (using the separate weekly and daily results from 1980 to create a crosswalk that estimates 1972 and 1976 daily figures from weekly figures).

³⁶ Compared to the 1950s, where substantial federal and foundation monies flowed into the transformation of academic curricula and the development of new “discovery-based” pedagogies (Crowse, 1981; Divine, 1993; Dow, 1991; Goetz, 2002), the recent educational reform movement has focused little attention on improving curriculum or pedagogy at the high school level in order to increase student buy-in for traditional academic subjects. This reflects, in our view, the greater pessimism that exists today regarding high school as a realistic object of systemic reform or as the educational linchpin of American democracy (Angus & Mirel, 1999; Labaree, 1997; Ravitch, 2001).

³⁷ Howard Gardner and Alfie Kohn have articulated a more expansive view of homework that is consistent with these earlier efforts (Gardner, 1999; Kohn, 1999).

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