

Senior Dad

The Show About Parenting

Weekly from San Francisco

Hosted by Stan Goldberg



Senior Dad Homework Position February 2007

Homework has been the mainstay of American education for the last 75 years. Like hemlines, the perceived need rises and falls as the market demands. Homework can be a polarizing issue. Some parents crave more homework assignments for their children while others seek a way of removing their children from what they view as a treadmill going nowhere. Within families there may be sometime divisiveness and acrimony over homework and some parents would rather retire from their role as the homework warden in the eyes of their children.

There has been exhaustive research on the subject. There have been enough studies written about homework to fill a school library. I came to the subject without any current bias. I did remember my own feelings about homework when I was in school (1947-1965). I cast those aside and set out to view homework with a modern objective approach. First, I got the current published thought on homework.

Sara Bennett—*The Case Against Homework*

Alfie Kohn—*The Homework Myth*

Harris Cooper—*The Battle over Homework*

John Buell—*Closing the Book on Homework*

I then interviewed each of the authors for my Senior Dad podcast (Senior Dad 008-010). I learned that while there is minor disagreement about the value of homework in the middle and high schools, everyone agrees that there is no value to giving homework in the grades K-5. So if that is true, why do we still assign homework to K-5 students?

The answer to the, “Why do we still do it?” question is complex. If we view the education of our children as a Parent-School partnership there may not be tools to foster dialogue between these groups. We decided to develop a tool that could supply information to both parents and staff about the current climate about homework in their school. We designed a questionnaire that a school or PTA could use to educate themselves about homework conditions. The survey addresses many issues surrounding homework. Teachers assign homework and have a perception of the amount of time it will take the student to complete. Is this perception reality? How much stress does homework produce in the child or parents? Does homework impact on family time? Has there been is change over the course of the term in the child’s love of school and learning?

Would you use a no-penalty opt-out policy for homework? These are important questions where the survey can provide insight.

One of the survey questions ask if the parent would use a no penalty opt policy. While each school must design it's own opt out policies. A two tier opt out policy allows the parent to have their child removed from the homework list. At the start of any school year the default status should be opt in. At any time during the year a parent should be allowed to change their child's status. A second level of an opt out policy is for the child that is opted in. It allows the parent whose child is in an opt-in status the ability to opt out on any given homework assignment. An opt out policy allows both poles of the homework issue to achieve their beliefs without harming the other.

I believe that the best chance we have to receiving accurate, true information is if the confidentiality of the parent-respondent is maintained. With that in mind, we have made a PDF survey that is submitted via email. We disconnect the survey from the email and archive the address of the email sender (we will not use the email address to send anything out) so we can verify if a survey was in fact received. We have a method of tagging a master survey form with a school name. When we receive the data it is added to all the other data we receive to get an over all view. We are able to send the total data picture back to the school or PTA as well as the data of that school only. This allows a comparison to be made with total data to local school data. This is fine for parents with computer access but does not address those who do not have such access. For those parents, the school or the PTA must supply a printed copy of the survey along with an envelope to submit a sealed completed survey. When that survey is returned a parent volunteer then enters the data into a computer form and sends it off via email. Senior Dad will email the total results and data analysis back to the school or PTA. This is a totally free service.

Schools should not rush into change. If a system has been in place for 75 years, adjustments to it should be made respectfully with all parties evaluating the effects of the adjustment year to year. The first step is developing the information to make decisions. Educators need to evaluate the relevancy and value of the homework they assign. The homework survey tool allows for a barometer of homework attitudes at a school. By the parents and staff working together, understanding everyone's needs, we can improve the educational experience and results for all families.