

Parent Committee on Health and Wellness

Presentation at PA General Meeting – March 4, 2019

We are a group of parents who understands that academic success and a healthy and well-balanced life are not mutually exclusive. We would like our children to achieve both.

The goals of our committee:

- To promote health and wellness for kids
- To maximize the potential for academic success for our children
- To collaborate with the school, teachers & other parent groups to meet these goals

Myth: We are anti-homework/only care about homework

- One piece of the puzzle, but one that is tied to many others
- Think about your own work experience & the intersecting spheres of stress
- There are no “sides” in this debate
 - No child benefits from excess homework that provides no additional academic benefit
 - Students could spend time on sleep, exercise, reading for pleasure, all of which are associated with academic success
 - Students could spend time on extra-curricular activities that make them well rounded, help with college applications, etc.

MYTH BUSTING

- Myth: work and academic success follow a linear path – more is always better (or at least more won't do any harm) and will lead to greater success and a better life
- Confronting our own biases leftover from our childhoods

Opinion

Why Girls Beat Boys at School and Lose to Them at the Office

Hard work and discipline help girls outperform boys in class, but that advantage disappears in the work force. Is school the problem?



By **Lisa Damour**

Dr. Damour is a clinical psychologist.

Feb. 7, 2019



An illustration of a large, brown tree with thick branches and green leaves. Several children are climbing the tree. On the right, a man with a beard and a woman are standing on the ground, looking up at a child who is climbing a green ladder leaning against the tree. The background is a grassy field under a light sky.

The parent trap

The greater a country's income inequality, the likelier parents are to push their kids to work hard

Thinking about the real challenges

- It is unlikely that any Lab School graduates will struggle in life because of an academic deficit in their education ...
- but Lab School graduates might struggle later in life because of:
 - mental health issues
 - issues with drugs and alcohol
 - struggles with social skills/emotional intelligence

The Atlantic



The Silicon Valley Suicides

Why are so many kids with bright prospects killing themselves in Palo Alto?

The Washington Post

CDC investigates why so many students in wealthy Palo Alto, Calif., commit suicide

“Burnout is common among high-achieving high school students who sacrificed sleep and relaxation for four years to get into their college of choice, only to find once they get there that they can’t imagine another four years of grind.”

The New York Times

When a College Student Comes Home to Stay

Thirty percent of freshmen won’t return for their sophomore year, and the wheels can start to fall off as early as Thanksgiving. What can parents do?



Northwestern U. grapples with String of Suicides 12/11/18

“Northwestern’s experience is not uncommon among universities and is not happening in a vacuum, experts say, with students increasingly arriving on campus with mental health issues. Multiple schools nationally have experienced a series of deaths among talented students whose lives seemed so full of promise.”



Northwestern University senior Angelica Wilson, 22, pictured during Senior Week in June 2018, died later that month, and authorities ruled she died of a suicide. She was one of four Northwestern students who have died of a suicide this year. (Stephanie Bernstein)

Other myths to bust

- Kids can get by without much sleep and/or can make up sleep on weekends.
- It's better for a kid to be busy than bored.
- Research about homework is inconsistent and we cannot draw any conclusions.
- Kids who are stressed out just aren't "cut out" for Lab.
- This is an age old problem that no one can fix.

Some myth/some reality

- Kids are overscheduled
 - 15-20+ hrs/week have higher anxiety & depression
 - Downtime is a critical component
 - But hobbies important for stress release & exercise
- It's all about the screens
 - We all know parents who heavily regulate screens and still have stressed kids

Myth: Evidence is inconsistent

- Evidence shows no increase in academic achievement in young children
 - Some studies even find small negative relation
- In middle and high school, academic achievement tends to improve to the point of about 10 minutes per grade per night
- After about 90 minutes for middle school students and 120-150 minutes for high school students, academic achievement appears to begin to decline

What have we done?

- Engaged with middle school administration
- Participated in middle school homework committee convened by Sandy Bixby
- Reached out to many teachers, counselors, and parents, and other parent groups
- Formed a Facebook/G-mail group for parents interested in health and wellness issues
- Conducted a homework survey among parents
- Initiated a survey among students and teachers
- Met with Charlie Abelman /Betsy Noel/Nicole Neal/Priyanka Rupani

What have we learned?

- Levels of homework at Lab is high compared even to peer schools.
- There is a communication gap between home and school. Hard for teachers to know what things look like at home and parents to know what is happening at school.
- This topic unmask some of our fears about having successful kids.

What can parents do: Communication is key

- Communication gap means disconnect between home and school
- Need to encourage more communication
 - Many students are unwilling to contact teacher when homework takes a long time
 - For many reasons, parents are often also reluctant to engage with teachers
 - Student advocacy is necessary but sometimes not sufficient. Kids are developing skills.

What can you do?

- Encourage/teach students to advocate
- Communicate early, civilly, and thoughtfully with teachers when stress levels and homework are high
- Give teachers positive feedback when they have good HW practices or make changes so they know that parents appreciate sensible work loads

Homework at Peer Schools

- Footnote in our Call for Action, Study and Reform lists many examples of peer schools that have engaged in reform.

Trend Lines: How Important Is Homework?

Winter 2019

By Alison Baran



Homework has been a deeply rooted feature of the primary and secondary education system for well over a century. And it's an extremely divisive topic—homework seems to be considered either all good or all bad. There's no in-between.

Throughout the 20th century, the debate about homework seemed to be guided by cultural and political pressures. During the early 1900s, the emphasis for work outside of school was placed on rote tasks such as memorization of multiplication tables. In the 1940s, leading education scholars, primarily progressive ones, pursued a campaign to abolish homework, maintaining that it caused more harm than good to both children and their families. On the flip side, with the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in



Example from Park School

- A cross-divisional group of teachers examined the current research
- Continuing discussions
- Experiments: What if not giving homework became our default setting? What if we asked ourselves: Is there a specific reason that this homework assignment is necessary? Then maybe we could truly be mindful of our students' lives outside of school, and put the learning and well-being of students first.
- Developed Policies and Guidelines

Park School Guidelines

- Children have the right to playtime, extracurricular activities, downtime, and adequate sleep.
- Teachers should assign homework with a clear sense of why it is being given.
- The purpose of the homework assignment should be articulated to the students, including the fact that a certain task might be a challenge. Research shows that when children know why they are doing the homework, they are more engaged and inspired.
- Tasks should be personally relevant to students and should allow for choices. Children are motivated when they have ownership in their learning.
- Over the course of time, the kinds of homework should vary depending on what is happening in class.
- Homework assignments better serve students when they feel competent and confident with the material being assigned.
- Children deserve feedback about the homework that they have completed.
- Teachers should differentiate for individual needs across all grade levels. This might mean adjusting number of math facts, amount of reading, etc.
- ****Parents have the right to control their child's time outside of school without being judged.****
- If you have doubts about whether the assignment will further learning, consider that the default might be to have no homework, or think about conducting an experiment of not doing homework for a set period of time.