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## Homework Research Reflects Benefits, Shortfalls

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# COLLEGE OF EDUCATION & HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

## *Selected News Releases*

### **Homework Research Reflects Benefits, Shortfalls**

ORONO, Maine - Nothing brings the beliefs and practices of a school directly into family life or influences the household like homework. A recent report from the University of Maine helps educators, parents and students take a step back from the emotional debate and a look at some objective research on the issue.

The Center for Research and Evaluation at UMaine's College of Education and Human Development has compiled a summary of some of the national research examining the pros and cons of homework over the past two decades.

The sample literature review offers the opportunity to reflect on what society really knows about the value of homework, according to Walter Harris, director of the research center.

"Issues related to homework surface repeatedly as significant concerns," says Harris. "A summary of the research is useful for schools and individuals in reviewing their homework policies and practices."

The most persuasive argument for assigning homework is the assumption that it increases learning and raises students' academic achievement. Some studies suggest that homework leads to better schools, other say there is no correlation.

According to the studies reviewed in the UMaine report, evidence supports a strong grade-level effect from homework on student achievement. High school students experience the greatest advantage from completing homework. The positive effect is only half as high for middle school students, and homework appears to have no effect on academic achievement for elementary school students. Supervised, in-class study proved more effective than homework for elementary students.

General themes in the sampling of published research indicate that homework needs to be assigned with a specific goal in mind, not as busy work, and it should be an extension of classroom experiences, rather than repetition of information already presented.

Another recurring theme is that homework should consider individual differences, not only in academic abilities, but also in home life situations. Homework can tilt the playing ground in favor of children who have well-educated parents able to help them, as well as books, computers and an overall home environment conducive to academic success. Completing homework assignment may increase academic understanding for some children and be detrimental to others, various studies suggest.

Among other conclusions gleaned from the research:

- Homework can increase immediate achievement and learning, encourage nonacademic self-discipline and inquisitiveness and facilitate greater parental appreciation of and involvement in schooling.
- Homework can be misused as a teaching and learning strategy. For example, assigning too much, assigning busy work, putting too much pressure on students or not allowing for individual differences
- Junior high students perform better in school when their parents help them with their homework, but the effects of parental involvement on student achievement vary from child to child and on which parent provides the support.
- Unrealistic homework expectations can cause students to miss out on valuable family, leisure and community activities. Homework overload can result in cheating and increased differences between low and high achievers.
- Enhancing students' organizational skills and reinforcing personal responsibility for academic performance can result in a positive change in attitude and a noticeable increase in use of school time to complete homework assignments.

Copies of the report, "Homework: A Literature Review," are available at no cost from the UMaine College of Education and Human Development by phone (207) 581-2761; or e-mail: [kay.hyatt@umit.maine.edu](mailto:kay.hyatt@umit.maine.edu).

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