

Chalkboard

By

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What follows is a compilation of responses I received from Gentry teachers in answer to the question-“ If the Gentry Public School District’s teachers agreed to stop grading homework, what incentive would the student have to do the work?” The following are excerpts from the teachers’ thoughts. Each paragraph is a different teacher’s opinion. I took the liberty of editing the responses in order to condense 4000 words to 1500.

Students need homework to practice until skills are mastered. They need the homework grades in order to be compelled to do the work. I think students should receive a homework grade that is part of their final grade: enough to pay them for their work, yet not enough to significantly change their grade should they score 100 % on homework and 50% on tests.

Is homework being used as an extra practice tool, or is it a means of assessment? Could a student have the knowledge of the concept that the teacher is trying to help them achieve, but not interested or able to give the feedback in the context that it is asked. Therefore, a teacher has to not only teach the concept, but also teach how to translate the knowledge from one form to another.

Perhaps the evaluation process could be turned to a more self- evaluation process. Many students will graduate to go to work for companies that require them to do self-evaluations. It would benefit these students to already have the skills to self-evaluate. Another good example is in sports. The coach is there as a guide. The improvement comes from self-evaluation, peer-evaluation, and practice. How hard the athlete practices is based on his/her drive to succeed.

As teachers, our goal should be to help each student be the best they can be. Our job is to teach, not to give a certain number of A's, B's, etc. If many kids are not doing their homework, how is homework helping these kids be the best that they can be? The answer might be in changing the "culture" of homework. How the knowledge is achieved should not be our focus. Our focus should be that the knowledge is achieved.

I think that practice is very important for the retention of skills. I think the grade of homework should not carry as much weight as work done in class which would be a truer measure of learning. But reality is that students must have the immediate gratification of a grade to motivate them to do the work.

Any homework that my students have usually comes from not completing daily work. Occasionally I will send home something for a couple of reasons - for extra practice of a skill or to give my students a little practice of actually doing homework since I know that in the upper grades they will probably have homework and need to be responsible enough to take it home and bring it back. I don't think that many students would do it if they knew that it would not be graded.

How will students, teachers, and parents know if a concept or skill has been practiced correctly or mastered if teachers don't "grade the homework"? Where's the motivation? A large number of my students are not even motivated to complete assignment by a "grade".

Homework is a good thing for several reasons. The first reason that homework is good for students is because it requires student responsibility beyond the school walls. "Character education" has been a catch-phrase in Arkansas Education for quite awhile, and I believe that

homework helps in building character by building responsibility. The second reason that homework is good for students is that it prepares them for college.

Most of the homework that my student's receive is actually work that was assigned in class but was not completed. We have students who are under the impression that they should not have to do any school work at home. While I agree that students should not have to spend all their free time on homework, I do not believe that we will prepare students for the benchmark exams if they do not spend any time at home on schoolwork.

I have never given "homework", meaning independent practice, outside of the classroom. I don't like my students working on independent practice items at home because I want to see with my own eyes what they can do. I do a problem of the week, and this is to be worked at home with the parents for two reasons. The first is so that the parents get involved and know what skills that we are covering at school. The second is so the students can show their parents what we are learning.

Math is a skill and must be practiced, corrected, and redone. My students probably don't agree, but anytime I ask them to just try something new, they try to quit, saying they don't know how. My focus is always the process. To see their mistakes when I grade the homework, gears my instruction for the next day.

In an ideal world the only motivation that a student would need to learn is the quest for knowledge itself. Although we encourage our students with this idea, it is not very realistic and that is one reason why we have grades. Also with a young mind, we cannot expect the mature thought process to motivate them on a day-to-day basis

I would rather the students complete most of their written assignments in my class. I like to be available for assistance during every step of the writing process. My daily homework assignment is for students to read. Since each student's home situation is different I have not assigned a specific amount of time for this.

I also feel that less grade value should be assigned to it and more grade value given to quizzes, tests and written material where the student's knowledge or skills can be better assessed. Many students still need some grade value assigned to the work or they won't attempt it. If the student says, "why do I have to do it when I already know how", I respond that this will give them the opportunity to get an easy 'A'.

In an ideal world (and classroom), academic success would be its own reward. Students would be able to see how their achievements lead directly to a better quality of life, not just for themselves but for the entire community. Alas, this is not the case, as I am sure you are more than aware. Many of them have no understanding of causality (linking a outcome to a preceding cause). Many of them cannot seem to be held accountable for forgetting that I gave them an assignment five minutes earlier.

In Second Grade, we really don't have a homework grade. We do have a problem of the week which children are expected to do, but we do not give a grade on it. About 90% of my class always returns their assignment, but you have to remember these children are still young and don't really understand that it doesn't affect their grade either way. Also, the parents are more actively involved with the child at this point

Unfortunately, elementary students do not have control over their situations at home. Their common excuses for not doing it at home are: We didn't have time because we went to _____. We got home too late from _____. My parents weren't home to help me do _____. They sound like excuses, but are actually the truth many times. Some

children are not going to receive help, encouragement, time to do/practice the things they need to work on.

If grades are a motivator for a student, the homework could be "assigned" and then left up to the student to do or not as he/she decided. If the student is truly motivated by making better grades, the teacher could emphasize that doing the homework would expose the students to the material more and make them more familiar with it thus resulting in better grades. The teacher could "grade" the work but not have it count in the grade book.

Homework can easily be manipulated (parental over-assistance, copying and others). The classroom should be an adequate forum to measure a child's progress, but I feel that that forum should be generous in number. Tests should be plentiful enough to demonstrate a child's proficiency or lack thereof.

I think most homework should be eliminated. If a student can't get it in class then doing it at home isn't going to help. If a new concept is introduced, teach it, then the next day a pop quiz will tell if the student understood and/or able to perform the task. If the homework is enriching or expanding something, then this is beneficial to their education and should be continued.

Homework in a social sense may even be more important. In changing from a rural society to one more urban, many responsibilities that the youth once had are no longer present to teach life lessons. Listing those that come to mind might be the concept of responsibility, prioritizing and planning, delaying gratification, self-discipline, and tenacity. It is a vehicle for parents to be aware of what is happening at school and what is being taught.

Grades are important to give for homework because it is important for teachers to understand where their students are making mistakes. Mistakes should be made part of the learning experience and, while grades for homework should not be given the same importance as tests and quizzes, it is important that we value the student's efforts.