

Does homework help with
engagement between
Whanau and school and
benefit learning?

Is homework appreciated
by Whanau and valued?

Background

- From a professional perspective, over the past 20 years of teaching it has often been a given that homework and set for the children and expected to be done with consequences if it wasn't. It was often set with the purpose of preparing the child for future schooling as well as a way to teach self-management and time management. Many parents over time have wanted homework as they have seen it as important at maintaining the academic achievement of their children. Teachers saw it as important as it helped teach the skills mentioned earlier. Over time I then started to hear parents complain and moan about their primary aged child having set homework.
- Just in the last 2 years my own children have got to an age where they are now receiving daily homework in the form of projects, spelling words (with no context) or maths sheets, again with no context. As a parent I am now wondering what the point of it all is as I would rather my child to be outside running around or reading a book, all in all, simply being a kid. As a parent it has completely taken me to the point where I am beginning to question the relevance of the consistent, regular place for set homework.
- With this in mind I approached some of the schools within my Kahui Ako and asked for a short survey to be filled out by the families. I targeted Years 2, 4, 6 and 8 with 4 surveys for each age group.
- I wanted to know whether homework was seen as important by the families and what they saw the role of it as. Also whether any aspect of life was compromised due to regular homework.

Some local schools views

- Homework can be a very dividing part of school life. Different people / schools can have very different and strong beliefs.
- Winchester School: we don't have set homework except for junior reading and some basic math facts. The decision was made after a community survey which showed that overwhelmingly parents did not want their children bogged down with homework. Many of our students have lots of after school activities and parents felt they had little time for extra schoolwork.
- Hiwinui School: 50% of the students weren't doing the set work as the parents didn't believe in homework. The other 50% of parents wanted busy work so that the kids could sit down quietly on their own for a set period each night while they got the tea. This group didn't want to have any input but needed to know that the work would be marked and the children rewarded. We produced a Home Learning booklet which is available to parents who still want homework and it gives a whole lot of ideas re reading and mathematics in the home. All students are expected to read every night and the Junior also have their Heart Words to learn.

Results of survey

School		Did families feel more engagement through HW	Did they see a benefit of homework	Benefits seen
School 1		87%	71%	Spelling * Managing time More depth of knowledge
School 2		75%	75%	Spelling/Reading and Maths * Understanding priorities
School 3		73%	73%	1:1 time Kids feel proud of what they can do Reading and spelling and maths * Confidence has grown in reading *
School 4		75%	81%	Spelling/Reading/Maths * Better behaviour Remembers what she has done at school We can see what she enjoys
Overall		77%	75%	

* This answer was mentioned numerous times.

Summary of results

- Across the 4 schools in excess of 75% of families surveyed felt that they had more engagement with the school through homework.
- 75% of families also felt that they saw a benefit of homework for their children. The benefits were very similar across the schools and this point will be touched upon later.
- There was no difference across gender, age or ethnicities in their approach to homework.
- Looking at the comparison between my results and the 2 local schools who say they don't do homework there is still a strong focus on reading and basic facts. The majority of my surveyed parents said that the benefit see was the reading, spelling and basic facts. These are the core skills required by all children and are essential to all learning.
- Parents felt more engaged through homework as this was their link to the schooling of their child - but again it was only through reading and basic facts.

So where to now?

- Across all schools the fundamentals of reading and basic facts are seen as an important part of home life and a child's learning.
- Overall parents enjoy the opportunity to sit an talk with their child about their learning and to share in the process. Is it a shame that they feel they need the focus of homework in order to sit and discuss their child's work with them.
- Families value the 1:1 time when reading in the evening.
- The basics of reading and maths are valued but not the extra projects and other 'keep busy work' by families and schools.
- Parents seem to have a short term view to the benefits of homework - i.e. their child can spell words on Friday that they couldn't on Monday.
- I believe that overall parents and schools do hold the same beliefs as each other. Both believe that reading and the basics are important. Neither enjoy the value of the long term project work or keep busy work. Even those schools that have a 'no homework' policy still expect reading and some basic facts.
- Schools possibly need to provide some education around the difference between what is classed as homework and what is simply consolidating children's learning. i.e daily reading

External research

- Research into the Finnish way of schooling sees that children learn better when they are ready. When they are less stressed out - less homework means less stress for all involved. Homework loads are kept to a minimum so students have time to build upon their own hobbies and interests. High schools in Finland limit homework to 30 minutes per night.
- Those countries that have high amounts of homework are outdone by those with smaller amounts in the academic ability and testing of the students. Japan has a no homework policy at younger levels so as to allow family time and personal interests.
- Some overseas countries work on a philosophy that if the children work and work hard during class then homework won't be set. From this viewpoint students work is diligently completed in class and time outside of class can be spent building experiences and skills outside of the lessons.
- Overall: research shows and tells us that children benefit from building their experiences outside of the class. By spending time with family and doing that which personally interests them.

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- Smithsonian.com - ' Why are Finland's schools so successful' By LynNell Hancock
- Why Finland's schools are top notch - by Pasi Sahlberg (CNN)
- The tyranny of homework. By Miriam Clifford. (InformED)
- 11 ways Finland's education system shows us that less is more. By Kelly Day