Homework: Reduced Policies

If you are curious about research that suggests reduced homework leads to increased equity and helps students create a healthier school-life balance, you might want to experiment with one of the suggested homework policies below.

Elementary: Optional Homework

Make homework optional. If kids do it, great. Maybe even offer extra credit or some other incentive for doing it. If they don't do it, fine. It wasn't required, so non-homework doers aren't penalized.

Secondary: No Daily Homework

With the exception of essays and multi-day projects, which are intended to be worked on at home over a period of days or weeks, only assign homework if what you planned for the period doesn't get finished. Plan to give some independent work time in class for students to work individually on what was taught, so that you can be there to support those that need it and monitor those that don't. Students that don't finish everything in class simply finish up at home for homework. Those that did finish in class have no homework. This policy has the added benefit of encouraging greater classroom engagement; because the more focused students are, the more likely they are not to have homework.

Secondary: Leveled Homework

Label each homework assignment with a level from 1-3. Be explicit with students about which level has been given for each night's homework. A level 1 indicates an assignment to spend 10 minutes on. Level 2 is 20 minutes. Level 3 is 30 minutes. For example, you might say to a class, "Tonight's homework is a level 2 assignment. Do your best for 20 minutes. After that, even if you are not done, stop. I only want you to spend a maximum of 20 minutes on this." This policy makes homework both more equitable and more reasonable. Slower learners are not punished for being slower. Faster learners know how much effort to put it. All students are more willing to try, because they know the time and effort they have to put in is finite. And teachers are more certain they aren't overburdening their students, who may have been assigned homework in 4 or more other classes. Further, it can serve as an assessment tool for the teacher, seeing how much work individual students do in a given amount of time.

Any Grade Level: Reduced Homework

Don't assign homework on weekends and over holidays, and limit school night homework. Limitations to school-night homework at the elementary level might look like a weekly reading log for K – 2nd grade, and that's all. For grades 3rd-5th it might be a weekly 3-page homework packet that includes no more than 1 page of math, 1 page of literacy, and a 1-page reading log. Limitations to school-night homework at the secondary level might look like requiring no more than 10 minutes of homework per school-night per subject.