High Schools Assign 3.5 Hours of Homework a Night, Survey Estimates

By Samantha Stainburn on February 27, 2014 4:22 PM | 7 Comments

CORRECTED

Amidst the current backlash against homework, it would be helpful to get some real data on how much homework we're actually talking about.

The college of education at the for-profit University of Phoenix recently took a stab at it, asking Harris Poll to survey teachers about the hours of homework they require and why they assign it. The pollsters talked to 1,005 teachers in public, private, and parochial schools across the United States, a group designed to be a representative sample of the nation's 3.7 million teachers.

High school teachers interviewed said they assign an average of 3.5 hours worth of homework a week. For students who study five days a week, that's 42 minutes a day per class, or 3.5 hours a day for a typical student taking five classes.

Middle school teachers (grades 6-8) assigned roughly the same amount: 3.2 hours of homework a week, or 38.4 minutes a day per class. That adds up to 3.2 hours of homework a night for a student with five classes. K-5 teachers said they assigned an average of 2.9 hours of homework each week.

The data reflect what anecdotally shocks many parents: homework loads jump in middle school.

Teachers' top three reasons for assigning homework were to see how well students understand lessons, help students develop essential problem-solving skills, and show parents what's being learned in school. Just 30 percent of teachers chose covering more content as one of their top reasons for assigning homework.

The survey also finds that the longer a teacher has been in the classroom, the less homework they assign, said Tanya Burden, a spokeswoman for the University of Phoenix.

Here's a breakdown of weekly homework assigned, by years of experience:

• **3.6 hours** (teachers with less than 10 years in the classroom)
• **3.1 hours** (teachers with 10 to 19 years in the classroom)
• **2.8 hours** (teachers with more than 20 years in the classroom)

Homework has come under fire from parents and administrators who worry that hours of after-school assignments are stressing students out. Education Week recently reported on research indicating that students with heavy loads of homework were significantly more likely to be sleep-deprived, particularly if the homework load had jumped between ages 12 and 15. Others question whether required assignments are necessary for learning.

But doth Americans protest too much? The Atlantic recently ran a group of photos showing children doing homework after natural disasters and war had displaced them. It's a good reminder that in many places, homework is considered a privilege, not a burden.

**CORRECTION** (Feb. 28): The original version of this blog post included incorrect figures on the time for homework assigned each day per class for both high school teachers and middle school teachers.

Categories: School schedules

Tags: after-school homework