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Homework: to Give or Not to Give

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Social media recently was all “a-buzz” with postings related to the evils of homework. To summarize one such post, about which I have only heard, a Wisconsin classroom teacher announced that she would not be giving homework to her students--AT ALL-- this year. She reportedly said something to the effect of if she couldn’t impart to her students all that they needed to learn in the seven hours spent with them daily, it would be a sign that she was not doing her job. The post supposedly ended with something like, “Evenings are for sitting down at the dinner table together, talking about everyone’s day, and relaxing.”

While truer words have never been spoken, sadly, the above statement does not typically describe American families in the year 2016, but is too much homework actually the culprit of this eroding family value? Or is it more often that because we are blessed to live in such a prosperous generation which affords us the opportunity for so many things to chase after? What typical family hasn’t experienced the following day: From the time we pick children up from school to the time we coast into the driveway at night, we have been to at least one practice and/or one game, had dinner from a drive-through window, and maybe even wedged some sort of church activity into the mix? Factor in more than one child and the variables increase exponentially.

At that point in the day, incomplete homework, whether the assignments are worthwhile or not, is a villain. Stuff has to be hauled into the house, baths are to be taken, more stuff needs gathering for the next day, school lunches need making. Tomorrow is the bi-weekly vocabulary test, there’s half a page of math to complete, and the science project is due!

Truth be known, the Wisconsin teacher’s announcement is probably coming after she has determined that she might as well “go with the flow.” I once had a teaching partner with a “no homework policy,” and I know what her ratio-



nale was. She shared with me that she had grown weary of assigning homework, planning her next day around the assumption that her students would have done the previous night’s assignments, only to discover that several of them had not done it, and then having to adjust her lessons on the fly to accommodate for lack of preparation. Homework, for her, had become a stumbling block that she opted to remove from the path.

Syndicated columnist and esteemed family psychologist John Rosemond weighs in on the topic in a recent article (which can be read by clicking [HERE](#)). He seems to agree with said research cited by the teacher, but in true “Rosemondian” fashion, he zeroes in on what he proclaims to be the broader issue with homework and virtually every other dilemma in the parent/child universe. It is enablement stemming from over involvement in the things the

child should age-appropriately be shouldering for him-or herself. He states, "A good 95 percent (my experienced estimate) of parent homework help amounts to enabling. It is unnecessary, undermines a child's tolerance for frustration and ability to persevere, and erodes the child's sense of responsibility. Furthermore, this "involvement" (the seductive name given it by America's schools) quickly becomes self-fulfilling. The more a child is enabled, the more he will act like he is in need of enabling." Rosemond refers to research that concludes as parent involvement in outside of class assignments increases, achievement decreases. Common sense, he maintains, says that a moderate amount of homework, in fact, improves achievement. He says abandoning homework altogether would be the equivalent of coaches abandoning team practices and expecting their players to be competitive and successful against opponents once the season begins. Just as athletes can't learn all they need to know about their sport in game situations, students cannot reach their full potential if their only engagement in their academic studies happens from 8:20 AM-2:45 PM Monday through Friday.

I think we can all agree that the discovery of balance in this matter is a desirable goal. To this end, we all have a role. As the school, it is our responsibility to confirm that homework assignments are reasonable, necessary, and helpful. We pledge to maintain clear, ongoing communication among ourselves, to our students, and to you concerning assigned work, and to have a plan that enables balance in workload. We have recently begun to look for

times during our day in which we expect students to start their homework. Our goal is to train our students to use the time that would otherwise be unproductive to get at least parts of their assignments done before they leave for the day. We need for you to help out by setting activity parameters for your children. I encourage you to map out a typical week for your family. Factor in travel times between activities, prep time, sleep time, etc., to determine if you have inadvertently allowed your family's schedule to become too full, thus sabotaging your child's chances of coming to school each day truly prepared. If you find this to be true, I encourage you to decide where you can cut back on those activities. Finally, the third member of this partnership, your child/our student, is the key player. After you have provided an atmosphere in which he or she can achieve success in completing homework meaningfully, expect the assignments to be done. See to it that your child has what he or she needs, materially, time-wise, and space-wise. Preview the assignments together. Make yourself available to answer questions, and even check over the assignments when your child proclaims to have finished. With each of us consistently doing our part, we can ensure that our children's learning experience is authentic, consisting not only of mastery of meaningful content but also including the development of organizational and pacing capabilities and a sense of responsibility for one's self that will enable them to be successful life-long learners.
