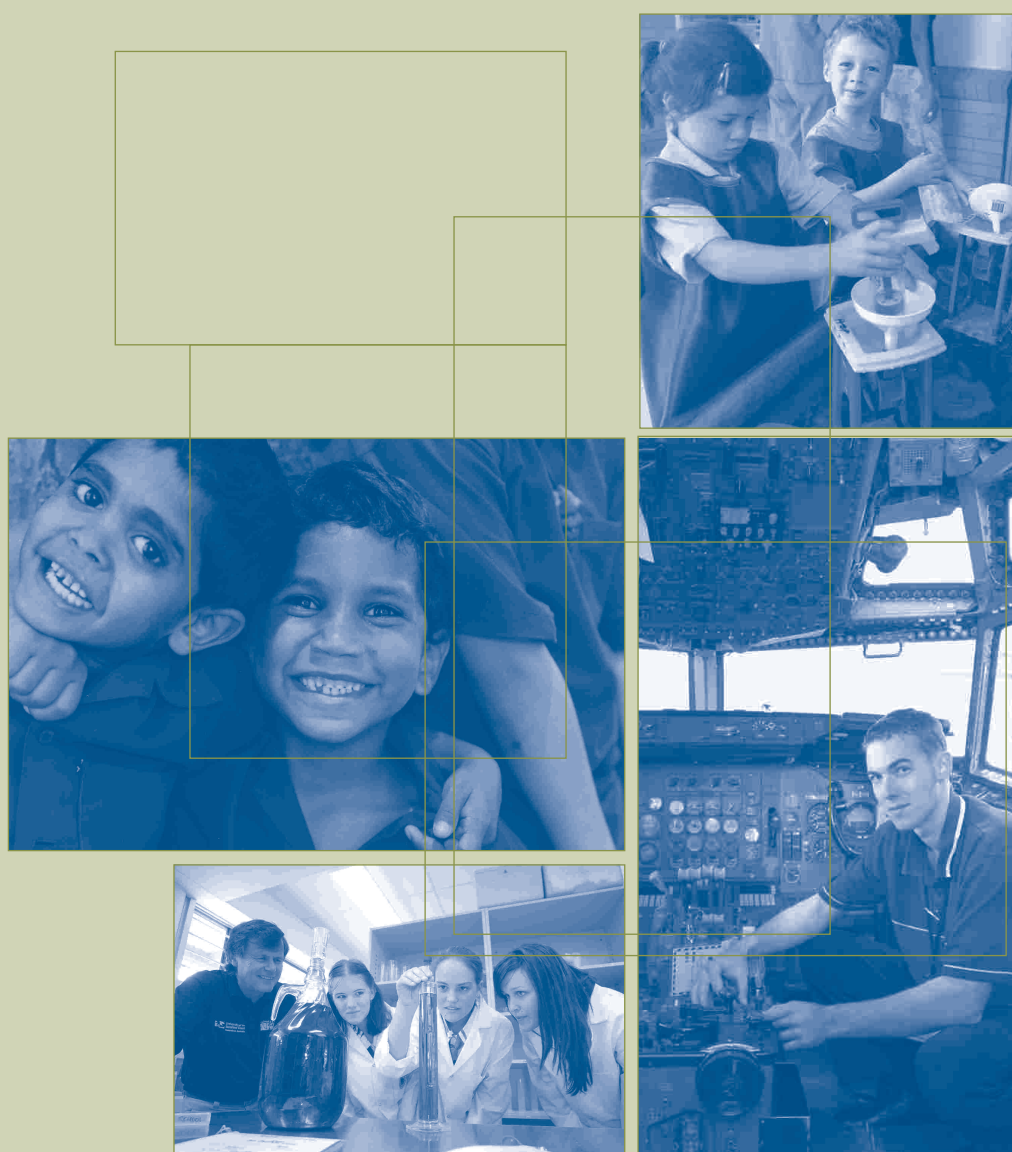


# Homework Literature Review

## Summary of key research findings

November 2004



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# Executive summary

## Introduction

This paper presents a summary of research findings associated with homework for school-aged children and was undertaken in response to community concerns about homework in Queensland. For the purposes of this paper, homework refers to any activities that school students are asked to complete outside of lesson time.

Changes to family structures including the increasing number of one-parent families, increased work demands, increasing community expectations about quality learning experiences and the competing choices available to families have resulted in the value of homework being questioned.

Recent media reports including *The War on Homework* (Rindlefleish and Alexander, 2004) published in *The Sunday Mail* (Queensland) have been prompted by increased parental concerns about the amount of homework expected outside of school time. Dr Michael Carr-Gregg, Consultant Adolescent Psychologist, has contributed to public debate by stating that students in Years 10 to 12 should do up to two hours of homework a day and students should do no homework prior to Year 10.

This paper sought to identify evidence of the impact of homework on students and families, the time spent on homework, environmental factors that affect homework, practices that can improve homework effectiveness and examines whether guidelines would be of benefit to schools. The research findings will inform consultation with parents, students and teachers on the future of homework in Queensland state schools through the *Education Laws for the Future* consultation paper.

Using online databases and websites with homework-related content, the review examined 64 studies, predominantly from the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US).

## Impact of homework on students

The research findings on the impact of homework on students, their attitudes and their achievements were mixed, with both positive and negative effects indicated. Students report positive attitudes to homework, and feel some homework is important in helping them do well at school. Students who complete homework generally outperform students who do not on some measures of academic achievement.

Homework can improve students' study skills, improve their attitudes toward school, and demonstrate that learning can take place outside of formal schooling. However, excessive homework may impact negatively on student achievement and also reduce student access to leisure activities that can also teach important life skills. There is little research on the impact of homework on student obesity, sleep, stress, and independence.

## Impact of homework on families

Overall it appears that parental involvement in homework is beneficial to students and positive parental involvement in homework is associated with higher levels of student achievement. The research indicates that most parents expect schools to set homework and that parents of younger children are more likely to be actively involved with their children's homework.

Interactive homework approaches, where the child and parent complete an activity together, can assist in making homework more meaningful for students and their families. When too much homework is set, or when parents use different methods to those taught at school, homework can

cause conflict between parents and children. Homework can also place stress on family life by reducing family time available for leisure and family activities, and by putting pressure on families to take on undesired roles.

## Time on homework

The research examining time spent on homework, including large-scale international studies, shows wide variation in the amount of time spent on homework and the associated academic benefits. The number of out-of-school hours per day spent on homework is positively related to student academic achievement but reaches a point where too much appears to be detrimental. Research has informed the notion of a point of diminishing returns and that a maximum amount of time spent on homework should be negotiated.

Research and case studies in the UK and US suggest there be no more than 10 minutes of homework per school day in Year 1, increasing by up to 10 minutes a day with each year level to a *maximum* of two hours per day in Year 12. This maximum time allocation for each year level is generally consistent with national and international policies.

Overall it seems that some homework is better than too much or none at all, however the time on homework needs to be responsive to the student's age and development. The research indicates that a 'more homework the better' view is misleading and should not be the basis for policy and practice.

## Homework environment

The major findings indicate that parents can influence the homework environment, through creating appropriate conditions for learning and encouraging their children to complete homework tasks.

There is evidence that students have individual preferences or 'learning styles' that relate to aspects of the environment and mode of learning (visual, text, aural etc). These preferences are also related to cultural differences. Providing conditions appropriate to individual homework styles can positively influence homework completion and academic performance.

The provision of homework centres may have a positive influence on student achievement and retention of some students in school. Initial evidence suggests that these clubs or centres offer both access to learning resources and a social environment that is conducive to study.

## Practices that improve effectiveness

The findings indicate that students, families and schools can benefit from a collaborative effort to improve the effectiveness of homework. A positive outcome for homework appears to be contingent on teacher preparation, the motivation of students, and the parental support available.

Homework that encourages students to interact with family members seems to improve family understanding and linkages to classroom activities. Interventions to support students in undertaking and completing homework include homework clubs, telephone help lines, and tips for parents.

There is some evidence to suggest that the following strategies may be particularly helpful:

- parental communication and involvement
- devising short, relevant tasks
- homework planners/diaries across a period of time and
- teaching students self-monitoring techniques.

## National and international scan of homework policies and guidelines

A national and international scan of findings related to homework legislation, policy, guidelines and support materials is summarised in the *Attachment*.

Features identified in other jurisdictions for consideration include:

- guidelines to support schools to establish a whole of school policy for homework
- providing a distinction between the type of homework and the desirable maximum time allocation for different phases of schooling and
- supporting materials and tips to assist teachers, parents and students.

## Implications

The review of research and national and international best practice investigated key issues including the impact of homework on students and families, suggested time allocations, and practices to improve the effectiveness of homework.

From this review it appears that guidelines to support schools in developing homework policies may be beneficial to state schools in Queensland. The research indicates that a ‘more homework the better’ view is misleading and should not be the basis for policy and practice.

The research findings will inform consultation with parents, students and teachers on the future of homework in Queensland state schools through the *Education Laws for the Future* consultation paper.

# Summary of research findings

## Purpose

This paper was prepared in response to community concerns about homework in Queensland and sought to identify evidence on the impact of homework on students and families and examine whether guidelines for homework would be of benefit to schools.

The research findings will inform consultation with parents, students and teachers on the future of homework in Queensland state schools through the *Education Laws for the Future* consultation paper.

## Definition

For the purposes of this paper, homework refers to any activities that school students are asked to complete outside of lesson time.

The type of homework set by schools varies. In the early years, activities are usually based on supporting literacy, numeracy and thinking skills. In the middle phase of learning, homework is more likely to focus on reading, revising, report writing, investigating and project work. Students in the senior years are likely to undertake a range of homework activities dependent on the course of study being completed.

## Method

This review was restricted to literature published after 1994 and focused on peer-reviewed publications and publications that included a meta-analysis and evidence-based studies (in terms of study design and methodology). Searches focused on the impact of homework, the appropriate quantity of homework and factors that improve its effectiveness.

Searches were conducted using online databases and websites with homework-related content through the Australian Education Index (AEI), ERIC (Educational Resources Information Centre) including ERIC Digests, Academic search Elite (EBSCOhost) and Professional Development Collection (EBSCOhost).

The review examined 64 studies, predominantly from the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US). Of importance were two recent reviews of the research, namely *Recent Research on Homework – An Annotated Bibliography* (Sharp et al., 2001b UK) and *Using Research to Answer Practical Questions About Homework* (Cooper and Valentine, 2001 US).

## Background

Changes to family structures including the increasing prevalence of one-parent families, increased work demands and the competing choices available to families have resulted in the value of homework being questioned.

Most parents have high aspirations for their children and homework is one way that many parents believe they can assist in their child getting ahead at school. The type and amount of homework set by schools varies. Moreover, the purpose and value of homework needs to be balanced by competing family and societal demands.

Cooper (2001a) suggests that public attitudes toward homework are cyclical and are related to broader social, national and international economic trends than to the research on homework effectiveness.

Recent media reports including *The War on Homework* (Rindfleish and Alexander, 2004) published in *The Sunday Mail* (Queensland) have been prompted by increased parental concerns about the amount of homework that is expected outside of school time. Dr Michael Carr-Gregg, Consultant Adolescent Psychologist, has contributed to public debate by stating that students in Years 10 to 12 should do up to two hours homework a day while students should do no homework prior to Year 10.

## Impact of homework on students

The impact of homework on students is affected by many factors including students' understanding of the purpose of homework, their attitudes towards homework, learning and achievement and their feelings of empowerment in the design and allocation of homework tasks. The benefits and negative effects of homework have also been the focus of a number of studies. Fourteen publications from peer-reviewed academic journals and academic publications were considered to inform this issue.

Some studies have begun to trace student understanding about the purposes of homework.

In an Australian study, the views of students in Years 2, 4, and 6 about homework and student responsibility for homework were investigated (Warton, 1997). This research found:

- Almost no students identified commonly-held adult views on the purpose of homework such as developing learning responsibility or time-management and study skills, when respondents were asked about the rationale for homework.
- Most Year 2 students reported the reason for homework was 'to learn', while Year 6 students reported it was 'to revise' material.
- Few differences in homework practices across Years 2, 4 and 6 were evident although there were developmental differences in students' understanding of homework as an activity.

Positive and negative effects of homework are found in educational and popular literature. Evidence from research outlining the benefits of homework for students and their attitude to learning includes:

- Homework can impact positively on the retention and understanding of knowledge and can improve study skills, attitudes toward school, and demonstrate that learning can take place outside of formal schooling (Corno, 2000).
- Students' writing scores, literacy outcomes and attitudes can improve when students engage in 'interactive homework' with family members (Epstein et al., 1997).
- Students' attitude toward homework appears to be unrelated to student ability or family and community factors but positively related to parents' attitudes toward homework (Cooper et al., 2001c).
- Students identify that homework can make them 'smarter' and 78 percent of students surveyed enjoyed homework (O'Rourke-Ferrara, 1998).

In contrast, other research evidence identifies the limitations of homework and resultant negative impacts on students. For example:

- Homework can contribute to boredom with school if it does not engage the student in meaningful learning, because all activities remain interesting for only so long. Homework may reduce students' engagement in leisure activities that can also be important in the development of life skills (Cooper, 2001a).
- Homework may contribute to existing social inequities as it appears that students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are less likely to complete homework. This may result from after-school employment or an absence of a quiet, well-lit location to undertake homework (Cooper and Valentine, 2001).
- Homework alone is unlikely to ensure students, families and schools will share and meet their goals for learning and success (Epstein et al., 1997).
- Although students can make significant contributions to designing homework tasks they are often omitted from the homework process and feel disempowered (Smith, 2000; Warton, 2001).

Researchers in the past decade have not conclusively agreed on whether homework is effective in improving student achievement. Cooper and Valentine (2001) conducted a quantitative synthesis of

research using three different research designs to reveal that students who did homework generally outperformed students who did not. The authors found a low association between the amount of homework young students complete and their subsequent achievement and that the relationship between homework and achievement was moderated by the students' age and grade level (Cooper and Valentine, 2001).

The evidence also suggests that although homework has a positive impact on student achievement, too much homework or homework not completed properly appears to reduce this positive effect.

Further evidence includes:

- The relationship between homework and achievement appears to be curvilinear, so that moderate amounts of time spent on homework are related to higher subject test scores, while a lot or very little time spent on homework is less productive (Keys et al., 1997).
- There appears to be an adverse effect on students' academic achievement when no homework is undertaken or when homework is poorly completed. A positive effect on academic performance through the accurate completion of homework is related to parental involvement, peer cooperation, self-monitoring and graphing, 'real life' tasks and collaborative problem solving (Bryan et al., 2001).
- Teacher-developed grades are more strongly associated with the relationship between homework and achievement than results on standardised tests (Cooper et al., 1998).
- Teachers identified the value of homework on student motivation and the development of a capacity for independent learning along with creating more time for learning, and improved measured achievement (Weston, 1999).

## Summary

The research findings on the impact of homework on students, their attitudes and their achievements were mixed, with both positive and negative effects indicated. Students report positive attitudes to homework, and feel some homework is important in helping them do well at school. Students who complete homework generally outperform students who do not on some measures of academic achievement.

Homework can improve students' study skills, improve their attitudes toward school, and demonstrate that learning can take place outside of formal schooling. However, excessive homework may impact negatively on student achievement and reduce student access to leisure activities that can also teach important life skills. There is little research on the impact of homework on student obesity, sleep, stress, and independence.

## Impact of homework on families

Sixteen publications addressing the impact of direct parental participation in children's homework and the effect on family life were reviewed to inform this issue.

Parental involvement in homework takes a variety of forms that may have different impacts on student achievement, as parents may be involved in helpful and unhelpful ways (Cooper et al., 2001c). Hoover-Dempsey and colleagues (2001) presented six positive techniques parents use to support their children with homework tasks. These are:

- oversighting (including motivating students and monitoring homework completion)
- responding to efforts (including the use of praise or rewards)
- actively engaging in homework (providing help or tutoring)
- coordinating (breaking homework tasks into steps to help understanding and match children's skill levels)
- interacting by modelling, demonstrating or problem-solving
- supporting children to learn techniques that will improve achievement (e.g. techniques to cope with distractions).

Evidence from research on parents' views towards homework and the benefits of parental involvement in children's homework shows:

- Positive parental involvement in homework has been found to be a strong predictor of student achievement (Cooper et al., 2001c).

- Family involvement in monitoring and supporting homework (particularly family discussions about schoolwork, courses, grades, and the future) has positive effects on high school students' grades (Lee, 1994).
- Homework can enable parents to keep in touch and support their child's learning at school (Cooper, 2001a).
- Parents take a more involved role with homework when their children are younger (Cooper et al., 2000).
- Parents of primary school students in America see homework as a normal part of their lives and they believe success at homework is necessary to succeed at school, and report that they feel obliged to be involved in their children's homework (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1995).
- A US study found that 83 percent of surveyed parents like very much that their children get homework (O'Rourke-Ferrara, 1998).
- Parental involvement in schooling (including involvement in student homework) is generally related to student achievement, self-regulation and students' perceptions of academic competence (Xu and Corno, 1998).
- Parental participation positively influenced the quality of students' writing scores once the effects of socioeconomic status, grade level, school attendance, previous teachers' grades and scores were considered (Epstein et al., 1997).
- There is a significant body of research demonstrating a strong, positive relationship between parent involvement and higher levels of school achievement, particularly in reading (Balli et al., 1998).
- By identifying the individual homework style preferences, parents can assist in designing the home environment to improve students' attitudes towards homework and reduce homework-related family conflict (Hong and Milgram, 1999).

Some research evidence identifies limitations associated with parental involvement in children's homework, including:

- Parents may get over-involved in homework, use different instructional techniques to the teacher or impact negatively on a student's sense of 'academic autonomy' (Cooper, 2001a).
- Parent involvement alone does not appear to be sufficient for success with specific reading initiatives (Macleod, 1995).
- Parents may feel pressured to support a homework agenda that they feel little power to influence or change (Solomon et al., 2002).
- The effect of parenting style or parent involvement is unrelated to students' attitudes towards homework (Cooper et al., 2000).

Other research has identified the negative impact of homework on family life. For example:

- homework can intrude on the lives of families and reduce family time available for leisure, domestic and other personal activities (Kralovec and Buell, 2001).
- homework can reduce the number of positive interactions parents have with their children (Dudley-Marling, 2003).
- parents may be required to assume undesired roles that may strain family relations (Varenne and McDermott, 1999).

## Summary

Overall it appears that parental involvement in homework is beneficial to students and positive parental involvement in homework is associated with higher levels of student achievement. The research indicates that most parents expect schools to set homework and that parents of younger children are more likely to be actively involved with their children's homework.

Interactive homework approaches, where the child and parent complete an activity together, can assist in making homework more meaningful for students and their families. When too much homework is set, or when parents use different methods to those taught at school, homework can cause conflict between parents and children. Homework can also place stress on family life by reducing family time available for leisure and family activities and putting pressure on families to take on undesired roles.

## Time on homework

The relationship between time spent on homework and academic achievement has been the focus of a number of research studies including large-scale, international studies. Eighteen publications from peer-reviewed academic journals and academic publications were considered to inform this issue.

Contemporary families are often 'time poor' and time spent on homework leaves less time for other activities (Dudley-Marling 2003). Van Voorhis (2001) reported on frustrated students and families who are 'tired of an overabundance of nightly homework'.

In an international comparative study, Zammit and colleagues (2002) found little change to mathematics and science scores in relation to the amount of time students reportedly spent on homework. Countries identified as having a 'heavy emphasis' on homework include the Islamic Republic of Iran, Malaysia, Singapore and Italy while more than 20 percent of students surveyed from Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Hong Kong and the Republic of Korea reported spending 'little time doing homework'.

Almost a fifth of the Australian students interviewed for this study reportedly watched less than one hour of television or videos, and a further half of the students reported they spent between one and two hours watching television or videos on a normal school day (Zammit and colleagues, 2002). The quarter of students who reportedly watched three or more hours of television and videos a day had lower scores than students who spent less time watching television and videos.

Zammit and colleagues (2002) also found that approximately 60 percent of Australian students surveyed spent less than one hour per school day on mathematics and science homework while just over half the students spent less than an hour on homework per school day for subjects other than mathematics and science. Approximately 20 percent of students spent between one and two hours on mathematics homework. Fewer students spent this much time on science homework. Some students (15 percent for mathematics, 21 percent for science and 13 percent on other subjects) reported spending no time on homework.

Further research shows mixed results when examining the relationship between the amount of time spent on homework and student outcomes:

- Several studies by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement have demonstrated that the amount of out-of-school hours per day spent on homework is positively related to student academic achievement (Lokan et al., 1996).
- The 'cultural capital' of a family defined as the extent to which a child's home background is educationally oriented and supportive is positively related to the amount of homework undertaken (Farrow et al., 1999).
- Student achievement is not related to the frequency of setting homework or time spent on homework (De Jong et al., 2000).
- Student achievement is related to the amount of homework the student completed, student ability and by the role of parental facilitation with homework tasks (Cooper, 2001a).

Research indicates that the amount of homework and resultant time spent on homework should recognise the effect of a student's developmental stage. This research includes:

- An increase in the time spent on homework in the early childhood years is found to relate to lower achievement whereas in the middle and high school years more time spent on homework coincided with higher achievement (Cooper, 2001a).
- There appears to be a negative association between the increasing amount of homework set in early childhood and students' attitudes to schooling (Cooper et al., 1998).
- Parents', students' and teachers' ideas regarding homework and homework practices alter significantly between early childhood and high school (Epstein et al., 1997).
- The amount of time spent on homework has increased in the early childhood years, based on US evidence over the last 20 years (Hofferth and Sandberg, 2001).
- There is a correlation between time spent on homework and achievement at secondary school (especially for older secondary students) but research at the primary school level is inconclusive, and inconsistent (Cooper, 2001a).
- The US Department of Education (2001) conducted a study of students aged 9, 13, and 17 years to determine how much time they spent on homework in 1984 and 1999. Some students at each of the three age levels (5, 8 and 12 percent, respectively) reported that they completed more than two hours of homework per night.

A meta-analysis conducted by Cooper, 2001a, revealed that for high school students the completion of at least one hour of homework per week was positively related to achievement. For high school students this positive relationship occurred even when a small amount was completed (less than one hour) but was not entirely evident when students reported more than two hours each night. This research indicates that ‘a more homework the better’ view is misleading and should not be the basis for policy and practice.

Research directly related to allocation of time suggests there is a point of diminishing returns and that a maximum allocation of time spent on homework should be negotiated. Findings include:

- Research and case studies in UK and US have informed suggested maximum time allocations across year levels. No more than 10 minutes of homework per school day in Year 1, increasing by up to 10 minutes a day with each year level, is acknowledged through research as a desirable *maximum* amount per school week (Cooper, 2001a; 1999; 1994; Sharp et al., 2001a; Cooper et al., 1998; Cooper et al, 1999).
- Benefits to student achievement in senior schooling are evident when students undertake up to two hours of homework per day, however no conclusive benefits are found when students undertake more than two hours per day (Lokan et al., 1996).
- Pressure to increase academic standards has resulted in significant increases in homework in the US. Time spent on homework by 6 to 8 year olds in the US has tripled in the last two decades to over 120 minutes per week (Hofferth and Sandberg, 2001).
- Some school districts in the US assign pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students at least 30 minutes of homework each night (Bryan et al., 2001).

In determining the amount of homework appropriate for students of different ages, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted UK, 1997) conducted a research study *Homework: Learning from Practice*. From this research, time allocations across year levels have informed the *Homework: Guidelines for Primary and Secondary Schools*:

- Years 1 and 2: up to 12 minutes per day
- Years 3 and 4: up to 18 minutes per day
- Years 5 and 6: up to 30 minutes per day
- Years 7 and 8: between 45 and 90 minutes per day
- Year 9: between 60 and 120 minutes per day
- Years 10 and 11: up to 120 minutes per day
- Years 12 and 13: dependent on individual programs and outlined in school policy.

The National Education Association (NEA) Today (US) states that ‘*Pupils doing a great deal of homework tend to perform less well at school than those doing “moderate” amounts*’ (NEA website). Significant factors such as measures of homework quality, relevance, feedback on homework performance, the connection between the homework and the learning program or resources and support are missed when homework debates focus on the frequency of homework or amount of time spent on homework (Weston, 1999).

## Summary

The research examining time spent on homework, including large-scale international studies, shows wide variation in the amount of time spent on homework and the associated academic benefits. The number of out-of-school hours per day spent on homework is positively related to student academic achievement but reaches a point where too much appears to be detrimental. Research has informed the notion of a point of diminishing returns and that a maximum amount of time spent on homework should be negotiated.

Research and case studies in the UK and US suggest there be no more than 10 minutes of homework per school day in Year 1, increasing by up to 10 minutes a day with each year level to a *maximum* of two hours per day in Year 12. This maximum time allocation for each year level is generally consistent with national and international policies.

Overall it seems that some homework is better than too much or none at all, however the time on homework needs to be responsive to the student’s age and development. The research indicates that a ‘more homework the better’ view is misleading and should not be the basis for policy and practice.

## Homework environment

Nine publications from peer-reviewed academic journals and academic publications were reviewed to inform consideration of the homework environment.

Comparisons of US and Korean students found significant differences in homework preferences (Hong and Milgram, 1999):

- US students preferred to work with background sounds such as music and preferred auditory learning. They also preferred to eat, drink and move around while completing homework. US students also liked to learn with adults, and were also more motivated by parents and teachers.
- Korean students preferred a brightly lit room, to sit at a chair and desk, to use the same location each night and preferred visual learning.

Research has considered a number of environmental factors that relate to homework including:

- Academic success has been associated with 'safe, calm and quiet home environments in which adults have the time and energy to interact with children'. Material resources (e.g. learning equipment), psychological resources (e.g. parental support) and behavioural resources (e.g. parent involvement) also impact on success (Martini, 1995).
- Student attitudes towards homework are more positive when children understand 'learning styles' and homework is based on their individual learning style (Geiser, 1999).
- When parents have an understanding of their child's learning style, students have a significantly more positive attitude to homework (Perkins and Milgram, 1996).
- When the home 'culture' supports academic achievement, students spend more time doing homework (Bowen and Bowen, 1998).
- The valuing of school learning and time on homework has a positive effect on student academic performance (Bowen and Bowen, 1998).
- Research examining the relationship between academic achievement and after-school activities, including homework, television viewing, extracurricular activities, structured after-school activities, non-school groups and part-time jobs indicated that forming a positive identification with school through extracurricular activities can positively influence academic performance (Cooper et al., 1999).

Some studies have identified that educational benefits may be gained through homework environments outside of the home. Homework clubs in off-school sites such as public libraries are emerging in the UK. Train et al (2000) found that homework clubs offer a learning environment that is differentiated from formal schools, removes the onus on parents to supervise homework and avoids distractions. Factors associated with the success of homework clubs are voluntary attendance, qualified staff, and access to learning facilities (especially computers). Parents of children attending homework clubs report that they no longer need to 'nag' their children to complete their homework.

In an Australian study, homework clubs in school libraries produced several noticeable outcomes. Homework clubs enabled students to be tutored by supervising teachers, which was associated with higher assignment and homework completion rates (Luke et al., 2003).

The provision of student support services (e.g., homework centres) at schools appears to be beneficial in communities in which there are high levels of poverty, family breakdowns and unemployment. These are the communities in which student school completion is lowest and academic achievement most at risk (Lamb et al., 2004).

### Summary

The major findings indicate that parents can influence the homework environment, through creating appropriate conditions for learning and encouraging their children to complete homework tasks.

There is evidence that students have individual preferences or 'learning styles' that relate to aspects of the environment and mode of learning (visual, text, aural etc). These preferences are also related to cultural differences. Providing conditions appropriate to individual homework styles can positively influence homework completion and academic performance.

The provision of homework centres may have a positive influence on student achievement and retention of some students in school. Initial evidence suggests that these clubs or centres offer both access to learning resources and a social environment that is conducive to study.

## Practices that improve effectiveness

Practices that improve the effectiveness of homework have been the focus of a number of research and review studies. Sixteen publications from peer-reviewed academic journals and academic publications were considered to inform this issue.

Evidence from research into practices associated with improved effectiveness for students and families shows:

- Homework may be more effective when parents receive regular information from teachers on how they could help with their children's homework (Epstein and Lee, 1995).
- Initiatives designed to support parents cope better with homework tasks appear to increase homework completion (Levin et al., 1997).
- Motivation and self-regulation strategies can be useful (Corno, 2000).
- Students' use of a daily homework notebook and giving students homework options in place of traditional homework (Diersen, 2000).
- Homework activities that involve students in sharing and discussing examples of their writing with their family contribute to improved writing (Epstein and Van Voorhis, 2001).
- Interactive homework encourages students to share their school learning with family members, and others in the community (Epstein and Van Voorhis, 2001).
- Some effective strategies to support students with homework include homework clubs, telephone help lines, homework check lists (e.g. what to do when faced with problems) and study skills courses. Guidance and support to parents is also beneficial (Cowan and Hallam, 1999).

Research investigating the purpose of homework has identified that most teachers set homework for a range of reasons including: practice, preparation, participation, personal development, parent-teacher communication, parent-child relations, peer interactions, policy, public relations, and punishment (Epstein and Van Voorhis, 2001). Sharp et al (2001a) however, suggest that the last is 'indefensible'.

Educators, policy makers, and families share the desire to see all children succeed in school and this requires innovative and systematic approaches to current teaching practice (Van Voorhis, 2001). Strategies identified in research that teachers can use to improve homework practices and demonstrate connectedness to the curriculum include:

- Designing homework that builds on students' current skills (Epstein and Van Voorhis, 2001).
- Enabling students with learning difficulties to engage in homework tasks and to take the time required to complete assigned work (Epstein and Van Voorhis, 2001).
- Providing homework help instructions and communicating homework expectations clearly and promoting parental involvement in their children's homework in the early childhood years of schooling (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1995).
- Designing homework to meet the needs of individual students while ensuring there is no stigma attached to receiving different homework between children by dealing with differentiation sensitively (Cooper, 2001b).
- Designing homework tasks to 'spark' students' creative thinking, talents, community involvement and problem solving, by encouraging students to work together after school, in person, by telephone or on the internet (Corno, 2000).

Researchers have identified whole-of-school practices associated with improved homework effectiveness including:

- Promoting productive home-school relationships and identifying a range of home-school collaboration opportunities including parent-teacher meetings and written communication (Patton et al., 2001).
- Teacher preparation and planning; assignments appropriate to the skill, attention, and motivation levels of students, and appropriate involvement of parents are crucial to homework effectiveness (Cooper et al., 2000).
- Collaborative planning between schools and families to develop homework policies and/or guidelines (Cooper, 2001b).
- If students are given 'real life' assignments and associated rewards combined with the use of homework planners and graphing of their progress there is likely to be an increase in homework completion rates (Bryan and Sullivan-Burstein, 1998).
- Consideration of families' experiences, particularly families where children may have difficulties with formal school learning (Dudley-Marling, 2003).

- Dudley-Marling (2003) recommend the need for parents, teachers, and school administrators to work together to create homework policies that are considerate of the range of family dynamics and forms, the different ways families live and the need for schools to maintain high standards. School staff need to be aware that for some families homework is a ‘heavy burden’ and is ‘simply not worth it’.

A challenge in any consideration of homework is to move the debate away from homework policies only stipulating time spent by students and tasks to be completed to seeing homework as an opportunity to encourage ‘seamless learning across home and school contexts’ (Warton, 2001).

In a UK cross-sectional survey of a representative sample of head teachers of primary schools, Felgate and Kendall (2000) found that 90 percent of responding schools had a homework policy. Of these:

- 91 percent included recommendations on types of homework activities
- 79 percent included recommendations on total amount of homework time to be set per week (or day)
- 73 percent explained how homework could be used to reinforce classroom learning
- 63 percent included guidelines on the marking of homework and the provision of feedback
- 45 percent offered guidance on time allocations for different subjects
- 31 percent gave advice on strategies to follow up on homework.

## Summary

The findings indicate that students, families and schools can benefit from a collaborative effort to improve the effectiveness of homework. A positive outcome for homework appears to be contingent on teacher preparation, the motivation of students and the parental support available.

Homework that encourages students to interact with family members seems to improve family understanding and linkages to classroom activities. Interventions to support students in undertaking and completing homework include homework clubs, telephone help lines, and tips for parents.

There is some evidence to suggest that the following strategies may be particularly helpful:

- parental communication and involvement
- devising short, relevant tasks
- homework planners/diaries across a period of time and
- teaching students self-monitoring techniques.

## National and international scan of homework policies and guidelines

A review of policy and guidelines from national and international educational jurisdictions provides information for the consideration in the development of any homework policy and/or guidelines within Queensland schools.

### What happens in Australia?

In Queensland, the *Education (General Provisions) Regulation 2000* Section 23 provides that a teacher at a state school may require a student to undertake homework. This regulation also provides that the principal of the school may decide what is a reasonable amount of homework. Schools currently use this regulation to determine the approach to homework in their local school. Some schools have developed their own homework policy in consultation with their school community.

In comparison, other states and territories in Australia provide more specific policy or guidelines such as:

- purpose, principles, types of homework and expectations of parents, teachers and students, and a memo to principals (New South Wales)
- principles, types of homework, successful practice in early years, middle years, later years and associated time allocations and guidelines for parents (Victoria)
- clarifying teachers’ roles within the intent of relevant legislation (South Australia)
- presenting homework as a component of parent participation in schools (Australian Capital Territory)

- presenting homework as part of the educational program and outlines expectations of teachers, principal and school council (Northern Territory)
- providing a resource support for students on homework topics (Tasmania)
- outlining a response to parents on how to help with homework through frequently asked questions (Western Australia).

Both the *Homework Policy* of the Department of Education and Training (New South Wales, 2000) and the *Homework Habits: Homework Guidelines* from the Department of Education, Employment and Training (Victoria, 2001) have significant content, processes and responsibilities that could contribute to any future policy consideration in Queensland. For example, to inform discussion on the amount of homework, the *Homework Habits: Homework Guidelines* (Victoria, 2001) suggest:

- Early Years (Prep to Year 4): not to exceed 30 minutes a day and not on weekends or vacation
- Middle Years (Years 5–9): range from 30–45 minutes a day at Year 5 to 45–90 minutes a day in Year 9
- Later Years (Years 10 to 12): increase to 1–3 hours per night a week with up to 6 hours on weekends during school term.

### What happens in other countries?

A search of international information indicates a variety of ways that legislation and policy provide guidance to schools on homework. The range of possible options reflects those available in Australia, including samples of policies from a local education board and individual schools.

The UK and US set clear parameters on homework. Of particular note are the *Homework: Guidelines for Primary and Secondary Schools* from the Department for Education and Skills, UK (1998), and the *Helping your Child with Homework: For Parents of Children in Elementary through Middle School* from the United States Department of Education (2002).

Specific features in the UK *Homework: Guidelines for Primary and Secondary Schools* include:

- a definition of homework
- evidence on which the guidelines are based
- that homework is a partnership with parents included in home–school agreements
- guidelines to establish a whole of school policy for homework
- responsibilities of schools, parents and teachers including homework and study support facilities at places other than home
- time allocations across year levels
  - Years 1 and 2: 12 minutes a day
  - Years 3 and 4: 18 minutes a day
  - Years 5 and 6: 30 minutes a day
  - Years 7 and 8: between 45 and 90 minutes a day
  - Year 9: between 1 and 2 hours a day
  - Years 10 and 11: between 1 and 2 hours a day
  - Years 12 and 13: dependent on individual programs and outlined in school policy
- supported by leaflets for parents
- supported by case studies
- supported through the *Homework: Learning from Practice, Summary of Findings* from the Ofsted Research Study.

Specific features in the US *Helping your Child with Homework: For Parents of Children in Elementary through Middle School* (2002) include:

- reference to the *No Child Left Behind Act 2001* which identifies stronger accountability for results, local control and flexibility, expanded options for parents, an emphasis on effective and proven teaching methods
- background information that identifies homework as a concern for the whole family
- outlines the ‘basics’ and how to help with homework
- parent responsibility outlined in a quote from President
- time allocations across year levels
  - Kindergarten to Year 2: 10–20 minutes per day
  - Years 3 to Year 6: 30–60 minutes per day
  - Years 7 to Year 9: benefit from more time in homework and the amount may vary from night to night
- a list of resources

- assistance provided by the Federal Government
- a checklist for helping your child with homework.

There are potential benefits to be gained from engaging parents and students in the development of school homework policies. Such collaboration provides opportunities to respond to the perspectives, contributions and experiences of the school community. Students can make significant contributions to designing school homework policy and this can assist in fostering independent and responsible character traits. Smith (2000) asserts that it is counterproductive to treat students as passive consumers of homework and to do so narrows their potential.

## Summary

A national and international scan of findings related to homework legislation, policy, guidelines and support materials is summarised in the *Attachment*.

Features identified in other jurisdictions for consideration include:

- guidelines to support schools to establish a whole of school policy for homework
- providing a distinction between the type of homework and the desirable maximum time allocation for different phases of schooling and
- supporting materials and tips to assist teachers, parents and students.

## Implications

From this summary of key findings, it is clear that time is a precious resource for contemporary families. Some homework appears to be better than too much or none at all, however, the time on homework needs to be responsive to the age and development of students. Research has informed the notion of a point of diminishing returns and that specifying a *maximum* amount of time spent on homework is a common component of homework policies in other jurisdictions. The research indicates that a ‘more homework the better’ view is misleading and should not be the basis for policy and practice.

The findings indicated that parents can influence the homework environment by creating positive conditions for learning and encouraging children to complete homework tasks. A successful outcome for homework appears to be contingent on teacher preparation and the setting of ‘real life’ tasks, the motivation of students and the level of parental support available.

National and international best practice identifies that the development of homework policies provides opportunities for schools to respond to and build on the perspectives, contributions and experiences of students and the school community. Homework activities appear to be most effective when linked directly to class activities so that homework is part of the learning process across home and school. Guidelines to support schools in developing homework policies are available in other national and international education systems and may be of benefit to state schools in Queensland.

These research findings will inform consultation with parents, students and teachers on the future of homework in Queensland state schools through the *Education Laws for the Future* consultation paper.

## Attachment: Summary of national and international scan of homework policies and guidelines

The following is a summary of legislation, policy and guidelines from national and international educational jurisdictions including a comparison of contents and some components of the relevant homework policy and/or guideline.

<b>Location:</b>	<b>Queensland</b>
Legislation:	<i>Education (General Provisions) Regulations 2000</i> Section 23
Legislative intent:	Section 23 provides that a teacher at a state school may require a student to undertake homework.
Policy/Guideline:	No systemic guideline for schools. Some individual schools have developed their own policy.
Time allocations:	Section 23 also provides that the principal of the school may decide what is a reasonable amount required.
<b>Location:</b>	<b>South Australia</b>
Legislation:	<i>Education Regulation 64</i>
Legislative intent:	Regulation 64(1) provides that teachers may require that homework appropriate to the age and ability of the child shall be done by a child attending a school.
Policy/Guideline:	<i>Student Homework</i> , Memo to all Principals, Department of Education and Children's Services, South Australia
Responsibilities:	Regulation 64(2) provides that every teacher shall give sympathetic consideration to any objection from a parent regarding the amount of homework expected by the teacher from a child of that parent.
<b>Location:</b>	<b>New South Wales</b>
Policy/Guideline:	<i>Homework Policy</i> , Department of Education and Training, New South Wales (August 2000)
Content:	Purpose; General principles; Types of homework such as practice exercises, preparatory and extension assignments; Successful practice
Responsibilities:	Expectations of parents, teachers, students
Other:	Supported by Memorandum to Principals
<b>Location:</b>	<b>Victoria</b>
Policy/Guideline:	<i>Homework Habits: Homework Guidelines</i> , Department of Education, Employment and Training, Victoria (April 2001)
Content:	Principles; Successful practice: Early Years, Middle Years, Later Years; Types of homework
Responsibilities:	Expectations of parents, teachers
Time allocations:	Early Years (Prep to Year 4): not to exceed 30 minutes a day and not on weekends nor vacation Middle Years (Years 5–9): range from 30–45 minutes a day at Year 5 to 45–90 minutes a day in Year 9 Later Years (Years 10 to 12): increase to 1–3 hours per week night with up to 6 hours on weekends during school term
Other:	Supported by <i>Homework Habits: Homework Guidelines for Parents</i>
<b>Location:</b>	<b>Australian Capital Territory</b>
Policy/Guideline:	<i>Parent Participation in Schools</i> , Department of Education and Training, Australian Capital Territory, May 2004
Content:	Benefits to homework completion; Answers questions such as: Why, How, Volunteering

<b>Location:</b>	<b>Northern Territory</b>
Policy/Guideline:	Homework – Responsibility of Schools
Content:	Homework is considered to be an integral part of a student’s educational program.
Responsibilities:	Teachers have a responsibility for setting and checking homework. School council and principal to develop and implement policy on homework and to ensure that parents/guardians are aware of the policy.
<b>Location:</b>	<b>Western Australia</b>
Policy/Guideline:	<i>How Can I Help with Homework?</i> Centre for Inclusive Schooling, Department of Education and Training, Western Australia (July 2002)
Content:	Frequently asked questions (parent audience) including: Why do teachers give homework? How can I help? How can I support my child’s homework? What should I do if I have a concern?
<b>Location:</b>	<b>New Zealand</b>
Policy/Guideline:	Each school has its own policy on the amount and type of homework that students are expected to do.
Other:	The Competent Children Project outlines children’s views on homework, findings of time spent on homework and ideas to support student learning beyond the classroom.
<b>Location:</b>	<b>United Kingdom</b>
Policy/Guideline:	<i>Homework: Guidelines for Primary and Secondary Schools</i> (1998). Department of Education and Skills, United Kingdom
Content:	Evidence on which the guidelines are based; Implementing the guidelines; Definition; Partnership with parents – homework and home–school agreements; A whole school policy for homework; Purpose
Responsibilities:	Role of schools in developing school policy; Role of parents and carers in supporting pupils; Homework and study support facilities at places other than home; Feedback; Monitoring and evaluating school policies; Appropriate tasks for homework
Time allocations:	Type and amount of homework appropriate for students of different ages, e.g.: Years 1 and 2: 1 hour per week Years 3 and 4: 1.5 hours per week Years 5 and 6: 30 minutes per day Years 7 and 8: 45–90 minutes per day Year 9 and 10: 2 hrs per day Years 10 and 11: 1–2 hrs per day Years 12 and 13: dependent on individual programs and outlined in school policy.
Other:	Supported by <i>Leaflet for Parents; Case Studies</i> (Homework policies apply equally to students with special educational needs including those in special schools); <i>Homework: Learning from Practice Summary of Findings</i> from the Ofsted Research Study.
<b>Location:</b>	<b>United States of America</b>
Legislation:	<i>No Child Left Behind Act 2001</i>
Legislative intent:	Stronger accountability for results; Local control and flexibility; Expanded options for parents; An emphasis on effective and proven teaching methods
Policy/Guideline:	<i>Helping Your Child with Homework: For Parents of Children in Elementary through Middle School</i> , US Department of Education (2002)
Content:	Homework: A concern for the whole family; The basics; How to help; Resources
Responsibilities:	Parent responsibility outlined by President.
Time allocations:	Years K–2: 10–20 minutes per day Years 3–6: 30–60 minutes per day Years 7–9: benefit from more time on homework and amount may vary from night to night
Other:	Federal Sources of Assistance; Checklist for Helping Your Child with Homework.

**Location:** **United States of America**  
**Policy/Guideline:** *Helping Your Child Get the Most Out of Homework, Parent Guide*, National Parent-Teachers Association and the National Education Association  
**Time allocations:** Years K–2: not to exceed 10–20 minutes per day  
Years 3–6: up to 30–60 minutes a day  
Junior and Senior High School: amount will vary per subject  
**Other:** Recommendations consistent with conclusions reached by analyses of dozens of studies.

**Location:** **Montgomery County, United States of America**  
**Policy/Guideline:** *Homework Policy*, Board of Education of Montgomery County  
**Content:** Purpose; Process and content; Review and reporting  
**Responsibilities:** School responsibility  
**Time allocations:** Years K–8: up to 3 to 5 times a week as a rule rather than the exception

**Location:** **Pound High School, United States of America**  
**Policy/Guideline:** *Homework Policy and Assignments*, Pound High School  
**Content:** Guidelines/Principles  
**Responsibilities:** Teachers to consider guidelines before giving homework.  
**Time allocations:** Timing of homework determined by teacher Weekly Timing guidelines:  
Years K–3: 0 to 2.5 hrs per week  
Years 4–6: 2 to 5 hrs per week  
Years 7–9: 5 to 10 hrs per week  
Years 10–12: 5 to 10 hrs per week.

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