

The growing argument against homework

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A New York City elementary school's decision to ban homework in favour of play has infuriated some parents.

Many people seem to believe that working on assignments after school is an essential part of a child's success. But if you actually do your homework on homework, evidence suggests its benefits are negligible at best. Given what we know about kids' sedentary lifestyles, of course we should ditch homework for play.

"The topic of homework has received a lot of attention lately, and the negative effects of homework have been well established," the school's principal, Jane Hsu, wrote in a letter that was sent home with students last month, [reports DNAinfo.com](#).

"They include: children's frustration and exhaustion, lack of time for other activities and family time and, sadly for many, loss of interest in learning."

Instead of working on essays or math problems at home, students in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade are encouraged to read and spend time with their families, the principal said.

The new policy was prompted by the fact that too many children had to sit out recess because they failed to hand in homework assignments.

A committee the school established a year ago to investigate the problem concluded there is "no link between elementary school homework and success in school."

Ultimately, therefore, it would be better to have kids running around at recess and after dinner playing hockey, or basketball, or tag, or whatever activity it might be.

But some parents are so upset they are threatening to pull their kids from the school.

"I think they should have homework. Some of it is about discipline. I want [my daughter] to have fun, but I also want her to be working towards a goal," Daniel Tasman, the father of a second-grader at the school, told DNAinfo. He is now looking for another school.

“I was just thinking maybe I’ll keep my daughter here for another year, but this pushed me over the edge,” he said.

Over the past few years, a movement has emerged that is questioning homework. Parents are sick of having to help kids complete mountains of assignments.

“If one thing happens in 2015, it should be a concerted campaign to eradicate this illogical, damaging, ass-paining institution once and for all,” [novelist Caitlin Moran wrote in *The Times*](#), a British newspaper, earlier this year.

My six-year-old daughter gets one homework assignment each week, which we usually work on the night before it is due. When this becomes a daily duty, I’m sure I’ll be at the same level of hair-pulling frustration as Moran and so many other parents.

Some politicians are also asking what’s the point.

In 2012, French president François Hollande proposed banning homework for children in primary and middle school.

Last year, an elementary school in Quebec [banned homework](#) because it was putting too much pressure on students and their parents.

Homework is not only a pain, its “educational value” is still unclear, particular at younger grades.

One public school in Barrie even noticed that [grades went up](#) after homework was banned.

If the ban in New York gets kids playing outdoors, other schools should follow suit.

According to the latest “report card” issued by Active Healthy Kids Canada, [only 7 per cent of children ages five to 11](#) meet Canada’s daily physical-activity guidelines.

Those guidelines set an embarrassingly low bar: at least one-hour of moderate to vigorous physical activity a day.

For a little historical context, harken back to an anti-homework argument in the 1920s. Back then, physicians in the U.S. worried that homework might damage children’s health. Doctors believed – I’m not joking here – that children needed six to seven hours a day of fresh air and sunshine, as Etta Kralovec, author of *The End of Homework*, has pointed out.

Obviously, that was before iPads and 24-hour a day access to Teletoon.

If we want our kids to grow up to make sound decisions based on evidence, we should set a good example by banning homework in elementary school.

