

**HOMEWORK SURVEY SUMMARY
AND ANALYSIS 2011-2012**

BERNARDS TOWNSHIP SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Homework Survey Summary and Analysis 2011-2012

A survey was conducted with [staff](#), [students](#), and [parents](#) on the subject of homework over the course of three weeks in November-December. While the goal was to collect information on the subject of homework, the surveys also allowed for the collection of anecdotal information on how parents and students are impacted by homework, both at home and in preparation for other classes. The main objective of the survey was to collect data on the perspective of each stakeholder in the process and thus three different viewpoints were solicited. All information was collected using an on-line survey software (Lime Survey) and the questions were designed by members of the administration, Board of Education, and teachers (teacher survey only).

After collecting the data an analysis was completed and the following represents both a summary of the results and plan of action for the future.

Number of surveys administered:

	TOTAL RESPONSES	K-5	6 - 8	9 - 12
PARENTS	1,931	650	681	591
STAFF	236	58	-	-
STUDENTS	2,756		6th- 411	9th - 441
			7th - 446	10th - 430
			8th - 277	11th - 381
				12th - 370

PURPOSE

The following are the underlying objectives of each respective survey:

Parents:

1. Gain valuable insight into the role parents play in the process of students completing homework.
2. Solicit general comments from parents on their interactions with children as it relates to homework completion.
3. Gain a more solid understanding of how parents marshal resources to help their children meet with success in finishing homework.
4. Utilize parental feedback in the refinement of district homework guidelines.
5. Understand the average time spent on homework per night as it intersects with extracurricular or other non-school related obligations.

Students:

1. Correlate student homework competencies with the curricular expectations as seen in the

teacher survey.

2. Support students' self-regulation skills, strategies, personal responsibility for homework processes and outcomes.
3. Help students organize personal thinking about assignments.
4. Align the expectations of students with the realities of the workload in accelerated classes (Guidance Department).
5. Collect information on the environment in which students complete homework.

Teachers:

1. Collect information on the underlying objectives of homework by content area and grade level.
2. Compare the expectations for the length of time it should take to complete homework with parental and student expectations.
3. Gather information on the frequency of various types of homework assignments and how they impact student performance.
4. Develop clear homework procedures which can be interpreted fairly and uniformly by all staff K-12.
5. Develop a plan for curriculum revision with a focus on homework assessments currently in use.

SUMMARY OF SURVEY DATA

While the full survey is included in the three PowerPoint presentations located on the District Homepage, the following are five highlights (questions) from each survey. They give an indication of how each group felt about the amount of time it takes to complete homework, homework over recess periods, and other factors that may impact homework completion. While these questions represent a focal point for the surveys, they are a sample of the type of questions which appeared on each respective survey. In addition, both staff and parents were given an opportunity to make general comments about either the use of homework (teachers) or how homework impacts children/students (parents). There were a total of 981 comments made by parents and 57 made by staff. The comments were summarized and organized into overarching themes which appear below.

PARENT SURVEY

Homework and recess periods: A majority of parents felt that homework should not be assigned over recess periods as many felt that students in grades 6-12 are spending a large portion of time completing homework. Many parents were adamant that students should have homework in their courses but that it is critical that recess periods be "homework free" periods where students can spend time with family and "de-stress". In some classes, parents pointed out that major projects were often due a day or two upon returning from the recess period, thus placing tremendous demands on student/parent time during the recess period. As a possible solution, several pleas were made to give greater lead time for long term projects to provide students the option to complete the assignments before the recess period.

Group Projects as homework: It was noted that parents saw a significant increase in the use of group

projects which require students to meet outside of the school day to complete a project. Consequently, many parents viewed this as a huge burden as parents were often driving students to the homes of other students to complete a project. Another issue raised as it related to group projects was the idea of students not “pulling their weight” and, through the completion of homework by other students, those students were “carried” to a better grade.

	Homework should not be assigned on recess periods	Some projects should involve parental involvement
Strongly agree	42%	8%
Agree	29%	42%
Disagree	22%	32%
Strongly disagree	6%	18%

Obtaining homework information: As is noted below, it was evident of the importance of Back to School Night in helping to introduce the teaching staff to parents and to open the lines of communication throughout the year. It was during this evening when parents were shown how the teacher notifies students of upcoming homework assignments through the Oncourse webpage or Moodle page in order to reinforce student accountability in this regard. There were some parents who expressed disappointment in the lack of a consistent system for obtaining homework. Despite the employment of the Homework Portal, some staff were using Moodle as a means to post homework. Thus, parents wanted all staff to utilize the Homework Portal to post homework to aid the development of a long range agenda in completing homework.

How do you obtain information about your child’s homework?	
Back to School Night/Parent Information Night	
Conferences with teacher	22.19%
Phone calls with teacher	4.24%
Class syllabus	15.69%
Daily/weekly assignment sheets	36.53%
Child's notebook/homework folder/binder	48.75%
Classroom website	36.40%
Emails	20.84%
My child tells me	66.82%
I don't receive information about homework assignments	4.12%
Not sure	0.58%
Homework Portal	34.21%

Time on task: Without question, the most commented on subject was the amount of time it took students to complete homework assignments. The majority of students are taking between one

hour and over two and a half hours to complete homework. Of those numbers, roughly sixty percent of the eligible students were in accelerated courses at either William Annin (Algebra/Geometry) or Ridge High School. Furthermore, the majority of comments centered on the amount of homework teachers in 6th and 7th grades gave which seemed to truly serve as outliers as compared with other grades. These were also the two grades in which parents commented on the types of assignments given for homework. Many parents felt that they were “busy work” or not helping to contribute to content acquisition in the course.

As is evidenced by the figures below, students are spending anywhere from 15 minutes to more than two and a half hours a night on homework in grades 6-12. While there was no consistent pattern for the amount of time it took students to complete homework by grade level, the vast majority of 6th and 7th grade parents noted that their child took at least sixty minutes a night to complete homework tasks. There is no question that differences in student ability levels and task completion skills will impact these figures.

On average, how much time does your child/student typically spend doing homework on a daily basis		The amount of time my child spends doing homework is:	
Less than 15 minutes	6.17%	About the right amount of time	30.42%
About 15 - 30 minutes	11.83%	Too much time	46.37%
About 30 - 45 minutes	10.23%	Not enough time	4.63%
About 45 - 60 minutes	10.80%	Sometimes too much and sometimes not enough	11.64%
About 60 - 90 minutes	13.50%	Not sure	5.92%
About 90 - 120 minutes	15.88%		
About 120 - 150 minutes	14.08%		
More than 150 minutes	16.66%		

STUDENT SURVEY

Perception of Rigor at Ridge High School: This question was asked as a way to find a correlation between the amount of homework in a class and student perception of rigor. The students seemed to feel that subject matter in the core content areas at Ridge High School are equal in the level of rigor. Less than 32% of students surveyed felt homework was meaningful to them, and 65% of these students came from grades 6-8.

I am challenged by the subject matter in the courses I take at Ridge High School					
	LA	MATH	SOC STU	SCIENCE	WL
No answer	41.15%	41.15%	41.18%	41.15%	41.15%
Strongly disagree	2.76%	6.20%	3.70%	4.39%	4.72%
Disagree	8.06%	9.54%	7.55%	7.51%	7.08%
Neutral	17.71%	14.19%	16.76%	14.48%	13.61%
Agree	17.96%	17.60%	17.67%	18.47%	17.56%
Strongly agree	12.12%	10.81%	11.65%	13.61%	11.18%

NA	0.25%	0.51%	1.49%	0.40%	4.72%
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Amount of time to complete homework: Students were asked to reflect on the average time they spend on homework each night. When this information is viewed by grade level it becomes apparent that a large number of students in grades 6-12 are spending between one to three hours a night on homework. It is interesting to note that there appears to be little difference between the time a 7th grade student spends on his or her homework and an 11th grade student, despite the four year difference in grades and the impact of honors/AP courses for the 11th grade student. In addition, about 100 students in grades 7 and 8 indicated that they spend over five hours per night on their homework. Based on the data, it would appear that the largest number of students spending more than four hours a night on homework are in 11th grade. This is typically the year in which students are developing the most challenging schedule as they prepare for their post-secondary opportunities.

On average, how much time do you spend each night completing homework?							
	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th
# responding	417	457	290	455	438	394	384
0-1 hours	15.59%	6.56%	3.10%	5.27%	6.62%	6.60%	13.54%
1-2 hours	47.00%	23.85%	21.72%	19.56%	19.41%	17.51%	18.49%
2-3 hours	21.58%	22.32%	28.97%	26.37%	26.48%	21.57%	20.57%
3-4 hours	7.19%	19.04%	16.90%	20.00%	22.37%	14.47%	19.53%
4-5 hours	3.84%	12.91%	8.62%	11.21%	12.33%	18.78%	14.58%
More than 5 hours	3.60%	12.91%	15.86%	14.51%	10.50%	18.02%	9.90%
No answer	0.00%	0.22%	0.34%	0.00%	0.46%	0.25%	0.26%
Not completed or Not displayed	1.20%	2.19%	4.48%	3.08%	1.83%	2.79%	3.12%

Use of Tutor: The majority of students who stated they used a tutor were in science classes at Ridge High School. Those students who indicated that they used a tutor in science identified themselves as

primarily (59%) in an honors or AP class. There is also evidence to suggest that students who utilized a tutor in science were also frequently utilizing a tutor in math. This was referenced in several parent comments and by those students who selected math and science as a response on the question below.

I have used a tutor or other outside help because I did not understand the material presented in class.					
	LA	MATH	SOC STU	SCIENCE	WL
No answer	0.15%	0.04%	0.04%	0.07%	0.11%
Strongly disagree	37.05%	30.77%	41.11%	37.41%	37.12%
Disagree	10.09%	7.22%	9.65%	9.00%	8.60%
Neutral	6.82%	7.62%	6.82%	7.04%	7.00%
Agree	8.09%	12.99%	4.90%	7.44%	6.28%
Strongly agree	5.81%	11.83%	2.90%	5.22%	4.46%
NA	32.00%	29.54%	34.58%	33.82%	36.43%

Homework time allotment: It was apparent that the vast majority of students (over 90%) spend at least an hour a night completing homework which does align with parent response. In addition, 82% of students who identified themselves as in at least some honors classes indicated that they spend at least two hours a night on their homework.

On average, how much time do you spend each night completing homework?	
No answer	0.11%
0-1 hours	8.45%
1-2 hours	24.75%
2-3 hours	24.49%
3-4 hours	17.67%
4-5 hours	12.16%
More than 5 hours	12.37%

Environment for completing homework: Information was collected on the conditions in which students typically complete homework. The students who answered the following question were able to select all applicable conditions. This question may also serve to refine or revise current building policies on the use of audio devices while independently working.

What is your homework environment: (select all that apply)	
Quiet room	64.70%
TV on	20.43%
With music on	45.50%
While surfing the internet	29.83%

While texting	34.83%
While on a social media source (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)	29.35%

TEACHER SURVEY

Homework Frequency: Most staff were in agreement that homework should be assigned at least two times per week with honors and AP teachers more frequently stating that it should be given every night. In addition, three-quarters of the middle and high school staff felt that homework should count for 20% or less of the total grade in the class.

How often do you assign homework?	
Every night	12.71%
3-4 nights on average	44.92%
2-3 nights on average	13.98%
Less than 2 nights on average	11.86%
Never	9.32%
No answer	7.20%

% of total marking period grade: The staff were asked to provide an estimate of what percentage of the total course grade was made up of some type of homework assignment. There was not a clear distinction as to the weight assigned to homework and the grade or level of a course.

Homework accounts for what % of a student's marking period grade:	
0%	19.92%
1-10%	25.85%
11-20%	29.24%
21-30%	12.29%
31-40%	2.97%
More than 40%	0.85%
No answer	8.90%

Homework time allotment: This question that did not seem to align with the student and parent response for actual time it takes to complete assignments in grades 6-8. While a large portion of teachers in grades 6 and 7 seemed to feel that homework should not take more than twenty minutes, many students and parents were reporting that it was in fact taking on average 30-40 minutes per night. It should also be noted that almost one third of eighth grade teachers felt students should be spending up to thirty minutes per subject each night. This can amount to upwards of three and half hours a night of homework.

At the high school, staff felt that students in college prep courses should be completing about twenty minutes per night of homework. However, honors and AP teachers largely felt that homework should take at least twenty minutes per subject each night.

How many minutes of homework, per subject, do you believe is appropriate for middle school?

MINUTES	6th	7th	8th
0-10	11.86%	5.08%	1.69%
11-20	43.22%	42.80%	27.97%
21-30	8.47%	14.41%	31.36%
31-40	1.69%	2.97%	3.39%
41-50	2.12%	0.85%	1.27%
over 50	0.85%	1.27%	1.27%
NA	15.68%	16.53%	16.95%
No answer	0.42%	0.42%	0.42%
Not completed or Not displayed	15.68%	15.68%	15.68%

How many minutes of homework, per subject, do you believe is appropriate for high school?

MINUTES	9th CP	9 HON/ AP	10 th CP	10 th HON/ AP	11 th CP	11 th HON/ AP	12 th CP	12 th HON/ AP
0-10	0.85%	0.42%	0.42%	0.42%	0.42%	0.42%	0.42%	0.42%
11-20	22.03%	9.75%	19.49%	7.20%	16.95%	5.93%	16.53%	5.51%
21-30	31.78%	25.00%	28.39%	24.58%	25.00%	19.92%	24.15%	18.64%
31-40	7.63%	21.19%	12.29%	19.49%	17.37%	22.03%	16.53%	21.61%
41-50	3.39%	7.20%	4.24%	11.02%	3.81%	11.86%	3.39%	11.44%
Over 50	0.42%	1.69%	1.27%	2.54%	1.69%	4.24%	3.39%	6.36%
NA	16.95%	18.22%	17.37%	18.22%	18.22%	19.07%	19.07%	19.49%
No answer	1.27%	0.85%	0.85%	0.85%	0.85%	0.85%	0.85%	0.85%
Not completed or Not displayed	15.68%	15.68%	15.68%	15.68%	15.68%	15.68%	15.68%	15.68%

What percentage of homework is formally assessed?

Answer	Percentage
0%-20%	27.54%
21%-40%	8.90%

41%-60%	11.44%
61%-80%	12.71%
81%-100%	16.53%
No answer	0.00%
Not completed or Not displayed	22.88%

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS

The following represents a summary of comments which appeared frequently throughout both the parent and teacher surveys. These comments have been edited or combined to include related information from multiple responses.

Teachers:

Many teachers felt that students were incorrectly placed into accelerated classes based on the student desire to be in the class despite their being unprepared for the rigor of the coursework. It was noted that students feel the need to compete with peers and thus may feel pressure to take additional classes. Furthermore, the waiver in humanities classes appeared to increase the number of students placed into honors/AP classes despite not being prepared for the workload. This was evidenced by the large number of students dropping levels during the first month of the school year. There was also concern that many students did not have a realistic understanding of how much time the homework would take them once they were actually taking the classes. There appeared to be a disconnect between the expectations at the time of scheduling and the realities of actually completing the work once in the course.

Staff were concerned that with any change to the homework procedures may come a reduced expectation and thus a decrease in the rigor of the program. Additionally, some staff mentioned it would be a good idea to include information on the impact of multiple accelerated classes on a student's time. Also, staff wanted to make sure that they were preparing students for the rigor of the college process. The suggestion was made to give students a sample schedule and estimate for the total possible amount of homework that students would have.

Teachers also expressed their reliance on homework as an important communication tool with parents and students. It is through comments on these assignments that a dialogue outside of the classroom opens through which students reflect.

Some teachers in grades 6-8 and RHS College Preparatory classes felt homework should not count for more than 20% of the total grade, while others strongly felt that it not be graded in grades K-5. In addition, staff in accelerated classes noted that homework should actually count for more than 20% of the total grade given the greater amount of time needed to complete the assignments. A few staff members also thought it would be worthwhile to explore the idea of making homework optional as a tool to improve or practice if needed, although staff had not put this into practice on a regular basis

at the time of the survey.

The most frequently commented on subject was the issue of too many tests being given in one day so that it required students to study for up to five-six quizzes/tests in one night. Teachers at the middle school expressed their concern for the lack of coordination in planning tests/quizzes on the same day.

Many teachers observed the misuse of study halls at Ridge High School and the missed opportunity for students to complete homework or study for a test in these blocks of time. Some students were using study halls to listen to music, socialize, or play games instead of working on homework. It appeared that this was most prevalent in the large study halls created to handle students participating in Option II sports.

Parents:

Parents appreciated the use of a weekly agenda by many teachers in grades 6-12 and were desirous of all staff using these agendas. Not only would it help students plan out their time during the week, but it helped to instill good time management skills. In addition, the parents were frustrated with the lack of a consistent method for online homework posting. While some staff used Homework Portal, others were using Moodle which made it difficult for a student/parent to get a “snapshot” of their weekly homework and plan accordingly.

By far, parents commented on the amount of time students spent working on homework both over the weekend and during recess periods. Since students were spending so much time on homework the parents often had to alter their weekend/recess period plans to ensure students were able to complete these assignments. There were many teachers who were able to assign projects in advance, and it gave students the option of completing the assignment ahead of time so they did not have homework on a weekend or recess period. However, many teachers assigned homework and projects specifically to be completed over these periods. It should be noted that parents did understand that some homework was inevitable and beneficial over the weekend.

The types of assignments given were also a subject for comment and specifically the issue of projects. Many parents felt that some projects given were “busy work” and did not seem to further learning objectives of the class, or they required additional work to be done (coloring/shading, etc.) that seemed unnecessary. Parents were concerned that students were expected to color and were graded on various projects on their neatness in this regard. Additionally, parents were unsure of the value of group projects where students could be penalized for the lack of contribution from another group member. Finally, there was concern with the type of projects which required students to meet over a weekend to complete these projects.

The parents felt there was an inordinate amount of homework given in grades 6 and 7 and the workload actually decreased as they moved on to 8th grade. As a way to help students deal with this workload, it was suggested that each teacher work with students on specific time management strategies and make efforts to not assign more than one project/assignment to be due on any given day.

Many parents felt the level of rigor in the honors and AP program, along with the competitive nature of the student body, led to greater incidents of cheating.

NEXT STEPS

- Revisions to the homework procedures to include homework-free recess periods (effective December 2011) and establishment of clear homework time allotments. Also, articulation of project guidelines and communication of homework assignments using Homework Portal.
- Staff development in department/faculty/K-5 meetings to review homework procedures
- Curriculum revisions to existing projects
- Assessments returned to students at all times
- Administration of the Student Stressors Survey in the spring
- Development of Academic Integrity Procedure to help define types of academic integrity