

Is homework worth the kids' effort?

National trend says not, but it can have important benefits if it's done correctly

BY ROSS ROSENFELD

The Long Beach school district recently announced that it will discontinue traditional homework — such as workbooks and repetitive drills — for elementary-aged students come September. In an announcement posted on the district's website, Superintendent Jennifer Gallagher said that instead kids should “WRAP”: wonder, read, and play.

Long Beach isn't alone. There's a growing movement to drastically alter or do away with homework for elementary school children. Mark Trifilio, principal of the Orchard School in Vermont, scrapped traditional homework in 2016, and last year all of Marion County, Florida, did away with it as well. Citing the work of Professor Richard Allington of the University of Tennessee, Marion County schools Superintendent Heidi Maier said that research “showed that students who are given a preponderance of homework do not perform better, or get better grades,

than those who do not.” Like Gallagher, she suggested instead that parents spend that time selecting texts and reading with their kids.

Gallagher based her decision on the work of Australian educational expert John Hattie. He has found that homework, as it's done now, has a net effect of “zero” on academic achievement. He hasn't advocated doing completely away with homework, but has said it's important to gauge its effectiveness and make changes when necessary.

Harris Cooper, a professor at Duke University who has studied the effects of homework for more than 30 years and led a research team that analyzed more than 60 studies on homework, has found that homework does make a difference. But Cooper says that difference is much greater in middle and high school than in elementary school, where the effect is minimal.

As a professional tutor, I've seen the effects of homework on young children. I've witnessed frustrated parents try-



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ing to explain directions to kids and have watched kids grow bored and angry when performing mundane tasks that provide little intellectual stimulation.

Time is a commodity: every minute a kid is kept inside filling out worksheets is time that kid isn't reading a book, playing a sport, riding her bicycle, or exploring woods — all of which also provide opportunities to learn. Is it worth it? If the homework is just doing worksheets rather than reading, investigating, or finding creative solutions,

I say it's not.

Too often teachers assign young kids homework that is repetitive, not age appropriate, or just too time-consuming. Kids need time to play, have fun, and relax. If you're going to diminish that time, what they get in exchange ought to be something extremely valuable. And, right now, it isn't.

Homework can have benefits if it's done right: kids can learn to follow directions, analyze and solve problems, and come up with creative solutions. Asking,

say, for kids to conduct experiments once a week, construct their own model bridges, or figure out how many feet it is from the Earth to the Moon, could both interest kids and get them thinking. But that's not how homework is being done at most elementary schools today. Teachers are assigning unappealing tasks that young kids often can't do on their own and are overburdening them with excessive homework. Even Professor Cooper, who counts himself as a homework advocate, agrees that younger children should be given significantly less homework than older ones.

Kids need the chance to explore their own interests. They already have long days at school, where they're often forced to sit still and ignore their natural inclinations to move around and explore. Once they're home, turn off the TV and open up a book, but don't make them suffer through any more boring, unhelpful, argument-inspiring homework.



Ross Rosenfeld of Lynbrook is the founder of Ross Tutoring.

and move away from global institutions that have made the world a better place. We would be better served by remaining on the council and contributing our values, rather than be like the individual who criticizes but doesn't vote to change things.

Tony Korec, Medford

Editor's note: The writer is a member of the United Nations Association, a UN support organization, and a senior lecturer in religious studies at St. Joseph's College in Patchogue.

Islanders' golf outing does a lot of good

This is a response to the June 9 letter “Isles' golf outing shouldn't be on 9/11,” which objected to the scheduling of this year's New York Islanders Children's Foundation golf outing.

As a member of the Bethpage Fire Department, I drove an ambulance to Manhattan on Sept.

11, 2001, and the next day dug through the remains of the Trade Center.

Meanwhile, I've attended the Islanders' outing every year and have seen the foundation's great work for children here and beyond Long Island.

Sept. 11 is a day of service. The Islanders raise tens of thousands of dollars at the outing for causes including hockey training for kids, service dogs for veterans, and surgery for children with facial deformities.

Each year, I remember a friend who died on 9/11; I'll wear his name on my arm again. I thank the Islanders for the service the team does.

Charles Razenson, Hicksville

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PUZZLING POLITICIANS

Test your knowledge of local politicians.

The answers below are rhyming words, such as BLACK JACK, and each includes the last name of a New York politician, present or past. Put one letter for each blank (apostrophes do not take spaces). The numbers in parentheses indicate the syllables in each word. Here's an example to get you started: State Assemblyman Fred's bargains (1, 1) T H I E L E ' S D E A L S

1. Congresswoman Kathleen's costs (2, 2) _ _ _ _ _
2. Governor advertisement (2, 2) _ _ _ _ _
3. Hempstead Town supervisor temporary replacement (2, 2) _ _ _ _ _
4. U.S. senator gossip (2, 2) _ _ _ _ _
5. Late NYC mayor's libations (2, 2) _ _ _ _ _
6. Former master planner Robert naps (2, 2) _ _ _ _ _
7. Former Suffolk Legis. Kate fooling around (2, 2) _ _ _ _ _
8. State Senate majority leader's hijinks (3, 4) _ _ _ _ _

— Michael Dobie

ANSWERS: 1. RICE'S PRICES, 2. CUOMO PROMO, 3. GILLEN FILL-IN, 4. SCHUMER RUMOR, 5. KOCH'S SCOTCHES, 6. MOSES DOZES, 7. BROWNING CLOWNING, 8. FLANAGAN'S SHENANIGANS