

More no-homework days eyed

East Quogue might expand program to two days monthly

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The small East Quogue school district's once-a-month initiative called "Family First Wednesdays" has worked out so well that the no-homework policy may be expanded, school officials said.

It joins a growing number of school systems that are moving to limit routine homework assignments.

The district, with an enrollment of 400 students from kindergarten through sixth grade, is looking at adding a second day — possibly another Wednesday — for a homework-free evening that students and parents here say would be a popular choice.

"I really like the idea because you can spend more time with your family," fourth-grader Lily Blenk, 9, said Thursday.

Parent Janet Fratello, who has children in the third and seventh grades, said that since the district launched the plan, she has spent time playing board games and has organized other family activities.

"We always love it," said Fratello, 40. "It's a great time to decompress. And I think it is good as long as they get done what they need to get done in school."

Neighboring Westhampton Beach has had a similar policy for elementary school students since 2015 called "Family Connect Night."

In a recent note to parents, Westhampton Beach Elementary School Principal Lisa Stover said: "We believe the family unit is the foundation of our school. Spending family time without interruption is crucial for keeping families close." She said the only assignment is for the family to come together and share in activities.

And the Long Beach school district is in its first year of eliminating "traditional" homework, such as workbooks and repetitive drills in math and spelling for elementary students, with a focus instead on reading — a move that drew



Students at East Quogue Elementary School read essays about what they did on "Family First Wednesdays." ■ Video: [newsday.com/education](https://www.newsday.com/education)

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mixed reviews at the time. Thursday, Long Beach Superintendent Jennifer Gallagher said that teachers have noticed an uptick in students' reading.

"A parent remarked to me at a meeting last week that she has read more with her son in the last month than they did in the entire previous year," she said.

In East Quogue, the concept of adding a second home-

work-free school day was just recently brought up by the local Board of Education. The first family night was launched in December last year.

Board President Chris Hudson, who has three elementary-age children and is a teacher in a nearby district, said school officials are looking for input from the community and teaching staff before adding a second

homework-free school day. The board is expected to consider this at a meeting later this month.

"Sometimes it is hard to give up two nights of homework," Hudson said. "But when you think in the long run maybe one or two is not so bad. As a parent I totally welcome it, and as a teacher I would be able to work with it."

Superintendent Robert Long said the district aims to strike the right balance between academic rigor and providing more freedom for students.

"There is no doubt that to us it is a priority — our families being together and spending time together and at the same time not compromising what we do here instructionally," Long said.

Board Vice President Jessica

Stalters, who had proposed the idea initially, said the board may consider scheduling a second homework-free night when there is an activity in the district such as a school concert so that all students can attend — even those not participating — as a way to share more in the school community.

"The major reason why I really first promoted the school-wide no-homework night was I found that many families were struggling, night after night, with the homework," she said. "Many of my friends have three or four children, and I just couldn't possibly see how they were all getting it done every night . . . It was really for that one night for the whole school for families to spend time together."

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