

February Student Trustee Reports

Jen Serdetchnaia

STUDENT TRUSTEE REPORT

At this time, Student Trustee J. Serdetchnaia made the following remarks.

“Good evening Madame Chair, Mr. Director, trustees, superintendents, ladies and gentlemen.

‘I love doing homework and I look forward to opening my books every afternoon when I return from school’.

Now, is this a phrase you would ever expect to hear from today’s students? Maybe in your dreams or perhaps in your nightmares, depending on your perception of a happy and productive child.

This past month we were introduced to the “Homework Realities” report from Linda Cameron and Lee Bartel, two professors at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. “Homework Realities” questioned the need for great volumes of homework, mostly at the elementary level. In general, the report concluded that homework is “burning out families and is of little value to elementary school kids”. With this news immersing across the province, I decided to talk to York Region students and teachers at the high school level and see how this board compares to the information found in the study.

A survey of twenty-one high school students from York Region, showed that not one single student said that he or she does homework all the time. On the other end of the spectrum, and on a positive note, only two admitted that they do homework rarely. The most common responses for homework completion were most of the time and sometimes.

Teachers in high school today tend to give students more and more independence and responsibility with homework completion. However, one-third of students stated that their reason for completing homework is that their teacher checks it or assigns marks for it. Another 26 per cent chose to identify their reason for not completing all of their homework, as “boring”. Only 11 per cent of the students said that they do homework because it helps them in the course or helps them do better in school. An overwhelming 86 per cent of the students surveyed noted that the most useful type of homework for them is practice and review. Students chose this type over both research and application.

Seventy-one percent of those surveyed stated that there is sometimes or rarely a correlation between homework completion and the final mark. Twenty-nine percent of students strongly disagreed, saying that there is always or most of the time a correlation between homework completion and the final mark.

The students surveyed noted that there was little correlation between homework completion and academic average. For instance, a high school student that cited his or her average to be in the low nineties also said that he or she only sometimes completes homework, spending about ten minutes daily. Another student stated his or her average to be in the mid-seventies, but that he or she completes the assigned homework most of the time and spends about three hours daily on it.

This example also demonstrates an incongruity in the amount of homework students receive nightly. Responses varied from zero to five hours of homework per night. The responses were somewhat concentrated between two to three hours of homework per night. It could be argued that students are taking courses with varying magnitudes of homework loads; however, there is inconsistency with which courses students consider to have a lot of homework. For example, some say English is the subject with the most homework, while others say it is the subject with the least. The only consistency was the identification of mathematics as producing the most amount homework by 52 per cent of those surveyed.

So how do teachers' responses compare? Of the three senior high school teachers surveyed, all three rated homework as extremely valuable to student achievement. Each teacher assigns different amounts of homework, from 30 to 45 minutes or one hour, per class, per night. There was consensus that high school students in senior grade levels should have no more than two to three hours of homework each night. The survey results show that this is more than most students are receiving. Even students completing two, three, four or even five hours of homework nightly noted that they are still not completing all of it.

One teacher expressed his concern with the vast amounts of homework assigned, stating that it is "not reasonable". He questioned why it is that students "need to spend a lot of time for their marks". In his class, he consciously makes a decision that "volume is not important". He believes that there is a perception that "we are supposed to be very busy", but that hectic is not synonymous with successful.

Another teacher was concerned about the decreased homework completion rates among his students but viewed the situation from a different perspective. He stated that students spend less time on homework than they did ten to 15 years ago. He identified the main reason for this to be that a greater number of students regularly hold part-time jobs as part of the "I want" generation and do not have the same amount of time for homework that they once did.

Two things seem clear from this survey. Students are not managing the homework loads that are given to them and they do not perceive homework to be as important as teachers do. Is reducing the amount of homework the answer? Should it be entirely up to the student how much homework he or she completes? Should amounts of homework be congruent in the same subjects across the Board? Answering such questions is one homework assignment that should be completed.

Thank you".