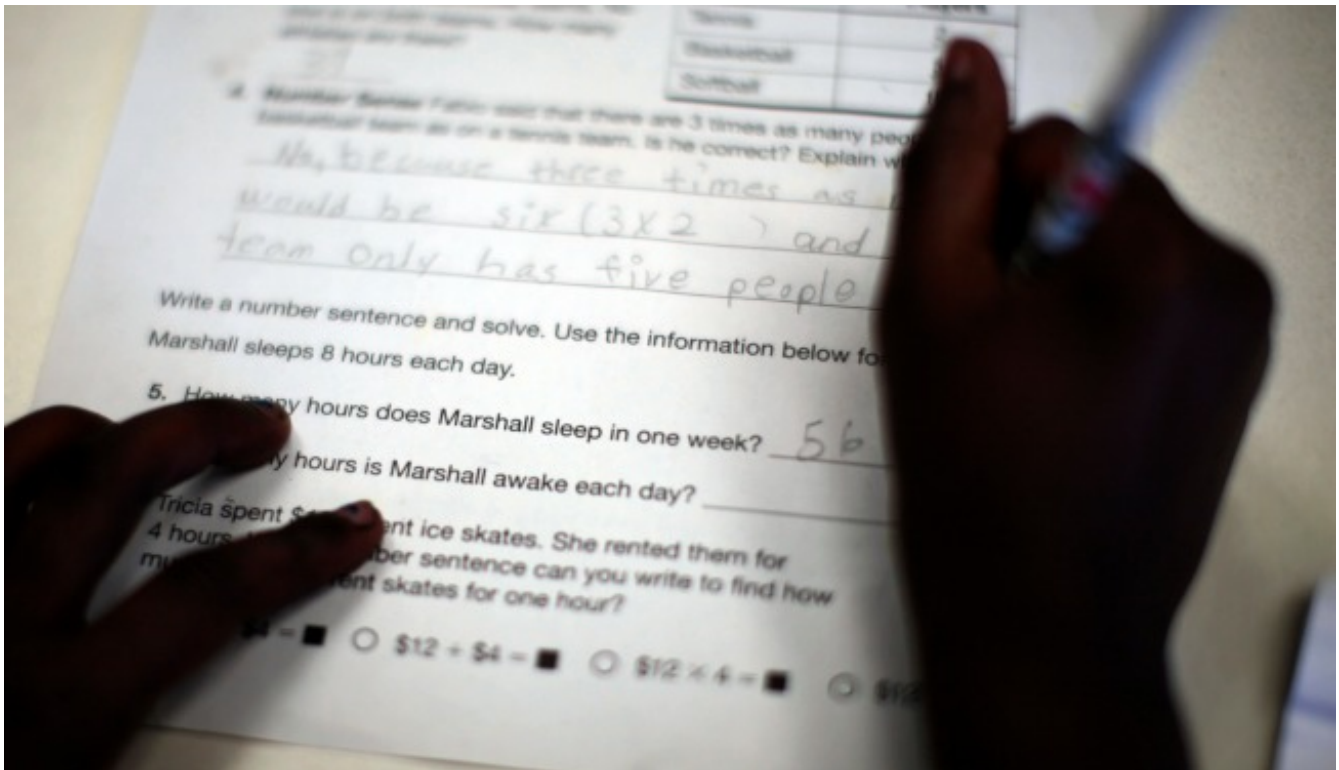


# How Much Homework Do American Kids Do?

Various factors, from the race of the student to the number of years a teacher has been in the classroom, affect a child's homework load.

JULIA RYAN | SEP 19, 2013



Lucy Nicholson/Reuters

In his *Atlantic* essay, Karl Taro Greenfeld laments his 13-year-old daughter's heavy homework load. As an eighth grader at a New York middle school, Greenfeld's daughter averaged about three hours of homework per night and adopted mantras like "memorization, not rationalization" to help her get it all

done. Tales of the homework-burdened American student have become common, but are these stories the exception or the rule?

A [2007 Metlife study](#) found that 45 percent of students in grades three to 12 spend more than an hour a night doing homework, including the six percent of students who report spending more than three hours a night on their homework. In the 2002-2003 school year, a [study](#) out of the University of Michigan found that American students ages six through 17 spent three hours and 38 minutes per week doing homework.



How Much is Too Much?: An *Atlantic* Debate  
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A range of factors plays into how much homework each individual student gets:

### **Older students do more homework than their younger counterparts.**

This one is fairly obvious: The National Education Association recommends that homework time increase by ten minutes per year in school. (e.g., A third grader would have 30 minutes of homework, while a seventh grader would have 70 minutes).

Studies have found that schools tend to roughly follow these guidelines: The University of Michigan [found](#) that students ages six to eight spend 29 minutes doing homework per night while 15- to 17-year-old students spend 50 minutes doing homework. The Metlife study also found that 50 percent of students in grades seven to 12 spent more than an hour a night on homework, while 37 percent of students in grades three to six spent an hour or more on their homework per night. The National Center for Educational Statistics [found](#) that high school students who do homework outside of school average 6.8 hours of homework per week.

**Figure 2.4**

**Amount of Time Students Spend Per Weekday on Homework – Students by Amount of Time**

*Q630 (Students): On a typical school day (Monday-Friday), how much time do you spend doing homework?*

Base: All Students

	Total	Grade Level		Grades		
		3 - 6	7 - 12	Mostly A's	A's and B's	C's and below
Base:	2101	922	1179	558	961	749
	%	%	%	%	%	%
None	6	2	8	4	5	8
5 minutes	5	5	4	3	4	7
15 minutes	12	15	10	12	10	14
30 minutes	19	23	17	17	19	21
45 minutes	13	18	10	15	12	15
<b>1 HOUR OR MORE (NET)</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>35</b>
1 hour	18	18	18	17	20	16
1.5 hours	10	9	11	11	10	9
2 hours	8	5	9	11	8	6
2.5 hours	3	2	4	4	4	1
3 hours or more	6	2	8	7	8	3
No answer	1	*	1	*	1	*

Metlife Survey of the American Teacher

**Race plays a role in how much homework students do.**

Asian students spend 3.5 more hours on average doing homework per week than their white peers. However, only 59 percent of Asian students' parents check that homework is done, while 75.6 percent of Hispanic students' parents and 83.1 percent of black students' parents check.

**Table 35. Average hours spent on homework per week and percentage of 9th- through 12th-grade students who did homework outside of school and whose parents checked that homework was done, by frequency of doing homework and race/ethnicity: 2007**

Race/ethnicity	Average hours spent on homework per week by students who did homework outside of school	Percentage distribution of students who do homework outside of school by how frequently they do homework				Percentage of students whose parents <sup>1</sup> check that homework is done
		Less than once per week	1 to 2 days per week	3 to 4 days per week	5 or more days per week	
<b>Total</b>	<b>6.8</b>	<b>5.4</b>	<b>14.8</b>	<b>38.0</b>	<b>41.9</b>	<b>64.6</b>
White	6.8	4.2	12.9	38.6	44.3	57.2
Black	6.3	‡	20.1	41.0	29.7	83.1
Hispanic	6.4	5.9	17.7	36.6	39.9	75.6
Asian	10.3	#	13.8!	18.5!	67.7	59.0
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡
American Indian/Alaska Native	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡
Two or more races	7.1	‡	10.5	32.9	50.5	65.9

# Rounds to zero.

! Interpret data with caution. The coefficient of variation (CV) for this estimate is 30 percent or greater.

‡ Reporting standards not met. Either there are too few cases or the coefficient of variation (CV) is 50 percent or greater.

<sup>1</sup> Refers to one or more parent or other household adult.

NOTE: Data are based on the responses of the parent most knowledgeable about the student's education. Data exclude students who did not do homework outside of school. In 2007, parents reported that about 7 percent of 9th- through 12th-grade students did not do homework outside of school. Total includes other racial/ethnic groups not separately shown. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Detail may not sum to due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program (PFIEHES), 2007.

National Center for Educational Statistics

## Teachers with less experience assign more homework.

The Metlife study found that 14 percent of teachers with zero to five years of teaching experience assigned more than an hour of homework per night, while only six percent of teachers with 21 or more years of teaching experience assigned over an hour of homework.

**Figure 2.10**  
**Teachers' Estimate of Time Students Take to Complete Homework Assignments**

*Q545 (Teachers): How long do you think it takes students to complete a typical homework assignment for your class?*

Base: Teachers who ever assign homework

	Total	Years of Experience			Level of School	
		0 to 5	6 to 20	21+	Elementary	Secondary
Base:	968	100	465	403	606	311
	%	%	%	%	%	%
5 minutes	3	5	3	3	5	-
15 minutes	36	29	37	37	40	28
30 minutes	42	41	42	43	39	49
45 minutes	10	13	9	10	8	13
1 HOUR OR MORE (NET)	8	14	8	6	6	11
1 hour	6	9	7	5	5	8
1.5 hours	1	2	1	*	1	1
2 hours	*	-	*	*	*	*
2.5 hours	*	-	-	*	*	-
3 hours or more	*	-	-	*	-	*
Not sure	1	-	1	1	1	1
Decline to answer	-	-	-	-	-	-

Metlife Survey of the American Teacher

### **Math classes have homework the most frequently.**

The Metlife study found that 70 percent of students in grades three to 12 had at least one homework assignment in math. Sixty-two percent had at least one homework assignment in a language arts class (English, reading, spelling, or creative writing courses) and 42 percent had at least one in a science class.

Regardless of how much homework kids are actually doing every night, most parents and teachers are happy with the way things are: 60 percent of parents think that their children have the “right amount of homework,” and 73 percent of teachers think their school assigns the right amount of homework.

Students, however, are not necessarily on board: 38 percent of students in grades seven through 12 and 28 percent of students in grades three through six

report being “very often/often” stressed out by their homework.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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