
Room for Debate: A Running Commentary on the News

[« Room for Debate Home](#)

[« Back to Discussion](#)

Stress and the High School Student

What can schools -- and parents -- do to relieve some of the résumé-building pressure that young people are feeling?

It Starts Before High School

Updated December 12, 2010, 07:00 PM

Nancy Kalish is the co-author of "The Case Against Homework: How Homework Is Hurting Our Children and What We Can Do About It."

The stress levels of our students have reached a crisis point, and I'm not just talking about those in high school. These days the pressure starts much earlier. From first grade on, many kids are burdened with too many hours of homework. It's not uncommon for a third grader to have two to three hours a night, displacing play time, story time, family time — even sleep.

As if that weren't enough, the need to succeed on relentless standardized tests weighs heavily on little kids. You'd think that seeing anxious elementary school children throw up on their test booklets would make an impression on the schools. But as one teacher told me, she feels helpless to stop the testing, so she's just learned to keep a wastebasket handy.

Parents are far from blameless either. It's time to admit that we have allowed the schools to sacrifice our kids' childhoods while we stood by and helped. No wonder so many students are stressed out, burned out and fed up with learning by the time they graduate from high school.

But we can improve the situation if only we have the courage to do so. First, we've got to show some common sense. We all know how badly we react to nonstop stress — why would we expect our children to be any different? Next, we've got to admit that what we've been doing isn't working. All of this pressure isn't resulting in better performance, higher test scores or a greater international competitive edge. Indeed, many schools have found success in cutting back on homework without sacrificing test scores — and often improving them.

It's also time to reinstate all those physical education classes that have been cut to make room for more academics. Research shows that exercise is key to proper brain development all the way through high school, and it's well documented that it reduces stress. Art and music classes also provide relief.

And why not teach kids productive ways to cope with stress (meditation, exercise, good nutrition and more) — not just as one unit in health class, but as an ongoing part of their education from an early age? If we show them how to nurture themselves, they might not get to the point where they develop all those stomach aches or turn to drugs and alcohol.

Now that would be a valuable lesson.

Topics: [Education](#), [schools](#), [students](#)

Reinstate all those physical education, art and music classes that were cut to make room for more academics.