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# Do Upper Elementary Students Have Higher Grades When They Complete Their Homework?

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Do upper elementary students have higher grades when they complete their homework?

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in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
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### Abstract

This action research study takes a look at the question, Do upper elementary students have higher grades when they complete their homework? Data was collected from forty-seven fifth grade students for a three-week period in five academic areas. Students are challenged to complete their homework and have three or less missing or late assignments to earn a reward. Homework completion is compared to the student's first quarter grades. There is discussion of different factors that affect homework completion from the point of view of the teacher, parent and student.

*Key words: homework, upper elementary, grades, views of homework*

Do upper elementary students have higher grades when they complete their homework?

Homework completion and the effects on student's grades in their educational journey has been a topic of much debate for the past century. However, regardless of the grade level, teachers assigning homework is an unquestionable practice in the United States. Yet, the current existing literature on the topic of assigning homework and the benefits is inconsistent (Kohn, 2006). Varied stakeholders have different views and perceptions towards homework to include the potential benefits or negative effects of assigning homework. The common homework practice that assigning more homework is beneficial to student's academic achievement and learning outcomes is a common view from the teacher, parent, student, and society (Brock, Lapp, Flood, Fisher, & Han, 2007). There are advantages and disadvantages alike when we analyze viewpoints of homework literature (Cooper, 1989). Teachers view homework as an opportunity to fill gaps and check comprehension of the lesson. Teachers and parents feel that students need to be given homework as a way to practice the skills they have learned to put them into their permanent memory. Students would also agree that they need to practice recently learned skills. There are also disadvantages to homework. Teachers feel that they are pushed by societal norms to give homework to students for fear of being looked upon poorly. Parents view homework as a stressful time for their family and would like to see it as a more positive time to bring the family together. Students view homework as a necessity but find it hard to complete the amount they are given each night, to ask for help when their parents do not understand the subject or just would rather be doing other social activities. However, there is a lack of qualitative data to support whether or not assigning homework in the lower elementary grades is beneficial or not. To narrow the field of research and the inconsistent narrative and descriptive data, this researcher

looks at a three week period of fifth grade students to see how their homework completion affects their first quarter grades.

### **Review of the Literature**

#### **Homework: Defined, Purpose and Viewpoints**

Homework has been a topic of discussion and an unquestionable practice for decades. There are many different definitions of homework, ranging from schoolwork actually brought home to work done outside of class or in study halls. To synthesize the definitions, homework can be defined as tasks assigned to students by teachers that are meant to be completed during non-instructional times (Bembenutty, 2011; Snead & Burris, 2016). Non-instructional time could include study halls, time at the end of a content class or at home after school hours. No matter the definition of homework, the purpose of it is seen differently from teachers, parents, and students.

Teachers view homework as an opportunity for students to practice skills, fill gaps, demonstrate knowledge, enhance retention, increase understanding of the content area, and independent learning to name just a few. Teachers and parents see homework as a way to increase understanding, practice skills learned in class that day, to fill gaps where knowledge is lacking, enhance retention, and demonstrate knowledge. Teacher and parents view homework as a way to teach other non-academic life-long skills such as learning time management, prioritizing tasks but also as a way to increase responsibility and independence along with building beneficial study habits. As students move up to the next grade more is expected of them when it comes to academics to include homework (Cooper, 2006; Pfeiffer, 2018; Van Voorhis, 2004; Xu, 2005). Many teachers and parents also feel that students need to practice the skills that they have learned in class. This practice repetition helps the student grasp the concepts just

learned so they have permanent learning (Kohn, 2006). Parents and teachers continue to be alike when discussing creating academic study habits, continuing the curriculum, and expectations of each other to provide the opportunity for further growth. Teachers and parents also agree and feel that homework is a communicator between the school and home. By sending worksheets home with students, parents are able to see what students are working on academically. They are also able to see firsthand how their student is holding up academically. Homework may then lead parents to contacting the teachers with questions or concerns. This communication is seen as a positive to enhance the learning for the student and open pathways for future communication. Therefore, starting early with teaching students good study habits will help them overall with achievement (Fox, 2016). While teachers and parents share many purposes of homework there are other outcomes that parents see at home.

Many parents are happy to see their students with homework. Parents see homework as a task that brings a family together. It is a time for families to sit and talk together about what they have learned during the school day. These conversations build family unity, create routines and family structure. Going over achievements also lends itself to family pride. Students are excited to share their grades and effort that give empowerment to themselves and their family. Parents also see homework as a time filler. Many students have hours of time before bed. Homework is an opportunity that keeps students learning after they have been to the park or other after school activities but keeps them away from the TV and video games (Fox, 2016). Parents are expressing that while they can help their student with most homework, sometimes they do not understand what the teacher wants the student to do to complete the homework or the processes to help their student understand the problems and complete the homework. This leads to frustration from the parent as well as the student. Many times different methods are being used

by the parent in an attempt to help the student understand the assignment which is different from what the teacher taught in class ultimately making the student further confused by the homework (Holte, 2016). Nevertheless, teachers, parents and students all agree that homework has a purpose in the academic area.

Students would agree with teachers and parents about the purpose of homework. Students agree it teaches them study skills, helps them practice, learn and retain what they were taught in lessons at school in the classroom. Students would also agree that the non-academic benefit of homework completion is receiving approval from teachers and parents, which students' desire on a regular basis. If students truly buy into this theory of increasing retention and practicing learned skills then their homework is to their benefit. Also, students choosing to do their homework assignment to the best of their ability gives teachers, parents and themselves a true measure of their ability and the best predictor of competence (Kohn, 2006). Students also reported that having their parents involved in the homework process or supporting them nearby was a positive motivator and made the homework experience more enjoyable (Fox, 2016; Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008). Even though students understand that homework is a necessity, in general they do not have a positive feeling towards it. Many students feel it takes away from their free time (Cooper, 2006; Pfeiffer, 2018; Van Voorhis, 2004; Xu, 2005). Socializing with friends, playing video games, practicing or playing extra-curricular sports, being on their computer or social media, texting or talking on the cell phone are just a few activities that students feel have a priority over homework when they are not at school. However, students understand that there needs to be time given to complete their homework to be successful in academics.

While there are positives to homework there are also negatives to the same subject. Many teachers are feeling that they need to assign homework due to district policy, higher curriculum standards and demands, societal cultural expectations, and parent's expectations of their student bringing homework home on a daily basis. Parents are reporting that there is an increase in family stress when talking about homework, getting their student started in the homework process, and completing or having discussions about how homework should be completed. There is also a strain on the parent-child relationship and a decrease in quality family time. Students and their parents feel that conversations revolve around and only relate to school and their homework. In the same respect, parents and students feel that there is not quality free time to have family dinners, movie or game nights, or other evening activities that do not involve homework. Students express feeling frustrated, stressed, and on their own when working on homework outside of school hours. This stress heightens because many students feel that their parents cannot help them with the challenging homework or feel there is no one else they can ask questions, to complete their homework in the evening. Another reason students feel stressed is because many students feel that by spending their time to complete their homework it takes away from other social activities (Coutts, 2004; Weir, 2016; Pfeiffer, 2018; Cooper, Robinson, & Patall, 2006). Numerous students spend their after school hours playing with friends, talking or texting on their cell phone to catch up on daily happenings, or playing video games. Students are also feeling the stress when not completing their homework because their free time is taken away at school. Students may have their time taken from before or after school socializing, recess, breaks or study halls to complete late or missing homework. Students are also feeling the stress when teachers are stating that they need to send emails home or make parent phone calls informing parents that their student has late or missing assignments or is not completing their

homework on time on a regular basis. The health profession of Norway reported an enormous increase in stress related diseases among young children. The report continued with frightening statistics. In Norway, it is expected that 30% of children will have stress-related diseases during their childhood. Included in that 30%, about 10 to 15% will have to receive medical care because of the seriousness (Holte, 2016). Though parents are trying to instill a positive work ethic sometimes, the consequences are not fitting the crime. These consequences can be traumatic for some students when parents go too far over a homework assignment not being completed. Teachers are not naïve to think that this conflict does not exist. Teachers then feel like they are in a hard place. They do not want a student to be over punished for a simple homework assignment but want to teach responsibility at the same time. Therefore, in certain cases teachers may bend the rules for students and not count an assignment late or give the student more time to complete it. Homework is then being done because students are afraid of the consequences not because they have an intrinsic need to want to learn (Holte, 2016). Other students are at a disadvantage because they do not have a quiet place to do homework, a computer or internet to complete the assignment, or do not receive parental help with questions due to parents working evening jobs. Many students also feel frustrated because their parents have a lack of content knowledge or the parent does not explain the information the same way the teacher has been teaching it (Cooper et al., 2006, Van Voorhis, 2004).

### **Time Spent on Homework**

The ten-minute rule for homework has been around for many years. It has the support from the National Education Association, National Parent and Teacher Association and the researcher Harris Cooper who clarify the rule by explaining that there should be ten minutes of homework per grade level (Weir, 2016; Van Voorhis, 2004). Research data shows that the time spent on

homework by students is scattered at best. The Brookings report explored survey data from the National Association of Educational Progress and noted how much homework the nine year olds and thirteen year olds had done the previous night. They found that between the years 1984 and 2012, there was a slight increase in homework for nine year olds, but homework for the thirteen year olds stayed about the same or even decreased slightly (Weir, 2016). Other data suggested that students are taking home more homework than the suggested guideline. Robert Pressman (2015), and colleagues investigated the ten minute rule with more than 1,100 students and found elementary-school students were receiving up to three times as much homework as the recommendations listed by the National Education Association and the National Parent and Teacher Association. To minimize time spent on homework teachers must look at what they are giving for assignments. Teachers must make assignments meaningful to the content they want their students to learn and stay away from giving homework for the sake of just giving it because of the parental and societal expectations. There is a widespread belief by teachers that homework is a priority over family time and leisure activities. Parents and students would agree in many cases but also feel that it is important for students to have a well-rounded education that includes extra-curricular or outside of school activities. This creates a problem for parents and students to find time for students to do their homework (Holte, 2016). The larger the family size the harder it is for parents to help each individual student complete their homework after running children to activities, making supper, showers, and chores.

**Purposeful homework assignments.** Teachers giving homework assignments must make them shorter and more purposeful assignments that engage the students. These well designed assignments that are completed outside of instructional time will benefit students by doing practice, preparation or extension. Practice homework, a traditional skill and drill model is the

oldest type of homework. Some examples of this homework include, end of the chapter review questions, math calculations, or spelling words. Preparation homework is given to the students so they have background knowledge for the next day's lesson. For this type of homework, students might be asked to read a chapter in a book for the next day's class or watch a video before discussion or lecture. Extension homework tries to creatively extend the student's knowledge about the concepts being taught. This type of learning requires a transfer of knowledge. Students may be asked to compare two different readings from separate classes and encourages an expansion of knowledge (Roper, 2008). Another type of homework is creative homework and is the process of combining different types of homework. An example of creative homework is having an art class create a piece of work, upload it to their school computer, and write an artist reaction to share with the class. This assignment uses technology, writing and presentation skills to expand an ordinary art drawing classroom assignment. Variety, interest and diversity are other key characteristics of a meaningful homework assignment and having student success while completing it. Students need to enjoy learning and be optimistic about how they are doing it creating and emphasizing student buy-in. It is vital that play be incorporated into learning so that they may process the content more efficiently (Holte, 2016). Alternative forms of learning like board games with content area questions, task cards and listening to music, writing on windows with dry-erase markers to complete math problems, or computer games with play time after completing a correct amount of questions are different ways to incorporate play while learning. Teachers must take into consideration that a one-size fits all approach to homework does not work. Teachers need to take into consideration: gender, socio-economic status, ability levels, and other variables that contribute to homework completion (Cooper, 2001). Teachers need to increase the knowledge base of their students and use all these types of homework exploring

variety, interest and diversity in their homework assignments. Yet students must be an essential part of completing the assignments for the individual academic success to occur.

*Student success.* Motivation, effort, and time on task are three areas that students must give to their homework to be successful students. While students need to be engaged, parents play a large role in helping their students navigate homework. Parents can help their student set up an environment that minimizes noise and helps to eliminate other distractions. Students need to have a space they can call their own to accomplish their homework tasks. This includes a table or desk, a well light area, appropriate school supplies and decorations of their choice. Likewise, students have asked for a room with a door so they can block out all other home noise. Routine or time allocation is also a key component of homework completion. Parents need to help their student establish a time each day that the student can have help completing their homework. For some just have the proximity of the parent will help motivate them to get the homework tasks done. For others, the parent will need to work on the homework with the student giving them prompts, helpful strategies and encouragement (Fox, 2016; Holte, 2016; Yelgün & Karaman, 2015; Núñez, Suárez, Rosário, Vallejo, Valle, & Epstein, 2015). Ample amounts of students note that their families are the distraction. Parents and siblings watch TV or play too loudly creating an environment in which the child cannot concentrate on their tasks (Yelgün & Karaman, 2015). Thus making it even more important for a child to have a space to complete their homework. Even though students want and need parental help with managing their homework, they want to keep some options, like choosing what assignment to work on first, or choosing the location to complete their homework, which gives them motivation to complete the task. This parental prompting and encouragement will also teach students the positive self-talk that is necessary to achieve goals (Xu, 2013). Epstein (2015) and colleagues found the strength

between parental involvement in homework and the students' educational outcomes depended on goal-linked or subject-specific activities. For example, a student's math skills were higher if the parents were engaged with the math-related homework activities (Núñez, Suárez, Rosário, Vallejo, Valle, & Epstein, 2015). Parents are also encouraged to help students set schedules that include sports or extra-curricular activities, school and homework tasks, work or chores, and social time with friends and family. Students need to be taught these self-regulation skills for success in their academics as well as life-long skills.

Parent involvement is a huge indicator of academic success for any student. It is seen to be even more important for those students that are considered low achievers, at risk or struggling. Parents are more apt to help their child with homework if they are in a lower grade because they are seen as needing more guidance to complete the task (Fox, 2016). This means that elementary students receive more help with their homework because they are young and parents view them as needing help developing time on task skills, academic need and all around homework skills. When considering language and culture factors, this also has implications for parents helping students. The barriers of a second language made it almost impossible for the parent to answer questions or understand the assignment. In the home of language minority families, older children take on the role of the "teacher" and help their younger siblings. This is part of their family routine to complete homework and help their children to be successful (Fox, 2010). No matter how parents are involved in their student's homework whether it is creating a space, ritual, time, or encouragement, on thing is clear, parent involvement increases a student's academic success no matter the grade level.

Student motivation can come in different forms. Students who are intrinsically motivated to learn find themselves appreciating learning opportunities. They will find these opportunities to

be meaningful or relevant to them inside or outside of the classroom. Students with intrinsic motivation will see that they are gaining knowledge, getting an opportunity to learn, expressing themselves, and getting to learn or gain knowledge in an interest of their own (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Brophy 2008). Motivation to learn needs to be seen by the student as continuous, meaningful, seeking enhancement through activities, and achieving academic tasks. Students who have intrinsic motivation will have perseverance when completing homework or class activities especially if they are difficult. This intrinsic motivation has students working for top grades that include creativity, looking good in front of classmates and wanting to excel above others. In contrast, other students may not have intrinsic motivation but need an outside motivator or an extrinsic motivator. A student that has extrinsic motivation will work so there is no negative outcome such as losing free time, punishment from parents or teachers, or looking poorly in front of peers. Others may do their homework or class work because they feel like they have to in order to avoid guilt, failure or embarrassment (Froiland, 2011). These extrinsically motivated students will work for rewards. Some teachers will individualize rewards and find out what each student likes to keep them focused and on task, or out of trouble when behaviors are involved. Rewards could include stickers of choice, earning a good mark on their paper such as a star, earning free time to do an activity of their choice, using technology, playing a game with a friend, earning an item such as a pencil or a trinket from the treasure chest, reading a book, extended recess time, or simple rewards like wearing a hat, slippers, or sunglasses for a prescribed time. These motivators may be used by a teacher for in class activities or rewards for completing homework. While intrinsic motivation is a value teachers and parents hope their child has and will use, all students like to be acknowledged and rewarded for a job well done. This acknowledgement is extremely important as students get older and pass up to higher grades

because their intrinsic motivation lowers. Motivation is part of self-regulation and this skill must continue to be modeled by teachers and parents alike.

*Student self-regulation.* There are three different types of self-regulation that students need to learn: motivational, cognitive, and metacognitive. The motivational domain of self-regulation implies that students believe they can complete the homework and value the process. Putting value on the task also enhances their learning and can increase persistence. Next, the cognitive component relates to the strategies students use to complete their homework. The strategies will help the student process the information and will vary on the homework task. For example, different strategies will be used to complete a math problem compared to writing a paper. Lastly, the metacognition component is seen when students set goals, reflect on their progress, and use complex strategies such as rereading or seeking help with a problem. These self-regulation skills are a huge part of successful homework completion and are life-long skills (Ramdass & Zimmerman, 2011).

Parent involvement with homework may be key to long-term student self-regulation. When parents are able to sit with a student and model behaviors the student learns from this process. Goal-setting, time on task, staying focused and showing perseverance are just a few of the skills that parents can model. Coping skills and dealing with frustration are also skills that students need modeled for them while doing homework. Sometimes, parents are not modeling the appropriate behaviors and can impede student self-regulation skills. Parents have reported giving students answers, completing the assignment themselves, or talking poorly about the assignment or teacher. This makes it difficult for the student to learn from doing their own homework or to work on their self-regulation skills, when parents give in easily to the stress of homework (Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008). Self-regulation can also include someone's

attitude towards a matter. Research has shown that when parents display a good attitude towards homework then the student will also adapt this same positive attitude. This attitude may carry into school and affects positively in the student achievements in the classroom (Cooper, Jackson, Nye, & Lindsay, 2001). This positive outlook at school will increase productivity, academic achievement, self-worth, and self-regulation.

**Summary.** Homework is a popular topic of conversation for teachers, parents and students. Teachers and parents see homework as a way for students to demonstrate learning, enhance retention, practice learned skills, and increase their content knowledge. Students see the need for homework but also feel that it cuts into their social needs and wants. No matter the views on homework, one thing is for sure, everyone has an opinion about whether or not students should be assigned homework outside of regular instructional time. This research is looking at whether or not students completing their homework affects their content area course grade. Looking at a period in which teachers tracked homework completion for forty-seven, fifth grade students and comparing their grade to homework completion will give substantial data to analyze. This data will help weigh the idea of whether or not homework completion is an indicator of academic success.

## **Methods**

### **Participants**

All forty-seven of the fifth grade students of the Emmetsburg Middle School, Emmetsburg, Iowa, were included in the data collection. This included seven students that were on Academic Individual Education Plans and three students on Behavioral Individual Education Plans that were not included in the Academic Individual Education Plans. Besides the students on Individual Education Plans, one student received English as a Second Language services, meeting with an English as a Second Language certified teacher, twice weekly to help with any academic needs and another student had a vision disability and is on a 504 Plan and received visual accommodations which are made by each academic teacher in the classroom. Also, among these students there were ten students that were identified as Extended Learning and receiving services in the classroom as well as services outside of the classroom at least twice per week. If the students were given any modifications by the content area teacher to their assignments, this was indicated by their Individual Education Plan and was allowed for the tracking of their assignment data. Throughout the three-week data collection period, teachers recorded any assignment that was not completed or deemed to be turned in late. Students were not penalized for turning in late assignments. Therefore, assignment scores or grades were not affected by the late work.

### **Data Collection**

In October 2017, the teachers at the Emmetsburg Middle School were becoming frustrated about the lack of homework completion and were concerned that it was affecting student's academic grades. The five academic area teachers had been training the students of their expectations for six weeks. The expectations included starting all homework in the classroom

before leaving the class; this allowed students to ask questions. All homework must be completed before student self-checking in class or the homework being collected by the teacher for correcting. The expectation of the teacher was to walk the classroom to make sure the homework was completed when collecting or before students checking their own work with a different utensil other than the one used to complete the homework. If the homework was not complete, the teacher would then collect it for later completion at the end of the class period, during Directed Study Hall, recess time or taken home. If the student was given the opportunity to finish the late homework before the class period was concluded it was still considered to be a late assignment and recorded on the late or missing homework list. The teachers unanimously agreed that homework would only to be assigned Monday through Thursday and nothing would be assigned on Fridays to be taken home over the weekend. At the conclusion of each class period teachers added late assignments with the date to the shared Google Sheet. Students did not have access to the shared Google Sheet for confidentiality reasons.

The goal for the students was to have three or less incomplete or late assignments turned in during the three-week challenge. If students met this goal, they would receive a bakery fresh donut as their reward. This meant each student would have the opportunity to turn in one late assignment per week and still receive the reward. All academic area teachers, at their discretion, continued to reward students for their positive behaviors, such as turning in daily homework on time and receiving a ticket, as our school uses Positive Behaviors Interventions and Supports. Students were also reminded often of their reward and the positive benefits of completing their homework on time.

Data was collected for three school weeks in October 2017. Teachers did not increase or decrease the amount of homework that was assigned in any academic area. The academic areas

that were recorded included math, science, language, reading, and social studies. The five academic area teachers recorded incomplete or missing work on a shared Google Sheet. When recording on the shared Google Sheet, the teacher placed the student's incomplete or missing work in the row next to the student's name along with the date the assignment was due. All five teachers did this daily. When an assignment was completed and turned in by the student, the specific academic teacher then used the cross off function to put a line through the assignment. This allowed the data to be seen by other teachers as completed by the student but not deleted giving a running total for teachers to share with students about where they were at compared to their goal of missing three or less assignments to receive their bakery fresh donut. Recording the data in this manner will help with data analysis and analyzing the action research question. Also, individual student data as well as whole grade data will be compared due to the different recorded data.

Daily, during Directed Study Hall, all five academic teachers would verbally discuss the current daily assignments with the class. Students were encouraged to write their assignments in their planners while teachers wrote the assignments on the white board for the students to copy into their planner. After the assignments were verbally discussed, the teacher would then read aloud any late assignments for their students by accessing the shared Google Sheet, which recorded any assignments that were on the late or missing work list. Students were then given access to their homework and all five academic area teachers if they needed help completing the late or missing assignment. Once the assignment was completed, it was the student's responsibility to turn it into the correct teacher. The academic area teacher would then put a line or cross out through the assignment on the shared Google Sheet. If students had multiple assignments to completed, the homework that was on the list first become the first priority and

should be done first by the student, either by themselves or with the help of the core academic teacher. Students were also encouraged to stay after school on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday for Homework Camp. This was an hour after school for students to have adult supervision and to receive help in completing homework. This was for all students not just the ones that were behind in assignments however, the supervising teacher had access to the shared Google Sheet and would read the late and missing work to the students. This work became a priority at Homework Camp and the supervising teacher helped the students locate the homework or locate a new copy for the student to complete and turn in. The supervising teacher also helped to facilitate the turn in of the homework by putting it on the core academic teacher's desk or in their mailbox. It was still the responsibility of the academic teacher to cross off the assignment on the shared Google Sheet the next day when it was received.

### **Findings**

#### **Data Analysis**

During the three week data collection period, each teacher recorded late and missing assignments. Table 1 shows all of the missing or late assignments recorded by all five teachers in their core academic area. Science reported the largest amount of late or missing assignments at forty-nine, while language came in second with recording a total of thirty-eight missing or late assignments. Social studies and math both recorded a total of nineteen missing or late assignments respectively. The data also showed that the content area of reading recorded zero missing or late assignments. When analyzing the data from Table 1 there are many valid points to consider. Late or missing assignments are almost double or more in science and language compared to social studies and math. Reading cannot be included in these comparisons, as it appears there was no homework given or no late or missing assignments to be recorded.

Table 1

*Total Number of Missing or Late Assignments Per Subject*

Academic Subject	Number = N
Science	49
Reading	0
Language	38
Social Studies	19
Math	19

The data in Table 2 shows the five core academic area grades for each student in the first quarter of 2017 right after the data was collected in October 2017. These academic grades can be compared to Table 1 for data analysis.

Table 2

*Student First Quarter Grades by Subject*

	Science	Reading	Language	Social Studies	Math
A	34	26	18	33	34
B	11	8	16	6	4
C	2	10	8	7	2
D		3	5	1	5
F					2

A comparison of the data in Table 1 and Table 2 gives shows some information that warrants further discussion. Science has the largest amount of missing and late work (N=49) but has tied

with math, which has almost half as many late or missing assignments (N=19), for the highest number of earned A's (N=34). This means that 95.7% of the students in science had an A or B, excluding only two students who earned a C. Looking at the subject of reading, it had the lowest number of missing or late work but recorded the largest number of C's (N=10) when compared to all of the academic classes. However, when combining the students that earned an A, B, or C in reading, this data indicates 93.6% of the students, with only three students earning a score less than a D. Language data showed the second largest amount of missing or late work at (N=38). But, 72.3 % of the students received an A or B for their first quarter grade for the language class. Social Studies and math both tied for missing or late assignments at (N=19). When this data is compared to the grades of students earning an A, B, and C for these two classes, Social Studies is at 97.8% and Math at 85.1%, with a 12% difference. When comparing percentages of students from all classes with an A, B, or C, to Social Studies and Math, scores are lower than Science but higher than language, which are the two subjects that recorded more missing or late assignments. Math is the only subject indicating that two students did not pass the first quarter or received an F or 0.04% of the total number of students. While this is a very small or insignificant number in regards to statistical value, readers must remember this is two real students that failed the first quarter of math class.

Table 3

*Number of Late or Missing Assignments in a Three Week Period Per Student*

Number of Late or Missing Assignments	Number of Students
Zero Late or Missing Assignments	23
1 or 2 Late or Missing Assignments	10

3 Late or Missing Assignments	1
4 Late or Missing Assignments	3
5 or 6 Late or Missing Assignments	2
7 or 8 Late or Missing Assignments	5
9 + Late or Missing Assignments	3

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The goal of the students was to get three or less late or missing assignments in a three week period to earn a bakery fresh donut. When looking at the data from Table 3, 72.3 % or thirty-four of the forty-seven students reached this goal and thirteen students or 27.6% failed to reach the three week goal. As a further breakdown of the data is done, 48.9% of students were in the Zero Missing or Late Assignments category and 70.2% of students had 2 or Less Missing or Late Assignments.

**Discussion**

**Summary of Major Findings**

This researcher looked to answer the question, “Do upper elementary students have higher grades when they complete their homework?” in this action research study. After looking at the data in the tables it was apparent that the subject area of reading needed to be addressed for a more accurate picture, due to the recorded zero of the missing or late assignment data. When investigating and speaking with the reading teacher, it was indicated that no homework was assigned during the three week period. With further discussion the teacher validated no homework being assigned due to the reading unit being taught at the time. The reading skill set needed direct teacher-student contact time for teaching and acquiring student learning. Students were encouraged to read a free-reading book of their choice outside of class but no assignment

was given on a daily basis. Reading can then be used as a comparison tool for the other four subject areas. After analyzing data Table 3, most students get their homework done on a regular basis without a problem. Again, 72.3 % or thirty-four of the forty-seven students reached the goal of three or less late or missing assignments and only thirteen students or 27.6% failed to reach the three week goal. When the comparison is made as a whole to all academic core classes, Table 2, the majority of students earn a grade of an A, B, or C. The percentages that earned a D or an F were minimal in comparison. Table 3 also indicates that the majority of students get their homework turned in on time. However, a direct correlation of these two factors does not directly that when students turn in their homework a higher grade is received. For example, science indicated the highest number of missing or late homework assignments but recorded the highest grades overall. While math recorded the lowest amount of missing or late homework assignments but recorded some of the lower grades. Unfortunately, the data is conflicted and there is no major indicator that homework does or does not affect a student's academic grade. There is no data trend to indicate one way or the other. My final conclusion is that this action research did not conclusively answer the question, "Do upper elementary students have higher grades when they complete their homework?" More research is needed such as a full year of recording late and missing work is needed to indicate a trend on whether or not completing homework directly affects upper elementary students earning higher grades.

When discussing the action research with the five core academic teachers, they saw this data as a huge victory in the battle of missing and late assignments in the fifth grade. Teachers identified that homework completion defiantly improved during this three-week period. They attributed the success to the action research offering of an incentive or the bakery fresh donut for each student. The incentive gave the students a goal to work for and achieve.

**Limitations of the Study**

There were several limitations to this study. First, the subject of reading did not indicate any late or missing work, therefore there was not enough data to compare the research question for this subject. A second limitation was that Emmetsburg Middle School started their transition to use Standards Based Grading. In the 2017-2018 school year students were allowed to hand in missing or late work without penalty. This means there were no points taken away or penalties given for the grade attached to the assignment being turned in late. Students were also given the option to do Retakes on any assessment they would like to raise their school in. Generally, a student earning a letter grade of a C- or below on an assessment must retake the assessment. The second score was entered into the grade book. Students were given the chance of a Retake until an optimal score was reached and agreed upon by the teacher and the student alike. Any student that wanted to increase their score was also given the opportunity but it was not a requirement. This affected grades in a positive manner, especially if compared to general grading practices or traditional grading practices in most schools without a Retake policy. This study only had a three-week data collection window. Looking for trends in homework completion in this short time frame was difficult. Even though a strict outline was discussed and agreed upon by the five core subject teachers there is always an element of teachers not recording all of the late or missing assignments correctly. Quarter grades were used because the data was collected in first quarter. If the study was extended to a full academic year, a trend for homework completion and grades may be more prominent.

It may also be said that since it was the first quarter of the new school year, that the students are still finding their way in the fifth grade. Students come to a new building and transition from the elementary building to the middle school. As a fifth grade student there are many new

expectations. Students switch classrooms every forty-two minute class periods, navigate going to their locker in between nine class periods and taking the appropriate materials to each class, finding new classrooms and adjusting to all new surroundings. Students must also adjust to five new core academic teachers to include their expectations and classroom routines rather than just one or two at the elementary level. This new adjustment also comes with daily homework given by most classes and the expectation of out of class homework completion. For many students this is a huge adjustment. Keeping this in mind, the homework completion could have gotten better because the students were adjusting to the routine of being a middle school student and all of the expectations that go along with it.

### **Further Study**

After completing this action research there are some recommendations for future research. One area that needs to be addressed for any future study is a congruent grading system. In the education field there are many different grading systems and scales. No two schools are exactly the same and thus can create differentiation in data when schools are compared to one another. This action research collected data in a three-week period in the first quarter of a new school year. Further research should be done throughout a complete school year to see if there are any trends throughout a school year. Some trends to look for could include homework completion at the beginning of the year compared to the end of the year, a trend of homework completion during each month of the school year, a trend of homework completion as the students approach a scheduled calendar break or data collected each quarter to see how homework completion is affected by the time of year. Another area of action research would be looking at the implementation of retakes and redos when completing homework and assessments in the classroom and the impact it has on grades. Further research could also be done on the

difference of homework being completed at the end of the class period and homework assigned and finished outside of class time. Ultimately, complete school year documentation on the homogeneous classes would give trends of completion as students as they increased in grade level over several years. Another area that should be considered is homework completion of students in a nine-month school calendar year compared to a twelve-month or a year-round school year. The defined academic school year opens up many different research questions. Another limitation in this action research includes having four academic areas that gave homework and one academic area that gave no homework or did not record any late or missing homework assignments. While some would say that this is a limitation it also could be used as a comparison. This action research validates that there is need for more research in the area of homework completion and how it affects academic grades. Current research is inconclusive and can be taken for or against homework assignments to increase or improve academic grades by early elementary students.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, based on this researcher's data, the question of homework completion and getting a higher grade could not be conclusively answered. Due to the large amount of research collected by this researcher it is apparent that homework and grades are a nationwide and worldwide concern in the field of education. However, direct correlations between homework and increased grades is yet to be seen in educational research. Due to the fast amount of research going in both directions, for and against homework and it improving grades, a conclusion could not be reached as to the absolute impact of homework on grades. This researcher learned that there is an abundant amount of research and data regarding what students need to complete their homework; how much time students should spend on their homework; how teachers, parents and

students view homework; and, different factors that affect homework completion. Other research identifies teacher, parent, and student views regarding time management, self-regulation, and to help teachers make homework meaningful, but there is not enough solid qualitative or quantitative data in research to directly indicate if upper elementary students receive higher grades when they complete their homework. The research completed in the action research study verifies that homework completion directly correlates to the grade students received in this study. To further define the results of this study a longer research study would need to be completed with the same group of students or data set. During the longer study it would be beneficial to identify the different grading systems and other factors that may impact homework completion. While the current study does not give a concrete conclusion there is enough information to identify correlations between homework completion and grades that would support further study of this topic.

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