

My name is Marianne Warner, and I am the parent of a high school and a middle school student, both of whom have attended MCPS schools since Kindergarten. Our family has been extremely impressed and appreciative of the many devoted and intelligent teachers and administrators who have contributed to our children's learning. We also appreciate the high standards and generally stimulating curriculum of MCPS schools.

I am fortunate, and happy to say, that both of my children are good students and love to learn. In recent years, however, I have seen their love of learning, and of school, eroded by unrealistic homework loads. Like many students, they seem to average about 2 to 3 hours per night in middle school, and 3 to 5 hours per night in high school. When I began to research the issue, I learned that this amount exceeds the recommendation of leading education associations, and is shown by research to be counterproductive to learning. Specifically:

Homework above age-appropriate limits is counterproductive to learning. According to a comprehensive Duke University review of existing academic research, homework stops helping children learn, and begins to work against learning, when the total homework load takes longer than 10 minutes for each grade level (i.e. 10 minutes for a first grader, 90 minutes for a 9th grader, or 120 minutes for a 12th grader).¹ That's because children and youth become overtired and discouraged by overwork, and are then less able to learn even during their in-school work hours. *MCPS schools could better achieve the laudable goal of promoting learning by recognizing the research-based reality that more work equals more learning ONLY to the extent that the work level does not exceed children's and teens' developmental limits.*

Homework levels for many MCPS students greatly exceed the levels recommended by the research and by the leading national education associations. Both the National Education Association (NEA) and the National Parent Teachers Association (NPTA) recommend that school systems limit homework amounts to reflect the 10 minutes per grade level limit supported by the leading research.² In contrast, MCPS policies set no recommended time limit for homework assignments at any age level, instead asserting, without research support, that homework is "beneficial and important" and "should be considered the rule rather than the exception."³ *Many MCPS parents, particularly those with students in GT or AP classes, report students with homework levels of 2 to 3 hours nightly in middle school, and 3 to 5 hours nightly in high school – or over twice the amount supported by the research and the leading professional associations.*

Excessive homework may increase the achievement gap between higher and lower income students, and may lead to an increased drop-out rate. Many researchers believe that homework increases the achievement gap between higher income and lower income children, because children from higher income families tend to have better educated parents who can help them complete assignments, and have greater access to computers and other education technology.⁴ Additionally, a Maine Department of Education study showed that homework load, and the inability to successfully complete it, was a major factor in causing teens to drop out of school.⁵ Today, with parents and children needing computer access just to track their multiple assignments on Edline, one can only assume that homework will continue to push the achievement gap wider. *MCPS schools could best serve all students by continuing to focus on high-quality in-school instruction, while limiting and de-emphasizing the necessity to complete substantial amounts of academic work at home.*