

## Homework Myths and Context

“Lessons in Learning: Parents' Role in their Children's Homework - Although most Canadians believe that homework is a valuable learning tool, 72% of Canadian parents report that homework is a frequent source of household stress. How can parents alleviate this stress while still providing support for their children's homework routines?”

The above was recently reported by the Canadian Council on Learning giving advice to parents about how to help with homework.

In a November 21, 2006 article, Jay Matthews, a well-respected Washington Post education journalist, debunks research against homework. Unlike many columnists, he does his own homework carefully.

He examined two books criticizing homework. "The Homework Myth: Why Our Kids Get Too Much of a Bad Thing," by Alfie Kohn, one of the [U.S.] nation's most knowledgeable critics of traditional education. The other is "The Case Against Homework: How Homework Is Hurting Our Children and What We Can Do About It," by Sara Bennett, an attorney and activist parent, and Nancy Kalish, a journalist who specializes in parenting issues.

In his comments on these books, Mathews says, “Homework is usually a daily, not a weekly chore. Seen in that light, Kohn's "doubled“ load and Bennett's and Kalish's "skyrocketed" numbers actually mean the average six to eight year old spent about eight minutes a day on homework in 1981 and 17 in 1997. According to a 2003 study, that homework load has since increased to 22 minutes a day.

That is less time than it takes to watch one episode of ‘SpongeBob SquarePants. Says Mathews, “maybe I am missing something.” (Nov 21, 2006).

[www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2006/11/21/AR2006112100633.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2006/11/21/AR2006112100633.html),

## Private and Voucher Schools

**Are Private High Schools Better Academically Than Public High Schools?** Relevant findings from this study, based on an analysis of the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988-2000:

Once family background characteristics are taken into account, low-income students attending public urban high schools generally performed as well academically as students attending private high schools.

Students attending traditional public high schools were as likely to attend college as those attending private high schools.

Young adults who had attended any type of private high school were no more likely to enjoy job satisfaction or to be engaged in civic activities at age 26 than those who had attended traditional public high schools.

[www.cep-dc.org/document/docWindow.cfm?fuseaction=document.viewDocument&documentid=226&documentFormatId=3665](http://www.cep-dc.org/document/docWindow.cfm?fuseaction=document.viewDocument&documentid=226&documentFormatId=3665)

## Choice may not improve schools, study from long time supporter

A study released last October finds that school choice is not the powerful tool for driving educational improvement. What is surprising is that this conclusion comes from the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, a conservative think tank that has supported school choice for almost two decades.

Why do they make that conclusion: "bad schools" and "little change."

**Bad schools:** An investigative report in 2005 of the then-115 schools in the voucher program found that about 10% showed startling signs of weak operations.

In short, many parents were choosing bad schools and sticking with them.

**Little change:** Milwaukee has been a national laboratory for school reform such as the voucher program, yet there is little evidence that it has yielded substantially improved academic results.

Asked whether the voucher program was leading to improvements in the achievement of MPS students, as was once expected, Howard Fuller, one of the writers of the report, said: “I'm one of those people who believes that we may have oversold that point. . . . I think that any honest assessment would have to say that there hasn't been the deep, wholesale improvement in Milwaukee Public Schools that we would have thought.” Milwaukee is a city that has experimented considerably with school choice, private and voucher schools.

[www.wpri.org](http://www.wpri.org)

Contact Patricia Parulekar, CSBA National Director for materials linking local democracy and high achievement.  
[pparulekar@cdnsba.org](mailto:pparulekar@cdnsba.org)

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