THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

Press Briefing

HOMEWORK: AN EASY LOAD?
A New Report from Brookings Says

American Children Study Less Than an Hour a Day

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[TRANSCRIPT PRODUCED FROM A TAPE RECORDING.]

THIS IS AN UNCORRECTED TRANSCRIPT.

P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. LOVELESS: [Inaudible.] My mike's not on, but having taught sixth grade, I usually can be heard anyway.

There. That's even worse. I can hear myself now.

Anyway, thank you for coming. This morning's talk is on homework. I will first be presenting the study that I conducted. This is part of the Brown Center report. It's an annual report we do on American education. The report as a whole has much more research in it. We do have some stories on rural schools, a study of rural school achievement. We have a study of charter schools looking at two kinds of charter schools: achievement in both conversion charters--those are charter schools that were once regular public schools; we also look at EMO-managed charters, charters that are managed by educational management organizations, and we look at their achievement.

The Brown Center report as a whole will be released in two weeks. You're all welcome to come back then and get the report as a whole. We pulled the homework portion out and released it separately because there was a lot of interest in it. So that's why we're here today.

After I talk, Brian Gill, who's a social scientist at the RAND Corporation, will also be talking about homework. He's been doing some of his own research on homework. He's published extensively on this topic. So we'll be hearing from Brian as well.

So let's get to it.

The section poses a question, Do students have too much homework? Let me tell you what motivated me to conduct the study. It had to do with a number of popular press accounts--Newsweek: "Homework Doesn't Help." Newsweek had as the lead-off in their article a story, I believe it was of a third-grader with just an awful amount of homework crying at home, really a terrible scene. People magazine: "Overbooked" was the title of their homework story about this horrible crushing burden on American students. Time magazine cover story says it all: "Too Much Homework!"--and if you look at the subtitle, "The homework ate my family." Kids are dazed, parents are stressed.

So there is this view in the popular media that there has been a terrible burden on American children in terms of homework and that this homework burden is increasing. And those are the two questions that I wanted to gather social science and look at: What does the homework burden look like for the typical student? and Has it been increasing or decreasing?

Now, the first data I looked at--you will definitely not be able to see this, but hopefully you can see in your hard copy. You can follow along. It's the first table, 2-1.

There was a study that was released in 1999 conducted by researchers at the University of Michigan. And this study, quite frankly, was misreported in the press. This was a study of how families use their time. And families filled out time diaries, and from that the researchers were able to compile estimates of the amount of time devoted to various activities.

Now, if you look down there at the bottom, the one in red--you look down the left-hand column, the various activities--this one here, the next-to-the-last one, is Studying. And that includes homework. And what the researchers found was there had been an increase in homework. If you go clear to the last column, the amount of time devoted to studying, in the last column you'll see that the average amount of time for this sample, in 1981, was 1 hour 53 minutes. And it rose by 23 minutes--this is weekly amounts of homework, expressed in hours and minutes. 1 hour 53 minutes in 1981; in 1997, the second time the study was conducted, that number had gone up to 2 hours 16 minutes.

So there had been an increase of 23 minutes per week. If you work that out over a seven-day week, that's about 3-1/2 minutes a day increase. If you put it in a five-day week, it's slightly more. But the big point here is there's not a huge increase there.

Now, the headlines that came out of this study had to do with a massive increase in homework. And what those reporters did was focus on ages 6-8. If you look at the second age group--the groups are broken out. The second age group, ages 6-8, their homework load, which was roughly an hour per week, went to roughly two hours a week over this period of time.

So small children, there was an increase in homework. But to put it in perspective, these would essentially be first- second- and third-graders. At two hours a week, that works out to about 20 minutes a night. And my guess is that that increase is probably real. It's probably due to the emphasis on reading in the '90s. And I'm a former elementary school teacher. I taught sixth grade for nine years. Reading is absolutely essential in the early grades, and we came to a realization of this, I think, in the 1990s. Some of those first-graders are taking home some flash cards, probably, and working on new words that they've learned during the day. So it does look like there's been an increase with that youngest group.

Now, if you dig into the Michigan data a little deeper, what you find is, what's driving the average up has to do with the fact that there were a lot of zeros in the Michigan data and now they are doing some homework. Some kids who, before, had no homework, now are doing some homework. The numbers there, roughly a third of the

kids--only a third of the 6-8 year-olds--that's the second set of bars there, 34 percent--had homework in 1981. That number increased to 55 percent by 1997.

But notice the other age groups. In every case, the percentage of students with homework fell. And that was not covered in, like, "The Homework Ate My Family" article. With the oldest group, ages 9-12, 80-something percent of them had homework in 1981; that had dropped to 62 percent by 1997. For all ages in the study, ages 3-12, the percentage of kids with any homework at all dropped from 54 percent to 46 percent.

So this study, you have to really kind of torture the data to use this study to back the claim that kids are being overworked with homework.

Now, the NAEP data, the National Assessment of Educational Progress, I think is one of the best sources of information on the homework load. NAEP's been asking kids since the early '80s how much homework they had the day before. And these are the data.

The three tables you probably can't read, so I've broken them out here, larger, for the presentation. Here's age 9. You can see that in 1999, 26 percent said no homework was assigned; 4 percent said it was assigned but they didn't do it; 53 percent had less than an hour. If you add those first three columns, you can see that the typical student at age 9 has less than an hour of homework.

If you look at that bottom row, the percentage of students who had greater than 2 hours of homework. Now, this is where the horror stories are coming from--this group of kids. And as you can see, that number has remained very stable and very small. It peaked, actually, around 1988, 7 percent; and then in 1999, the most recent long-term trend survey, only 5 percent.

So here's the bottom line: Those horror stories about too much homework, I am not claiming that those are fictions--they're true. I think they're true. There are students who have too much homework. But the question is whether or not they are typical. And they are not. They are outliers, fewer than 1 in 20.

Let's look at age 13. You see a very similar effect. None assigned, did not do it--about 29 percent in 1999; less than an hour, 37 percent--a really large number of 13 year-olds. These are middle school students, around eighth grade. And the homework load at the upper end, the over-two-hour group, does not exceed 11 percent. And again, that figure was registered in 1988.

So if there's a group of kids who have a lot of homework, even at age 13, they number no more than 11 percent.

Here's age 17. These are seniors in high school. I find the last column, actually, to be one of the most troubling statistics in the homework data. 26 percent of

high school seniors said no homework was assigned; 13 percent said it was assigned but did not do it. That means for 39 percent of 17 year-olds, they had zero homework. Now, you have to ask yourself whether these kids are being adequately prepared for the rigors of college if they have no homework.

In fact, if you go into the next row, less than an hour is 26 percent. So it still doesn't look like high school is a terrible, heavy load. In terms of heavy loads greater than two hours--12 percent in 1999.

Here are those cumulative figures for those first three rows in the tables--the percentage of kids with less than an hour. That includes the didn't-do-it, wasn't-assigned, less-than-an-hour. 83 percent at 9 years old, 66 percent at 13, 65 percent at 17. If there's a back-breaking homework load, it is not showing up in NAEP.

Now, there's a study that I reviewed but did not include in hard copy, didn't include in the study that I published. But I'd like to share it with you. It was conducted by the Horatio Alger Association. And by the way, with all of these surveys, these are nationally representative random samples, okay? They are samples that we have some confidence in in terms of being representative of all youth. And that's true of the Horatio Alger study as well. They surveyed adolescents. These are high school kids, these are among all high school students. You see a very similar figure. 58 percent said 5 hours or less of homework per week, and then the upper-end kids, more than 20 hours--only 3 percent.

One of the things that's presenting a drag on homework is part-time work. In the United States--when we look internationally, if you look at Tim's data, some of the comparative data--where, by the way, the U.S. also shows to be near the bottom of all countries in the world in terms of homework load; when you compare the U.S. homework load to kids' around the world, we come in next-to-last at age 17 and towards the bottom with age 13.

But what's unique about the United States is part-time work--part-time employment, working for pay. In the United States, this is something that more than half of high school seniors do. And that's unheard of around the world. That's unheard of both in developing and developed countries among kids who go to school. School is their job. But in the United States, we have a lot of part-time workers.

What Horatio Alger Association did, they broke out the 43 percent of students who have a job, and then here's the breakdown of their homework load and how many hours they dedicate to employment. It's very interesting. Look at 5 hours or less. 57 percent spend 5 hours or less on homework; only 8 percent 5 hours or less on a job. And look at the other end, as you get to the kids who really put in a lot of time with work. 27 percent of this sample of kids who work spend more than 20 hours.

By the way, there is some pretty good research by Lawrence Steinberg that looks at the impact of working more than 20 hours a week. Kids' grades and test

scores go down at that point. It's a drag. 27 percent of kids who work spend more than that working, and only 3 percent spend that much time on homework.

So part-time employment does appear to be a problem.

The second problem just is that homework is not a priority. They asked kids to--presented two statements to kids: Statement A, "Homework is a priority"; Statement B, "Never have the time for homework." 49 percent, roughly half, said they never have the time for homework. No, excuse me, the statements are at the bottom. "I know I should do more homework but I never seem to have the time." That's the statement.

So kids' schedules are filled with other activities, but homework is not the one that's dominating young adolescents' lives.

This study gets back to the issue of seniors in high school. And this is a very interesting study. The latest results should be out sometime over the next month. It's an annual survey that UCLA researchers do of college freshmen. And they ask college freshmen, How much homework did you have last year, when you were a senior in high school? And two-thirds of them, again--that magic number--said they had 5 hours or less.

Now, why I think this is particularly disturbing is it gets to this point of adequate preparation for college. Think of the kids we've removed from the sample in this survey. We have removed high school dropouts--they're not in the survey. We have removed kids who go directly into the military--they're not in the survey. We've removed kids who go directly into the work force--they're not in the survey. So we basically have America's best students. These are in four-year degree-granting institutions. They're not even at community colleges. We asked them how much homework they had as seniors in high school. Two-thirds of them said they had 5 hours or less. And I think we have to question--I know a number of college professors question--whether or not they've been prepared for the rigors of college with that kind of workload.

Let's look and see in the UCLA survey what kids are spending their time on as seniors in high school. Here's the percentage of kids who reported they spent 5 hours or more on various activities. The number one activity is socializing with friends. That's that bar on the left. 75 percent said they spend 5 hours or more per week on socializing with friends. Working for pay, there it is, 58 percent say that they spent 5 hours or more working for pay. Roughly half spent that much time on sports. And there's "studying," 33 percent. And 33 percent falls pretty close there, although it does exceed, the percentage who say they spent 5 hours or more--watching TV is the next one, and partying. So studying, you know, ranks right in there with watching TV and partying in terms of students leading well-rounded lives. They're doing lots of different things. Homework is not the dominant one.

And finally, there is the suggestion in many popular press accounts that there's a parent rebellion going on, that parents are up in arms, they've had enough of this, they're sick of their kids being overworked. The one survey I could find of parents on homework load was conducted by the Public Agenda Foundation. Again, it was a nationally representative sample. They asked parents to assess their child's homework load, and they gave the following responses: 64 percent said homework is about right. 25 percent said there's too little--they want more homework. And 10 percent said there was too much homework. So if there is a parent rebellion, it does not show up in the Public Agenda Foundation survey.

Let me conclude. First of all, I think there are four main conclusions.

Number one, the typical student, even in high school, does not spend more than an hour per day on homework. So you need to put all those homework stories in perspective.

The homework load has not changed much since the 1980s.

Number three, the students whose homework increased in the last decade are those who previously had no homework and now have a small amount. All those zeros, a few of the zeros, especially with the youngest-age kids, they are now spending some time on homework, but not a lot.

And number four, most parents feel the homework load is about right.

Now, I'm going to be a little speculative here and depart from the data, and also speak as a former teacher in terms of recommendations.

Number one, please take anti-homework articles with a grain of salt. That's the main message here from the data.

Number two, the PTA has guidelines on homework, and I think they make sense. I think they're sensible. They're based on the work of Harris Cooper, who is one of the nation's experts on homework. He's done a lot of research on this. Cooper came up with a basic rule of thumb to use as a benchmark, that kids should have about 10 minutes per grade per night. So if you have a third-grader, that would be about 30 minutes per night. If you have a sixth-grader, about 60 minutes a night. If you have a ninth-grader, about 90 minutes per night. If you have a senior in high school, you'd expect about 2 hours a night. Don't forget the earlier NAEP data I showed you showed that only 11 percent of high school seniors are meeting that benchmark. 89 percent do not have 2 hours of homework per night.

And then finally, the last two recommendations. You should understand that homework varies. Homework is an individual thing. If we took a page out of this report and I had all of you read it, there would be a lot of variance in the amount of time it takes to read that page. We just all do things differently in terms of pacing. When I

taught school, I surveyed my parents and my kids every year: How much homework do you have? And every year I got roughly the same range--minimum, 15 minutes a night; maximum, 3 hours a night. And I was the kids' only teacher. I gave all subjects. They had no other teachers.

So the point of this little story is that homework varies by the individual; and therefore, the last point is solutions need to be dealt with on an individual level. Homework problems--and again, I don't think they're fiction. I think there are kids that have too much homework. I think at the high school level it can be kids who get themselves enrolled in several AP classes all at the same time, and suddenly they have a ton of homework. Those problems need to be worked out individually with individual parents, students, and teachers. I do not think it's cause for any kind of policy intervention. We don't need school boards getting involved. We certainly don't need state legislatures getting involved.

And I'll stop right there. Thanks. Brian?

After Brian's done, we will go up there and then we'll take questions too.

MR. GILL: Thanks, Tom. And thank you all for coming.

As Tom mentioned, I've been studying homework, so to speak, for quite a while now with my colleague Steve Schlossman, who is a historian, a history professor at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh. And we've done a series of articles about the history of homework, the first three of which I think are available in the back. If we've run out of copies, come see me afterwards and I'll make sure that we can send them to you.

And I'm going to talk a little bit about a new study that we've done that is going to be published in the journal Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, in their fall issue, which is going to be released in mid-November. And then I want to talk a little more broadly about these homework findings in historical perspective.

The first thing to say is that the findings that Tom just told you about are quite consistent with our findings that are going to be released in this EEPA article next month. And you should all have two pages on this, a fact sheet and one chart from the article.

So to reinforce Tom's findings, we find that most American kids are not doing a whole lot of homework; that the only notable increase in homework in the last 20 years is for the youngest kids, primary grades of elementary school--kindergarten, first grade, second grade; and that for most kids there's no substantial increase in homework as they move from middle school to high school.

Now, in addition, our article in EEPA takes the story back a little bit farther. We found some additional data sets on homework that go all the way back to 1948. In our previous articles, we've tried to explore rhetoric and policy about

homework back 100 years; here we went back as far as we could go with any nationally representative data sets on homework. And that, it turns out, takes us back to 1948, at least for high school students.

So here, you can take a look at what is Figure 8, what is going to be Figure 8 in our EEPA article, which you should have a copy of. And this chart includes data from a variety of different national data sets showing how much time high school students have said they spend on homework at various points over the last half-century.

As you can see, the only notable increase, the only notable difference from current levels of homework, happened in the decade after Sputnik, when the proportions of high school students studying more than 2 hours a night increased pretty substantially--doubled or tripled, in fact, from 7 or 8 percent in the preceding period up to close to a quarter.

But the more general point to make out of this is that, even when you include that bump, the larger story from the last half-century is one of continuity. There was no golden age of homework that we can find. As Tom says, high school aren't doing a whole lot of homework today. Well, you can't find any point in the past 50 years when they were doing a whole lot of homework. That is, even at the peak, in the post-Sputnik period, no more than 1 in 4 high school students was studying at least 2 hours a night.

Now, to put more of this stuff in a little historical perspective, Tom talked about how he was motivated by a flurry of news stories about excessive homework. And that makes the present moment interestingly similar to a moment in educational history 100 years ago, when progressive educators and a number of parents thought that kids were getting too much homework, thought that it was burdening their health, thought that it wasn't academically useful, thought that they should be spending more time with their families.

And there was a what we call a progressive crusade against homework. This is described in one of the articles that we have in the back. It was carried on in places like the Ladies Home Journal. It actually had at that point considerable policy success. There were school boards across the country that abolished homework or severely limited it in a large number of grades. The single biggest success the movement had was in the State of California, where in 1901 the legislature actually passed a law abolishing homework in grades K-8.

So the sort of ferment we're seeing in the popular press over the last few years is reminiscent of something that happened 100 years ago.

The other point to make about that, though, is that our view is that 100 years ago, like today, that movement represented probably just a vocal minority of parents. As Tom showed you, the systematic research on parent opinion today from

Public Agenda suggests that most parents think homework is a pretty good thing and support the idea.

We have an article that just appeared in Teachers College Record this summer--and again, I have some copies of that if you're interested--that argues that that general attitude about homework has also been pretty consistent throughout the 20th century; that although it's certainly true that there have been parents who are concerned about homework, who are concerned about excessive loads--because, as Tom points out, you have large variations among individual kids--throughout the 20th century and up to the 21st century, the great majority of American parents, from all evidence that we can find, have thought homework was a pretty good idea, at least in moderation.

So, that's where we are in the historical data. And I think we can go to questions.

MR. LOVELESS: Who wants to start off with a question? Andrew?

QUESTION: I had a technical question about the NAEP data. Is this separate from the NAEP assessment? Are the students asked this right before the test, or during, like when they register for the test or-- This is a technical question, and I might have a follow-up, depending on the answer.

MR. LOVELESS: I'm not positive. The NAEP asks--first of all they have a random sample of schools, and then, as far as I know, a random sample within schools. And they ask kids a number of questions. They also ask teachers questions. So there are a number of questions. I think the way they do it is through matrix sampling. Again, I'm not positive. So everybody doesn't answer the same batch of these background questions, but they ask enough people where they can get a good estimate and lower the standard of error. So I think that's--

MR. GILL: That's my understanding as well.

QUESTION: My question was just more about timing. Sort of in an era of high-stakes accountability and testing, is it possible that teachers, because of pressure from their administrators or just pressure in general, are giving their kids less homework the night before an exam.

MR. GILL: Well, I think that's a very good question. And the key point there is that the NAEP is not a high-stakes test. And I think that would be--that would almost certainly be true if you were talking about one of the state high-stakes accountability tests, but the NAEP is a very low-stakes test. There are no consequences for schools or teachers or school districts, and in fact the results are not even recorded by school level.

My understanding of the sampling is that not all kids in a school or even all kids in a classroom take the NAEP. So I think it's fairly unlikely that teachers would

change their practices because just a handful of students in their classrooms are taking what is actually a very short, low-stakes test the next day.

The other thing to point out here is that the NAEP data from the long-term trend assessment are quite consistent with all sorts of other data, much of which Tom has pointed to. And they're also consistent with additional NAEP data where there question is asked, instead of how much homework did you get night, how much homework did you get on a typical night? The numbers don't change very much as a result.

MR. LOVELESS: The other thing about the NAEP is the NAEP has--the long-term trend, which are the data that I cited, no results of the long-term trend are reported below the national level. You know, very often you'll get state scores on NAEP? That's a different NAEP. That's the main NAEP. On the long-term trend, you just get a national score.

QUESTION: With the federal legislation for No Child Left Behind, do the studies reflect any information on the subgroups and any differences with regard to expectations for the subgroups?

MR. LOVELESS: I did break out homework by subgroups to the best that I could, and I didn't see any huge differences among those subgroups in terms of amounts of homework. Even between private and public schools, there was a slight advantage in terms of more homework in private schools, but not huge. And so I don't think those differences are that large. But frankly, we don't have a lot of data on that and so what you saw was the bigger picture. And that, we can be fairly confident of the findings.

QUESTION: I have two quick questions. One is, does this data reflect primarily public school students, or are independent school students included as well? Are they sort of folded into the whole thing?

MR. LOVELESS: It's both.

QUESTION: And are you aware of any research, or have you come to any conclusions about homework as a method of communication between schools and parents--ways for parents to know what their kids are studying in school?

MR. GILL: In our view, that is one of the main reasons that the parents have been supportive of homework and that that support has been maintained for a century or more. And that's one of the themes of some of the articles that Steve Schlossman and I have done, particularly the Teachers College Record piece that came out this summer.

Even early in the 20th century, when anti-homework attitudes were much more common than they are today, the evidence suggests that most parents thought it

was a good idea. And you can find lots of instances where parents felt that this is their--the best information they get about what the school is trying to teach their kids comes from homework.

MR. LOVELESS: That, by the way, was one of the points--Brian mentioned the campaign by progressive educators in the early part of the 20th century against homework. They were concerned--some of the concerns they mentioned was they were afraid that A) education should be left to the experts at school, that if homework goes home, parents are instructing their children and they might do something wrong, that they really don't know what they're doing, they're not trained to be teachers, and therefore it's not a good idea to put homework in the hands of parents.

QUESTION: You talked a little bit about public policy. Is there a trend in school districts to either mandate certain hours of homework or, on the other hand, to react to this parent revolt and say no more than X number? I mean, what--are there any trends in that way?

MR. LOVELESS: There are some cases of districts--there was a district in New Jersey, Piscataway, which put caps on homework after complaints from parents. There was a district, [inaudible] Bay in California, that considered banning homework. I think they wound up not doing that.

Typically, though, what you find at the district level is you'll have--and I believe Jay Matthews has this in his column in this morning's Post--in Arlington--you'll get guidelines first. I know when I was a teacher, when guidelines came down the pike, I knew--you know, I sort of trembled, because I knew what was coming next. The next thing that comes is why aren't you following the guidelines. The guidelines are never all that soft when it comes to parent complaints.

So I think the more common kind of policy intervention are school districts with these soft guidelines that then can become hard and brittle if there's too much parent complaints.

MR. GILL: That's consistent with our research as well. We found many more as compared with the early part of the century--in the early part of the century, from 1900 through the 1930s, you can find lots of examples of school boards passing regulations that abolished homework--occasionally K-12, more frequently K-8, K-5, K-6. This happened in Los Angeles, in Washington, D.C., in Chicago, and in dozens of smaller communities across the country.

More recently, we haven't seen examples of that, but it's increasingly common to have regulations about time, a kind of homework schedule something like the one that Harris Cooper talks about. And in particular it's increasingly common to have that advocated in district policy starting in kindergarten, which wouldn't have been considered before 20 or 30 years ago.

MR. LOVELESS: What I write about in my paper is that, again, I don't think standardizing learning in units of time is the right unit. We should be standardizing learning in the units of learning. So what we should be doing is saying, you know, all kids will learn arithmetic, not that all kids will in first grade will study arithmetic 1 hour per night. That's just the wrong unit.

QUESTION: Can I ask just one other question?

MR. LOVELESS: Yes.

QUESTION: The survey data is based on what kids tell you, right? Well, I mean, my kids always have told me they don't have much homework. How do we know that they're telling you the truth?

MR. LOVELESS: Well, we could wrestle them to the ground, I guess, and give them lie detector tests. I don't know.

QUESTION: I guess my question is, is the data reliable because it's based on kids telling you whether they have homework?

MR. LOVELESS: Yeah. I think the key thing with this is you look for convergence when data say the same thing. You look for data from various sources--teachers, parents, kids. And they all point--and they're basically telling the same story here. If kids were way out of whack with what teachers and parents are saying about homework, then I think there'd be cause to question it. But in this case, all of the different sources of data say about the same thing.

MR. GILL: Another thing to say about that is that I would bet that kids are more likely to be honest with an anonymous surveyor than with parents about whether they've got homework. But in terms of the consistency, the specific thing to point to would be the time diary studies at the University of Michigan that Tom mentioned. Those are generally considered the best methodology of studying how anybody spends time, kids or adults. Unfortunately, we don't have enough of those. They're very intensive, they're very difficult and expensive to do. But those also are consistent with the self-reports from students.

MR. LOVELESS: Deborah?

QUESTION: [Off microphone, inaudible] --and the amount of time kids spend on homework?

MR. LOVELESS: There are at the upper grades. There are--for 17 year-olds especially and for 13 year-olds, more homework is positively correlated with the NAEP scores. That relationship breaks down at the elementary grades. And quite frankly, the research on trying to make some causal connection between homework and achievement is very difficult to do. Correlation is the right word to use.

What happens, I suspect, is you actually get a reverse what we call "selection effect." In the elementary grades, with young children--let's say you have a first-grader who's having problems reading. Well, what happens is the parents freak out. They're working with him at the kitchen table every night--or with her. And sometimes there's crying, and the parents get frustrated. And you get low-achieving kids putting in a lot of time at home on schoolwork, in the form of homework. By high school, however, that selection has completely flip-flopped. What you have is the high-homework kids tend to be AP kids. And these are kids who sort of enjoy homework and they do a lot of homework. So then you get a correlation between high achievement and lots of homework.

Now, it doesn't--frankly, we don't know if lots of homework promote higher achievement. I suspect--you know, I sort of come from the school of thought that it takes work to accomplish something--so I suspect that it does. And I just seriously question whether we're going to get huge jumps in achievement by doing less work. My guess is it will take more. But as a research question, it's tough to untangle that.

Do you want to add?

MR. GILL: No, my views would be consistent with that. Good summary.

MR. LOVELESS: Other questions? Yes.

QUESTION: A news broadcast as I came in announced that China was about to launch a man into space. Is this going to have a Sputnik effect?

MR. LOVELESS: I doubt it. Had that announcement come in 1960, I think it would have.

MR. GILL: [Laughing.] I would agree. I don't think it has quite the--will get quite the public attention that the first one did.

MR. LOVELESS: Other questions? Yes.

QUESTION: Just a few minutes ago you mentioned that the appropriate unit was learning as opposed to time. So I'm just wondering if either of you are aware of any studies that would offer teachers some guidance on what kind of homework they should assign.

MR. LOVELESS: I don't think the homework research has gotten down to that level yet, frankly, but that's an excellent question. Because I do suspect--and this is just speculative on my part--that some of the frustration that you're reading about from parents has to do with improper homework, where kids are--they get home and they're now encountering new knowledge. Not things they were taught during the day that they

need to reinforce, but they actually have to learn some new things at home. And so what that does it put parents in the role of being a teacher. And boy, I don't know about anybody else, but in my career as a teacher you just didn't want to do that. You did not want to put parents in that position, because they don't like it and it's frustrating for them as well. So I suspect some of what's driving this today could be improper homework.

MR. GILL: Yeah, I agree. And I think that's a great question. And in fact, in my view, too much of the discussion over the last 20 years has just been about time on homework. There's been this effort to increase time on homework with the assumption that that somehow is automatically going to have a positive effect on achievement. And there hasn't been enough attention to the quality of homework.

And here we might be able to learn something from some of the dialogue about homework that occurred in the educational press in the 1940s, '50s, and '60s, where there was a lot more discussion about what makes for good homework. More recently there are a few people working on it, but not too many--people like Joyce Epstein at Johns Hopkins would be a good example.

MR. LOVELESS: Other questions? Yes.

QUESTION: As schools try to implement No Child Left Behind and try to meet all those standards, do you think that the amount of homework will increase?

MR. LOVELESS: I think it's reasonable to expect the homework load to increase. But they're--you know, there are two--I have two conflicting feelings about it. As Brian's research shows, homework's been pretty static. And we've had a lot of other things that have come up over the last 50 years and they haven't moved the marker in terms of homework. So there is that.

However, on the other side of that, again I think that if children--one of the things we do know about learning is that it takes time, and you have to devote time to it. And so my guess is if we are going to get any dramatic increase in school achievement--and by the way, this goes to the whole issue of school choice and equalizing school finance and all of the other really hotly debated--if we did something on school choice, we'd have an audience today of 800 people, you know, trying to get in here. With all of those policy questions, in the end I think you have to be really idealistic to think that test scores are going to jump and it's not going to take more work. I just think it's reasonable to assume that it will take more work.

So that would be my guess, that if it does get traction, you're going to see more homework.

MR. GILL: And the big question is whether it will--as Tom just pointed out, the big question is whether it will in fact get traction. I mean, increasing homework is something you might expect as a result of No Child Left Behind, but you might have also expected it over the last 20 years after A Nation at Risk. And it didn't happen. It happened, you know, at a small level for the youngest kids, but didn't happen at all at the

middle and high school levels, where it might make the most difference. So it remains to be seen, I think.

MR. LOVELESS: But if we can work less and actually learn more, boy, that'll be nice. I'm just skeptical.

QUESTION: My question is in regard to smaller groups [inaudible] sample that you looked at [inaudible] high-achieving high school students who are college-bound. Because I have--just from looking at this data, we're looking at greater than 2 hours of homework, where it is possible that perhaps students within that group are now receiving, say, 3 hours of homework to land in that group, as opposed to 2 hours 10 years ago. And from my own personal experience seeing young people and what they go through now to get into competitive colleges, enrolling in AP courses and having leadership activities and engaging in sports activities, it seems as though the burden on those young people has increased. Do you have an opinion or any data on that?

MR. LOVELESS: Well, no, your point is quite correct. If you have a category that's 2 hours or more, you don't know about the fluctuations within that category. But I do have two responses. One is we do know that numbers of kids that fall into that category to begin with are quite small. You know, they're 11 percent.

We also know that the kids that go on to college, they're reporting the same thing, that they really didn't have very much homework. And in that particular study, they did have higher-end estimates they could have used. They were given a number of categories that--I believe eight or nine different categories to respond to. So in the UCLA survey of college freshmen, there's a lot of room there to report high amounts of homework. They're just not reporting it.

MR. GILL: Yeah, I agree. There is some evidence that there is sort of increasing spread in the distribution as kids get older. So the proportion of 17 year-olds studying more than an hour a night is almost identical to the proportion of 13 year-olds studying more than 1 hour a night. But if you look at the over-2-hours category, there are more 17 year-olds in that category. Again, the total number is still quite small. Most of the surveys don't have categories beyond that, but the ones we've seen that do, it's hard to find evidence of a substantial increase.

The other point, though, that I think you raise has to do with other activities that compete for kids' time. And as Tom mentioned earlier, I think that's a key part of what's going on here and what might explain why some families are perceiving a greater homework burden--is that kids are busier than they used to be, and particularly those kids who are aiming to get into highly selective colleges. And they're busier, you know, not just with stuff directly related to their schoolwork, but also with extracurricular activities, with part-time jobs, with a million other things. And parents are busier, too, and so they may be perceiving a greater load as a result. Homework's getting squeezed out.

MR. LOVELESS: The AP students, my recommendation there would be, again, the student needs to talk with his or her counselor. They need to work a realistic AP schedule. I get calls sometimes from parents talking about AP--they say, well, my--I know you're a big homework advocate; well, my kid's going to take five AP classes. Do you think that's too much?

It may very well be. So if kids wait till their junior or senior year and then take five AP classes, they're going to have an awful lot of homework. And some of that takes, you know, kids talking to teachers, going to the AP teachers, getting an estimate of the homework load, talking to their counselors, and planning their curriculum so it all doesn't come at one time and so they don't wind up being overworked.

QUESTION: Sometimes low-income students might need to work up to perhaps 30 hours a week sometimes to help out their families. My question is do you find work to interfere with the academic achievement of these kids, or do you think that they would basically replace one activity over the other one--for example, their hours are lowered. Where do you see the balance?

MR. LOVELESS: I think work is a primary competitor with not just homework, but reading for pleasure, with anything dealing with the development of the mind. Part-time work is taking time away with teenagers. And as I said, the United States internationally is unusual in this respect. Most nations raise teenagers with the belief that school is their job, that they need to do as well as they can in school, that's their job.

And by the way, the data on part-time work are very interesting in terms of socioeconomic levels. Actually, the percentage of kids working is fairly stable across all socioeconomic levels, so the wealthiest kids in the United States have reasonably similar percentages of students working. They're spending their money for different things, you're quite right. Poor children are often supporting their families; wealthy children are buying car insurance and expensive sneakers. But nevertheless, the percentage of teenagers across social strata--very stable, very similar.

QUESTION: What advice would you give to parents? What advice would you give them?

MR. LOVELESS: On--

QUESTION: On work, how to balance [inaudible].

MR. LOVELESS: Try to keep the--make sure, first of all, that the companies that the kids are working for are following laws, that kids aren't closing stores at 2 a.m. in the morning on a school night, that they're working on weekends, that they're

only working in the summers. There are ways of doing work and--as I mentioned, Larry Steinberg's work, I think, is fairly persuasive, that there is a tipping point to work.

Work is not a bad thing. Part-time work does not have a negative effect on grades or achievement until it reaches about 15 hours a week. Once you hit that, you start really getting into trouble academically.

Any other questions?

Well, thank you all for coming. I hope you can come again in two weeks and we'll talk about charter schools and more things on student achievement. Thanks.

MR. GILL: Thank you.

MR. LOVELESS: Thanks, Brian. Appreciate it.