

Chicago Tribune

School's Lesson Plan: No More Homework

Students never did it; now it's no problem

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By Jo Napolitano

Tribune staff reporter

Junior high students at the Marya Yates School in Matteson simply had too many crushes to attend to, Web sites to surf, and television shows to watch in order to sit diligently at their kitchen tables and crank out homework. School administrators saw they were fighting a losing battle outside their walls. But they were confident most students were absorbing the lessons in class. So what did they do? They virtually eliminated homework.

Homework used to account for about 30 percent of students' grades. The shift in policy began after Principal Lucille Adams Johnson consulted with teachers a few years ago about why so many students were earning C's when tests and quizzes showed they had command of the material.

The answer was simple: homework. "Teachers were assigning it. Kids weren't doing it. Teachers found themselves entering dozens of zeros where better grades should have been," Adams Johnson said. As the policy has evolved, homework at Marya Yates now accounts for only 10 percent of grades, with some teachers making it as small a factor as possible.

But education experts are divided on the wisdom of adapting to the desires of junior high students, with some praising that flexibility and others noting that

being able to study on one's own becomes crucial in high school and beyond.

Harris Cooper, director of Duke University's Program in Education, has studied homework for 20 years. Cooper said there is only a modest correlation between homework completion and academic success for middle school children, but the connection between the two becomes much stronger in high school. "Homework teaches children study and time-management skills. All kids should be doing homework," he said.

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Adams Johnson said that from every indication she has, her students are more than adequately prepared for high school. And her students are happy. Not surprisingly, a small sampling of students on a recent afternoon found no one opposed to the school's approach. Sydney Holt, 14, said she likes having her teacher present when she has a question. Otherwise, she said, the assignments would "be very confusing. I'd forget everything," Holt said, speaking mainly of math.

The *Washington Post*

Teens Are in No Rush to Drive

As modes of socializing change, digital generation delays rite of passage

By Donna St. George

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WASHINGTON — The quest to get a driver's license at 16—long an American rite of passage—is on the wane among the digital generation, which no longer sees the family car as the end-all of social life.

Federal data released Friday underscore a striking national shift: 30.7 percent of 16-year-olds got their licenses in 2008, compared with 44.7 percent in 1988.

“Driving is real important to a lot of the kids in the culture, but it is not the central focus like it was 25 years ago,” said Tom Pecoraro, owner of I Drive Smart, a Washington area drivers' education program, who added that plenty of his students are older teens. “They have so many other things to do now,” he said, and, with years of being shuttled to sports, lessons and play dates, “kids are used to being driven.”

A generation consumed by Facebook and text-messaging, by Xbox Live and smartphones, no longer needs to climb into a car to connect with friends. And although many teens are still eager to drive, new laws make getting a license far more time-consuming, requiring as many as 60 supervised driving practice hours with an adult.

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Rob Foss, director of the Center for the Study of Young Drivers, and others suggest that these “graduated” state licensing systems—which have created new requirements for learner's permits, supervised practice hours, night driving and passengers in the car—are responsible for much of the decline in the number of licensed 16-year-olds. At the same time, drivers' education has been cut back in some public schools, so families must scrounge up money—often \$300 to \$600—for private driving schools.

Then there is car insurance and gas, expenses that make driving too costly for some families and a stretch for others.

But waiting too long also has its drawbacks. “Learning to drive is a fundamental part of adolescence,” said psychologist Joseph Allen of the University of Virginia. “It gives teens a major responsibility they have to handle, and it also gives them the chance to move about on their own, to function independently of their families.”