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# Chicago Tribune

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## 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.