

Balancing school work and activities requires time management

Marge Steele's two high-schoolers think they have too much homework - most students do. Mrs. Steele agrees with her sophomore and senior sons who attend Calvert Hall College High School, Baltimore.

"Our biggest issue is that they play sports and the days they have games they get home very late," said the mother of Ryan and Brendan Steele. "So usually they are rushing through their homework, going in early to complete it the next morning, and if they have free periods ... they do it then."

Why the need for homework? "Homework gives a student time to ponder material covered in class and commit it to memory," said Karl Dotterweich, Social Studies teacher at Our Lady of Mount Carmel High School, Essex, "without distractions that can occur in a classroom." His students can expect 15-30 minutes of homework several times a week; he remains conscious that other teachers are simultaneously assigning homework.

Yet he does not think teachers assign too much nor has he received parental complaints. It doesn't have to be an issue for busy students to balance homework and school activities, he said, "if they are responsible. I believe school comes before activities, but there is no reason a student cannot participate in a club or sport if they budget their time well."

Golf coach and science teacher Jon Cupp, Our Lady of Mount Carmel, knows it's an issue. His team has returned from golf matches sometimes at 9 pm. He witnesses kids on buses to and from games perusing notebooks and texts on their laps, and arriving in school earlier than teachers to get it done.

"There are a lot of students who work to fit in everything," he said. "To some extent, that can be a good thing ... but it does need to be addressed and planned for by the

students, teachers, and parents.” Mr. Cupp works with athletes, in conjunction with coaches, to address homework concerns. “If there is a big game that is far away, I may give students an extra day on an assignment,” he said.

As in every school, Mount St. Joseph High School, Baltimore, students are involved in many activities “that are important for their overall development,” said ninth-grade biology teacher Pat Abrahms. “A burden of excess homework would simply be counter-productive for students who are balancing a demanding load.” She assigns no more than 15-20 minutes of homework nightly.

Ironically, it can be more challenging to learn time management when a student has no extra activities, said Mr. Cupp. “Activities tend to force students to plan their time more effectively as opposed to watching TV or playing video games.” English teacher Dan Peightel of Mount St. Joseph agreed. He noted that busy students can be more competent at organizing and prioritizing their school work.

More than “a lot” of homework, he assigns “challenging” homework. “When our expectations about the amount of work become unreasonable, even the best students simply shut down,” he said.