

Needham High School
Parent Survey
June 16, 2009, NHS School Council

INTRODUCTION

The NHS Parent Survey (PS) was designed, conducted, and analyzed by the NHS School Council. The NHS School Council was charged with reviewing the homework situation of NHS and to modify policy accordingly. In order to fulfill this charge we had several sources of information. The first was a survey of teachers about homework. This was conducted in 2006, but was analyzed in 2008, by the School Council, as part of its homework review. The second was the parent survey, and the results of this survey are contained in this report. The primary members of the School Council who implemented the survey were Paul Richards, Susan Neckes, and Karen Price.

METHODS

Development of Survey Questions

Some of the survey questions were designed to match the teacher survey questions in order to make comparisons. Other questions were based on issues that have arisen in Parent Coffees throughout the past four years. Others were specifically requested by members of the School Council, including teachers, students, and parents. Students were concerned that most parents would answer “don’t know” to many questions, but we decided that “don’t know” is a valid answer that has meaning, and in the results this answer was used quite infrequently, with some exceptions. The survey included 21 questions, four of which were descriptors and the rest asked questions about homework.

Survey Conduct

The NHS PS was conducted using Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com). The cost was \$20/month. Susan Neckes created the Survey Monkey NHS PS. Before going live, several parents previewed the survey. On March 20 the survey was opened, via email from Paul Richards using the NHS ListServe. The email contained a web link directly to the survey and announced the survey would close on March 26. On March 25, 400 responses had been received, and Mr. Richards sent a reminder email. The survey link was closed on March 27, with 601 responses.

Dear Parents,

The Needham High School Council is evaluating the current homework policies and practices. In addition to gathering information from faculty and students, the council is seeking input from parents. Please click on the link below or copy the URL into your internet browser to fill out a brief survey. We need all responses by Thursday, March 26th. It's important that we receive a strong sample to get the best possible picture of homework practices for our high school students.

The link is:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm= 2bmWh3OjewvBCuEmKfvAlkQ_3d_3d

Thank you for your time!
The Needham High School Council

Survey Instructions

After linking to the survey, the following message was displayed.

The Needham High School Council is evaluating the school's homework policies. We are seeking input from parents in addition to input from faculty and students.

If you have more than one student currently attending NHS, please answer the questions as they pertain to one of your students.

By aggregating a large number of parent surveys for a variety of students, we will get a clearer picture of the homework experience at NHS.

We appreciate your taking a few minutes to complete this brief survey.

RESULTS

Student Information

How many students do you have at NHS? (1,2,3,4)

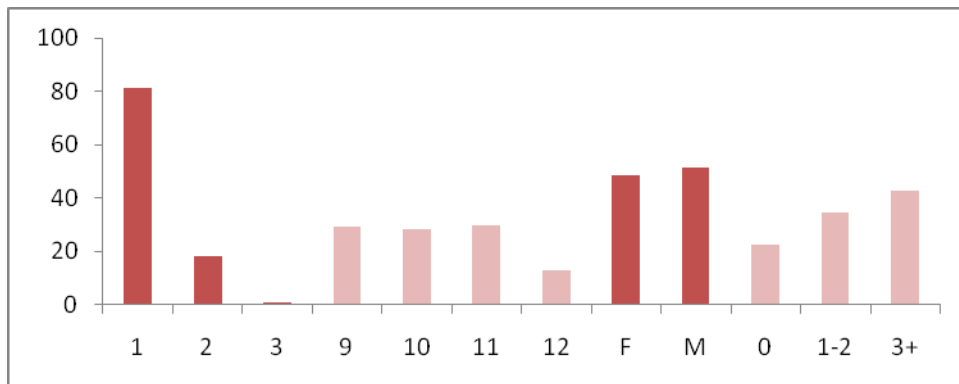
Your one student for whom you are considering as you answer this survey is in grade: (9, 10, 11, 12)

Which gender is your student? (F,M)

How many accelerated or advanced placement classes is your student taking this year? (0, 1-2, 3+)

Three responders answered left all three of these questions blank, but completed the remainder of the survey.

81% of the parents had one student, 18% had two, and 0.8% had three. None had four. Grades 9 to 11 were balanced, with 29%, 28%, and 30%, respectively. Seniors are under-represented with only 13%. Males were more common: 48% female, 52% males. This difference is not statistically significant. The number of surveys increased as the number of accelerated/AP classes increased 29% were taking none, 35% 1-2, 42% 3 or more. This difference is statistically significant, so some care should be taken when viewing the overall results.



Response and Sample Population

It is not possible to determine the exact response percentage for the survey. Simply taking the number of responses, 601, divided by the number of students, 1,397, yields 43%. This approach is inaccurate for two reasons. First, two parents may have responded for only one student, which would make 43% higher than the 'real' response. Second, a parent responding may have two or three students, which would make the 43% lower than the 'real' response. We know that among survey responders 81% had only one student. If we apply this percentage to the school population (1,397) we could estimate 1,132 families, and the response would be 53%. Given the lack of information for both the numerator and the denominator, we can only estimate a range of 45%-50%.

To determine if we have a representative survey sample, there are 720 (51.5%) males and 677 (48.5%) females at NHS, which corresponds to survey sample. The numbers of students by grade at NHS are grade 9: 378 (27%), grade 10: 331 (24%), grade 11: 373 (27%), grade 12: 315 (22%). As stated above, grade 12 was underrepresented (13%) in the survey, thus inflating the percentages for the other 3 grades. We were not able to obtain from the school the number of students according to the number of AP/accelerated courses, and thus we are missing an important comparison, and we do not know if the parents of students with more or fewer higher-level courses were more likely to respond to the survey.

Interpretation

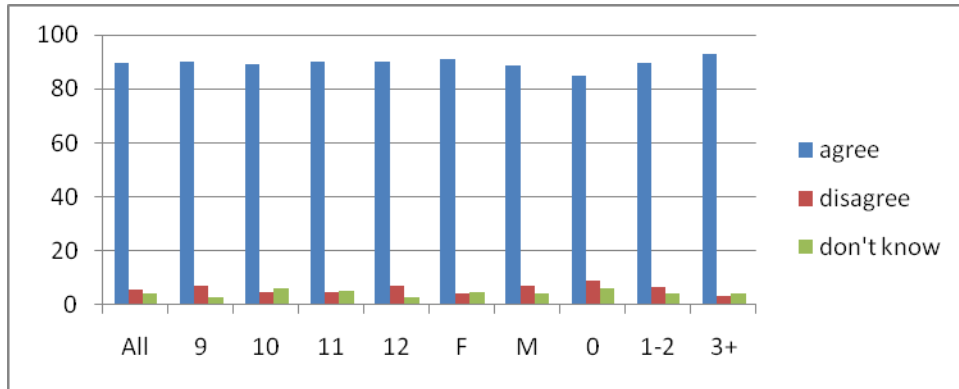
The remainder of the report summarizes the questions and the results. The NHS School Council reviewed these findings and made the following interpretive observations:

- The high percentage of parents responding to the survey is indicative of the interest parents have in the homework issue, and a willingness to take the time to provide their opinions so that the school staff can make informed decisions on policy.
- Parents overwhelmingly agreed that homework is an essential part of coursework.
- In all of the questions where "don't know" was an option, parents of male students were more likely to respond "don't know."
- On the question of whether the amount of homework was too much, too little, or just right, most responded "just right," but parents of male students and those taking no AP/Acc courses were more likely to respond "too much" than other subgroups.
- Questions about the amount of time spent on homework indicate that grade 11 is higher than other grades, females spend more time than males, and the time spent increases with the more advanced level classes.
- More than half of parents surveyed thought that the type of homework was appropriate and sufficient notice was given.
- In terms of seeking help from parents, there is a clear decrease in parental involvement as students progress from grades 9 to 12, but tutors are more likely to be hired in grades 11 and 12.
- 73% of parents reported they used Powerschool daily, monthly or weekly to check grades.
- 65% of parents reported at least one "diversion" during homework, with music the most frequently-reported (61%). 51% reported computer use and 36% reported phone/texting. The student members of the School Council felt that these percentages were much lower than actual use.
- Marked differences between male and female students were evident in the responses to every question.
- The number of accelerated/AP courses generally influenced the answers to the questions, more so than the grade.

Survey Questions

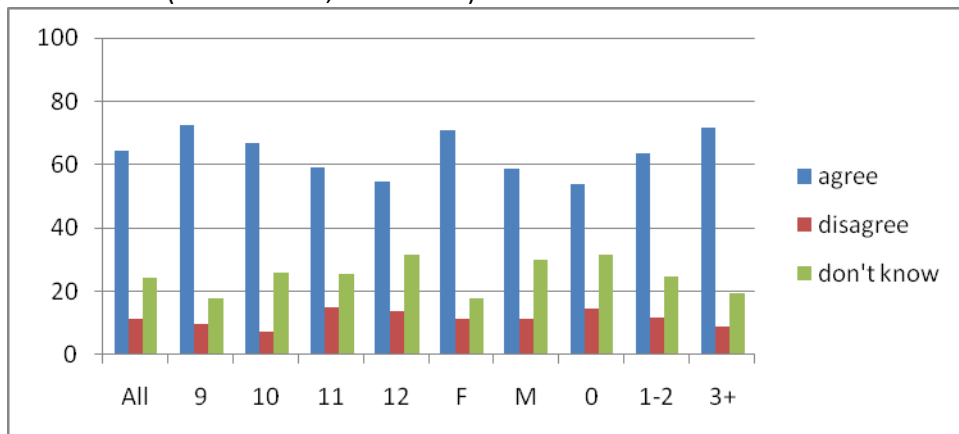
Question 5. Homework is an essential part of my son/daughter's coursework. (agree, disagree, don't know)

Overall 90% of parents agreed with this statement, which was consistent with results by grade and gender. Agreement tended to increase as the number of Acc/AP courses increased (85% 0, 89% 1-2, 93% 3+).



Question 6. The purpose of homework assignments is generally communicated to the student. (agree, disagree, don't know)

Overall 64% of parents agreed with this statement, 11% disagreed, and 24% said they did not know. When broken down according to grade, gender, and level, differences emerge. Lower grade (9-10) parents agreed 70%, while upper grades agreed only 60% of the time. Upper grade parents were less likely to respond “don't know” (23% grades 9-10; 27% grades 11-12). Parents of males were more likely to respond “don't know” (18% females, 30% males)

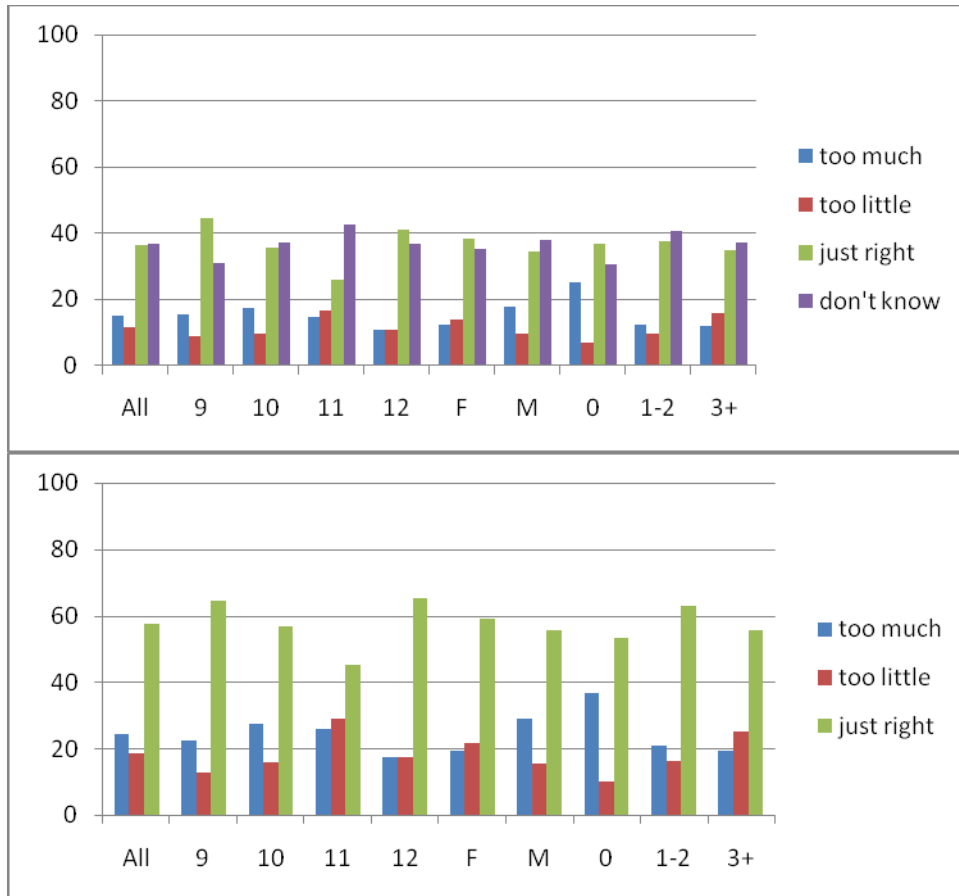


If we remove the parents who responded “don't know,” then 85% agreed, gender responses were similar, and more Acc/AP courses led to more agreement with this statement (79% 0, 84% 1-2, 89% 3+).

Question 7. In general, homework counts (too much, too little, just right, don't know) toward the final grade.

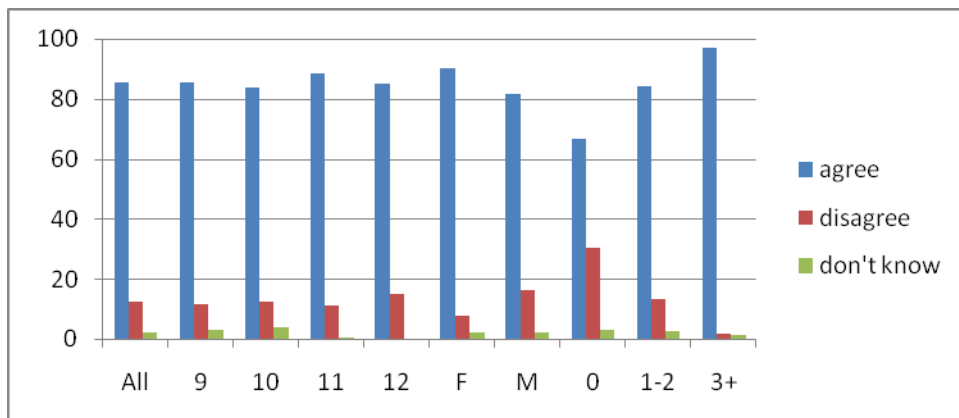
Overall, 37% of parents reported “don't know” and 36% “just right.” After removing responses of “don't know” 24% of responders said “too much,” 18% “too little,” and 57% “just right.” Differences between male and female students emerged when “don't know” was removed, with parents of males reporting “too much” more often (19% F, 29% M). There were interesting differences between the lower grades and the upper grades. Looking at number of Acc/AP courses, the more such courses the more likely the

response was homework counted “too little” (10% 0, 16% 1-2, 25% 3+, with “don’t know” removed). The second graph excludes “don’t know.”



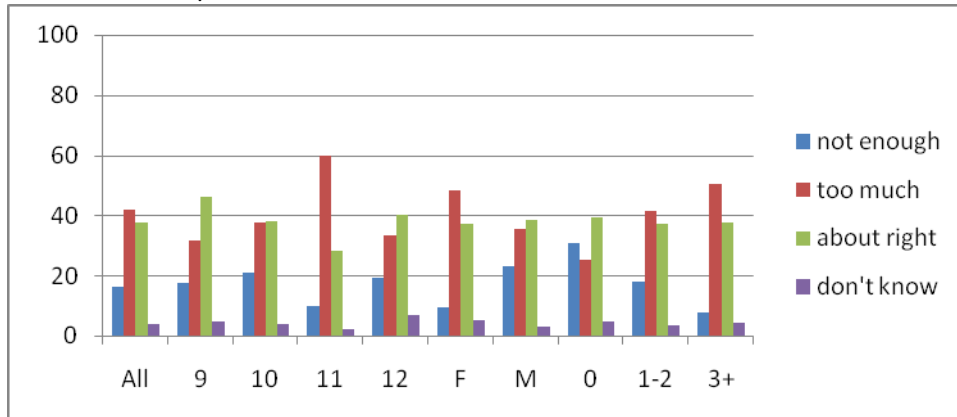
Question 8. My son/daughter generally completes his/her homework on time. (agree, disagree, don’t know)

While 86% agreed with this overall and results were consistent within grade, substantial differences were observed within gender and course level, with more parents of females agreeing (90% F, 82% M), and agreement increasing with the number of Acc/AP courses (67% 0, 84% 1-2, 97% 3+). Interestingly, few parents responded “don’t know” to this question (2%), lower than most of the other questions.



Question 9. The amount of time spent on homework is (not enough, too much, about right, don't know)

Fewer parents responded “not enough” (16%), than “too much” (42%) or “about right” (38%). “Don't know” was selected by only 4%. Results by grade showed that grade 11 had a higher percentage saying “too much” than the other 3 grades (32% 9, 37% 10, 60% 11, 33% 12). Gender also revealed differences, with 48% of parents of girls responding “too much” and 36% of boys. When looking at this question by course level, all three groups had similar responses for “about right,” but percentages of “not enough” decreased as number of Acc/AP courses increased and “too much” increased as the number increased.

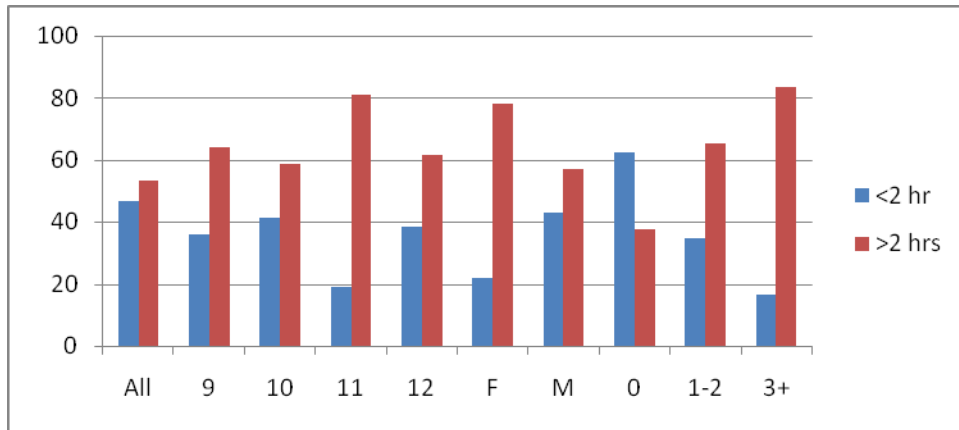


Question 10. On an average school night, my son/daughter spends how much total time on homework? (<1 hr., 1-2 hrs, 2-3 hrs, 3-4 hrs, 4+ hours, don't know)

The extremes are noteworthy in this question, 10% of parents reported < 1 hour and 16% reported four or more. According to gender, males were far more likely to spend <1 hour (14%) than females (4%); and females far more likely to spend 4+ hours (25%) than males (8%). Number of Acc/AP courses also was associated with the amount of time spent on homework. The parents of almost 1/3 of students not taking any Acc/AP courses reported their students spent less than 1 hour per night on homework.

Large differences emerge when the groups are dichotomized as <2 or >2. Students in grade 11 were more likely to spend more than 2 hours on homework (81%) compared to the other 3 grades (64% 9, 59% 10, 61% 12). Females were more likely to spend more than 2 hours (78%) than males (57%), and time spent increased as the number of Acc/AP courses increased (38% 0, 65% 1-2, 83% 3+ spend more than 2 hours).

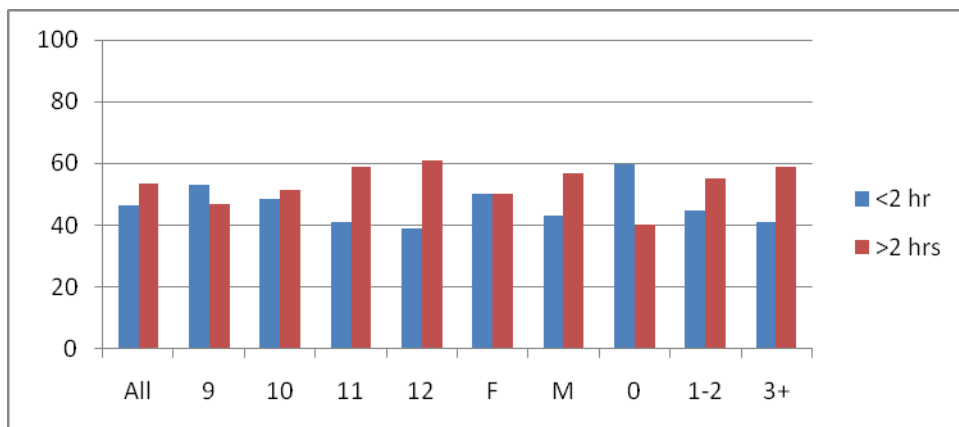
Q10	All	9	10	11	12	F	M	0	1-2	3+
<1 hr	9.58	12.65	9.32	5.85	12.33	4.33	14.38	27.34	5.1	4.07
1-2 hrs	22.65	22.89	31.06	12.87	24.66	17.33	27.4	32.03	29.08	12.2
2-3 hrs	28.05	35.54	25.47	23.39	27.4	29.24	26.71	22.66	27.04	31.71
3-4 hrs	21.95	19.28	16.77	30.99	19.18	22.74	21.58	7.03	25	27.24
4+ hrs	15.68	9.04	14.91	24.56	12.33	24.55	7.53	6.25	12.76	23.17
don't know	2.09	0.6	2.48	2.34	4.11	1.81	2.4	4.69	1.02	1.63



Question 11. On average school night, my son/daughter spends how much time on extra-curricular activities (i.e. organized activities outside the school day including part-time job)? (<1 hr., 1-2 hrs, 2-3 hrs, 3-4 hrs, 4+ hours, don't know)

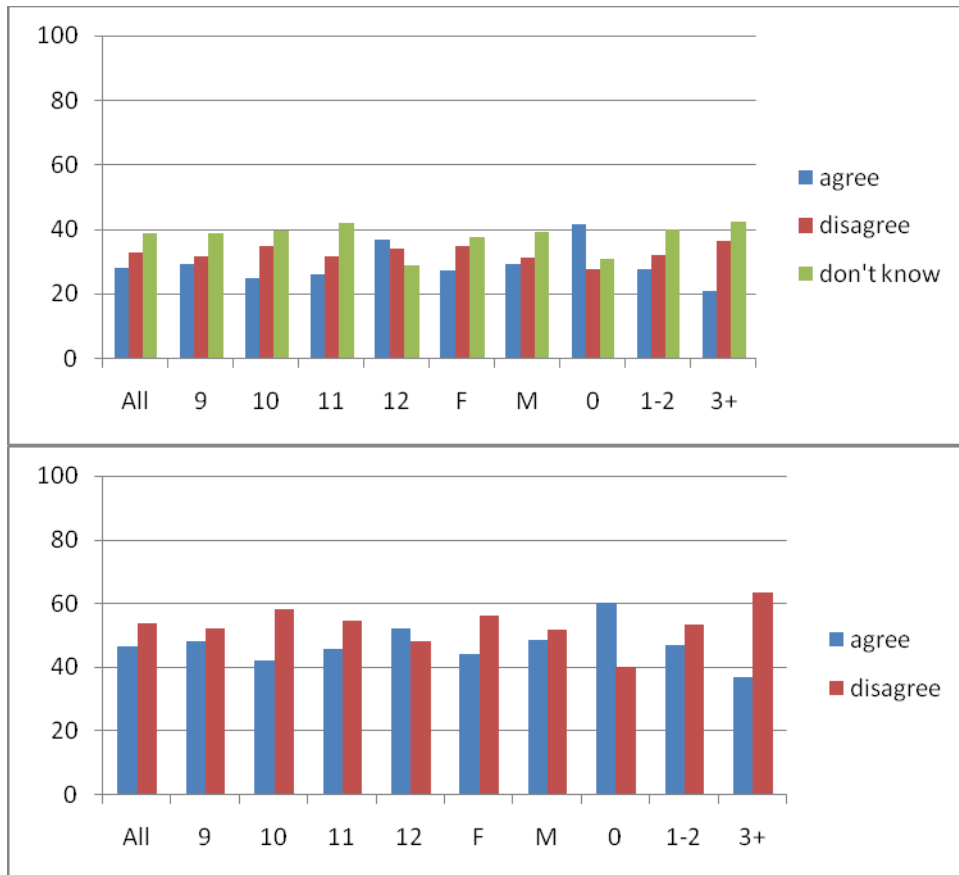
Again, looking at the extremes, 12% of parents reported < 1 hour and 3% reported four or more, with the upper grades spending more time overall. 24% of the parents of students not taking any Acc/AP courses reported their students spent less than 1 hour per night on extra-curricular activities while only 7% of those taking 3+ Acc/AP courses reported <1 hour.

When the groups are dichotomized as <2 or >2 for extra-curricular time, the upper grades were more likely to spend more time on extra-curricular activities (49% 9-10, 60% 11-12). Males were more likely to spend more than 2 hours (57%) than females (50%), and time spent increased as the number of Acc/AP courses increased (40% 0, 55% 1-2, 59% 3+ spend more than 2 hours).



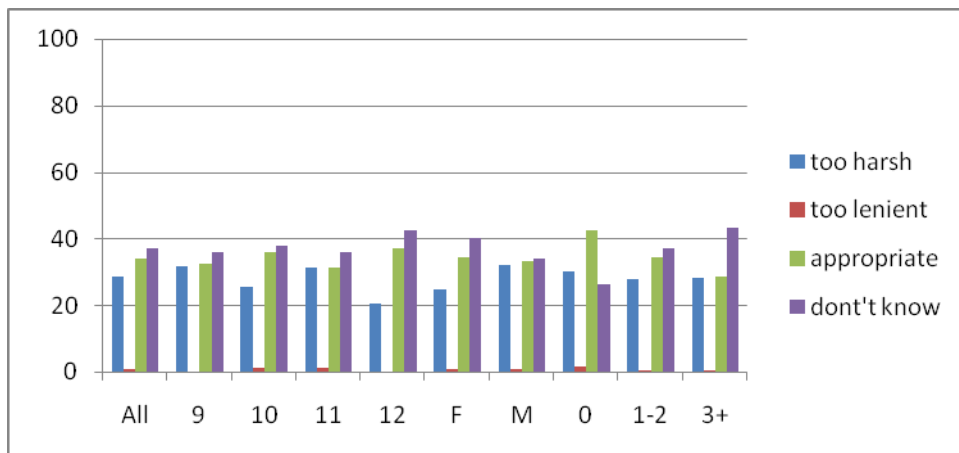
Question 12. Teachers are generally flexible if a student requests to turn in an assignment late due to an unforeseen circumstance. (agree, disagree, don't know)

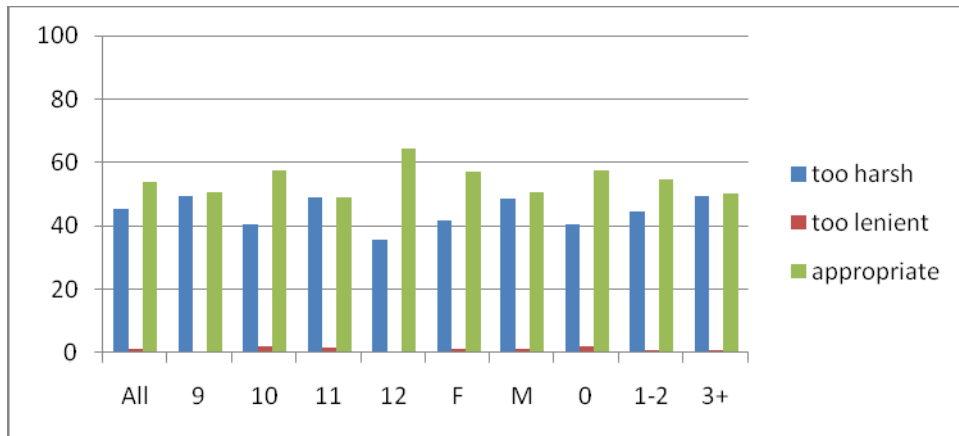
Overall, most parents responded "don't know," (39%) but among the other two groups, parents tended to disagree (33%) more agree (28%). Grade 12 parent and parents whose students were taking no Acc/AP courses were less likely to respond "don't know." After removing "don't know", there were no differences according to grade or gender, but parents with students taking **no** Acc/AP courses were more likely to agree that teachers were flexible (60%) than 1-2 (47%) and 3+ (37%). The second graph excludes "don't know."



Question 13. Teachers are (too harsh, too lenient, appropriate, don't know) in their penalties for late assignments

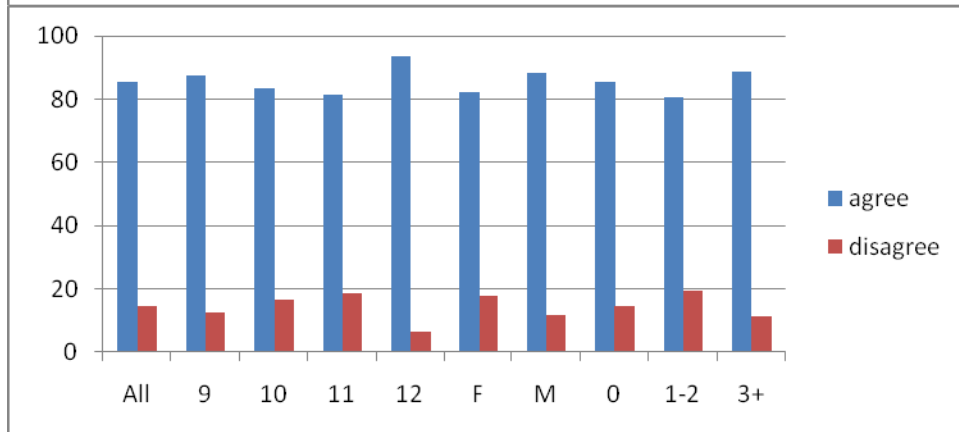
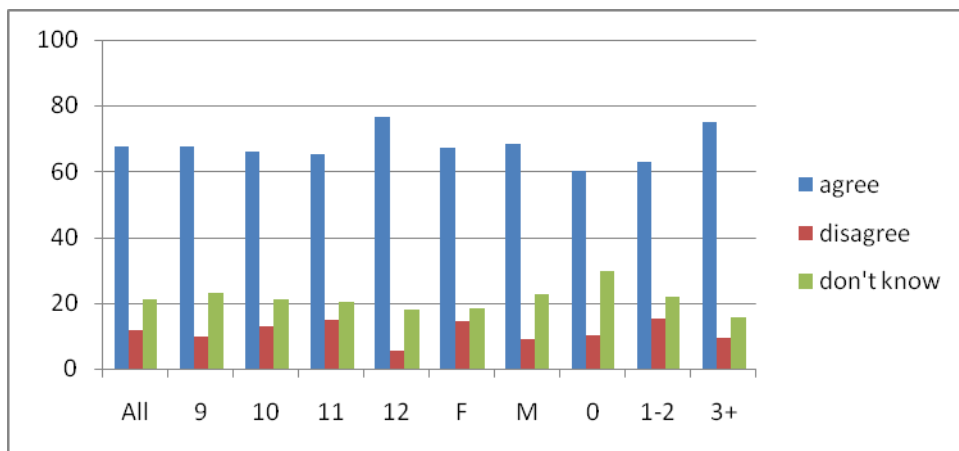
Similar to the prior question, 37% overall responded “don't know” (37%). When the “don't knows” are removed, 53% responded “appropriate,” 45% “too harsh,” and 1% “too lenient.” Grade 12 parents were more likely to say “appropriate” than the other three grades (64% vs. 50%, 57%, 49%). There were no significant differences by gender or number of Acc/AP courses. The second graph excludes “don't know.”





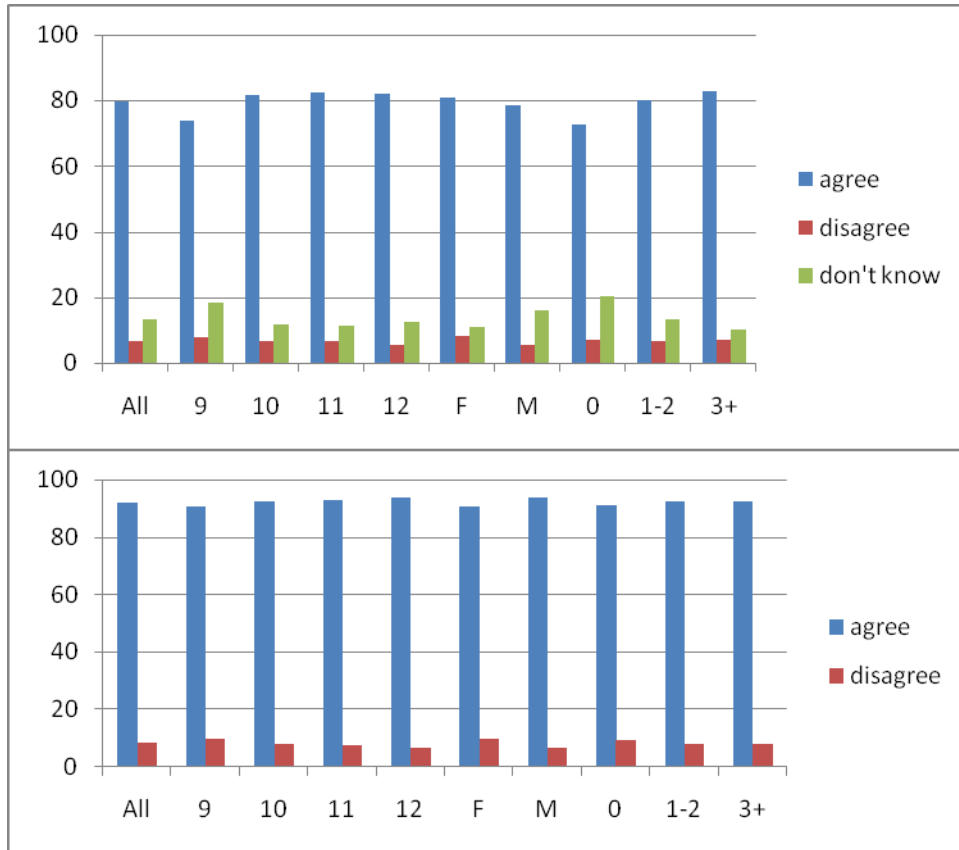
Question 14. My son/daughter has sufficient notice for tests/quizzes (agree, disagree, don't know)

Overall 12% disagreed with this statement, while 21% did not know and 67% agreed. So, among those who did not report “don’t know,” 14% disagreed and 80% agreed. Again, grade 12 parents were more likely to agree than the other three grades (77% vs. 66%). Differences in gender were reflected in the “disagree” (14% M, 9% F) and “don’t know” (18% M, 28% F) categories, while the agreement percentages were similar (67% M, 68% F). The second graph excludes “don’t know.”



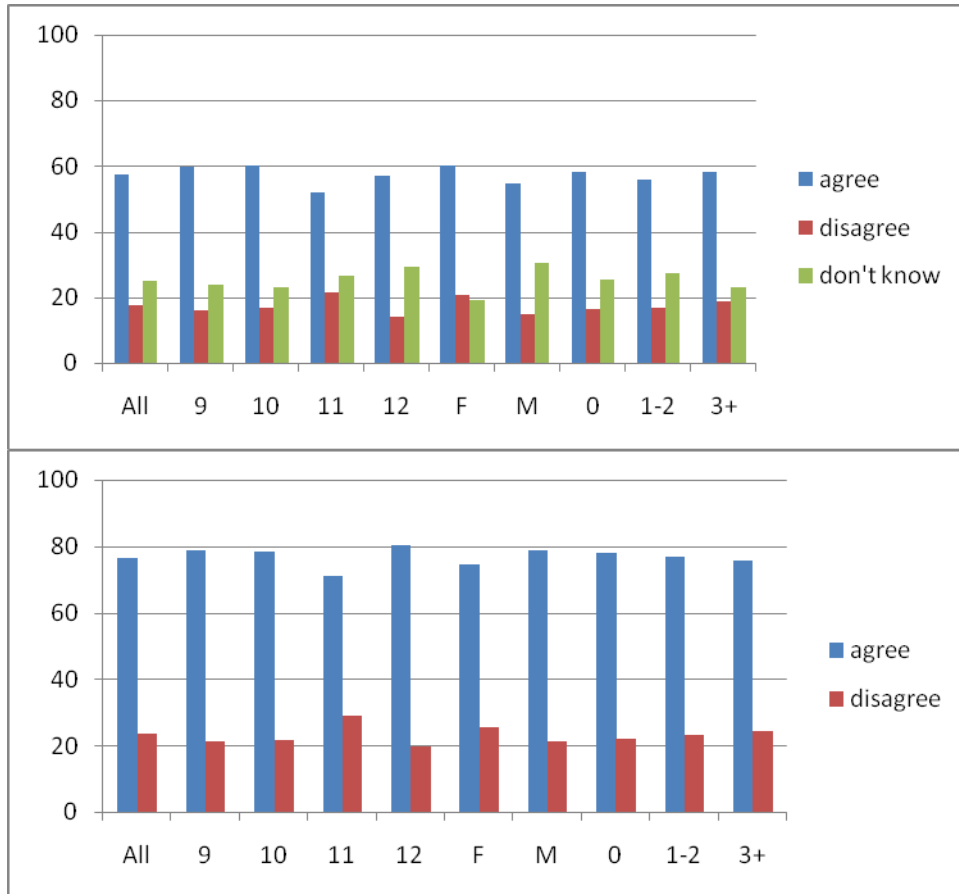
Question 15. My son/daughter has sufficient notice for long-term homework assignments (agree, disagree, don't know)

Overall, 80% of parents agreed, 7% disagreed, and 13% did not know. The number who reported “don't know” was lower for this question about long-term assignments than the prior question about tests/quizzes (13% vs. 21%). When the “don't know” category was removed, 92% agreed, and this was similar among all subgroups. The second graph excludes “don't know.”



Question 16. The type of homework assigned is appropriate. (agree, disagree, don't know)

Overall, 57% agreed, 18% disagreed, but 25% did not know. After removing “don't know” responses 76% agreed and 24% disagreed. Interesting there is little difference by grade, except grade 11 tended to have less agreement (71%) compared with grades 9 (79%), 10 (78%), and 12 (80%), and no difference by gender or number of Acc/AP courses.



Question 17. My son/daughter often has the following going on while doing homework. Check all that apply.

- Music
- Television
- Computer communication (Facebook, IM, e-mail)
- Telephone/texting
- Other (comment)

Unlike prior questions, the responders could check these more than once, therefore they must be tabulate differently, and there is no opportunity to say “don't know.”

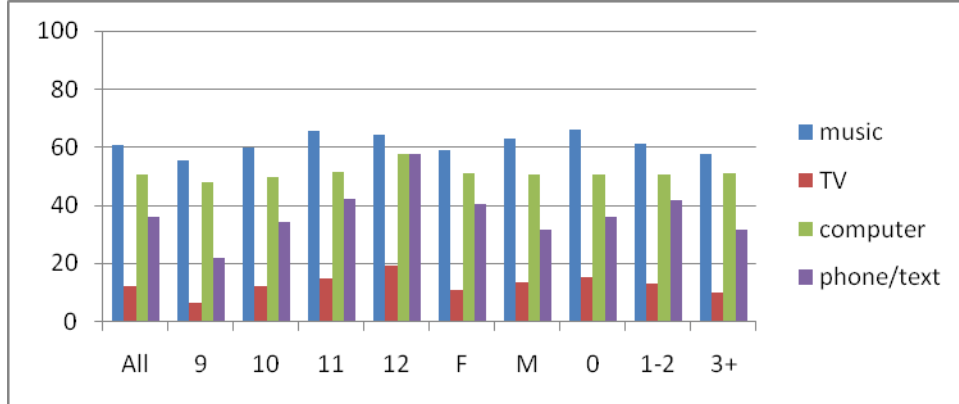
Overall 61% checked **music**. Parents with students in lower grades tended to be less likely to check music (60% 9-10, 71% 11-12), males and females were similar (37% M, 41% F), and the percentage decreased with number of Acc/AP courses (66% 0, 61% 1-2, 58% 3+).

Overall 12% checked **television**, and viewing increased with grade (7% 9, 12% 10, 15% 11, 19% 12) and tended to decrease with number of Acc/AP courses (15% 0, 13% 1-2, 10% 3+). Males and females were similar (14% M, 11% F).

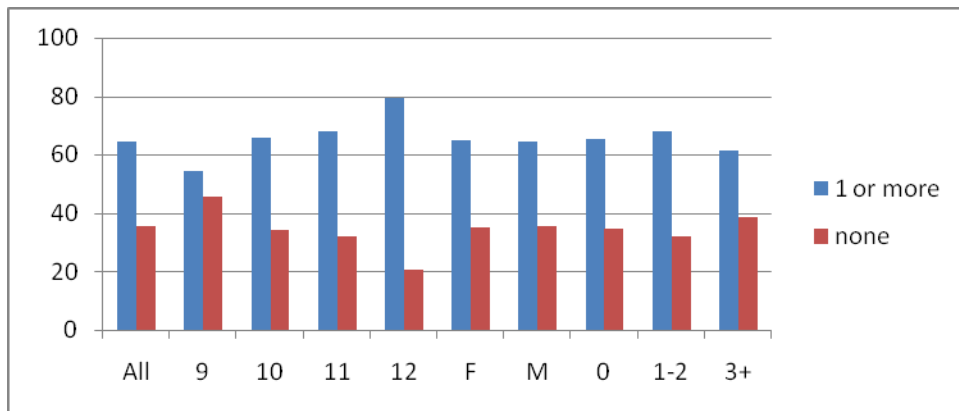
Overall 51% checked **computer communication**, and this also increased with grade (48% 9, 50% 10, 52% 11, 58% 12) but was similar according to gender and number of Acc/AP courses.

Overall 36% checked **telephone/texting**, and viewing increased with grade (22% 9, 34% 10, 42% 11, 58% 12). Females were more frequent than males (32% M, 40% F), and number of Acc/AP courses (0-2) was more than 3+ (40% 0-2, 32% 3+).

Only a few parents responded with “other” and most filled in “none.” These are not reported.

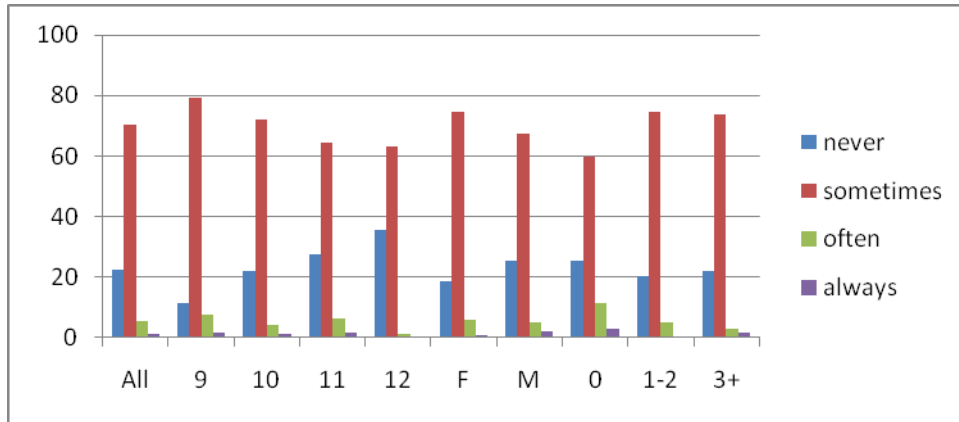


By combining the responses to the four categories, we can determine how many parents reported **at least one such distraction** compared with none. There were 65% who reported at least one distraction while 35% reported none; 35% reported one distraction, 25% reported two, and 4% reported three. None reported all four, and these are not necessarily happening all at the same time. Reporting any distraction increase with grade, from 54% in grade nine to 79% in grade 12, and the results by gender and course level were similar.



Question 18. How often does your son/daughter seek help from a responsible adult in the home (e.g. parent)? (never, sometimes, often, always)

Overall 77% of parents reported that they were asked for help at least sometimes, with 70% reporting sometimes, 6% often, and 1% always. The percentage helping decreased with grade, from 89% of freshman to 64% of seniors. Females were more likely to ask for help (81% vs. 74%). According to number of Acc/AP courses, the percentage seeking help was similar, but parents with students taking no Acc/AP courses reported “often” more than the other two categories (12% 0, 5% 1-2, 3% 3+).



Question 19. If your son/daughter seeks your help, what type of help are you likely to provide? (check all that apply)

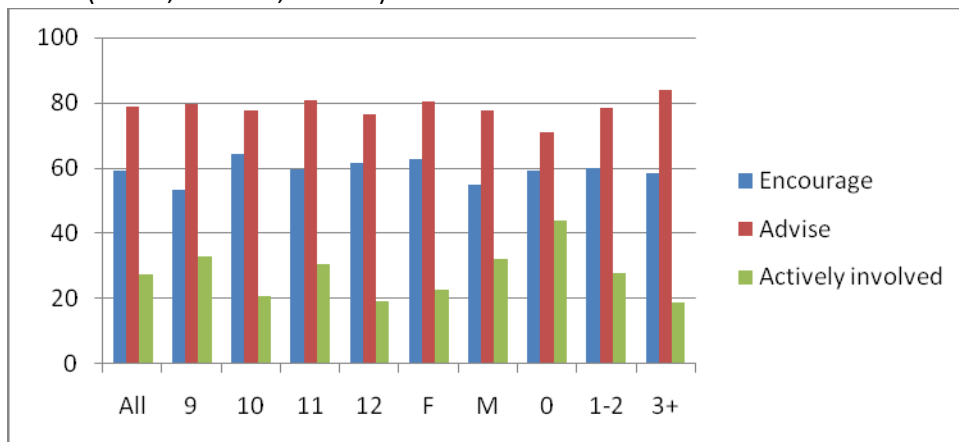
- encouraging
- advising
- actively involved

As with question 17, the responders to question 19 could check these more than once, and there is no opportunity to say “don’t know.” The answers to question 19 are limited to the 446 parents who indicated they were asked for help sometimes, often, or always.

Overall 59% checked **encouraging**, which was similar by grade, was more common in females (63% F, 55% M), but remarkably similar across number of Acc/AP courses (58%-60%).

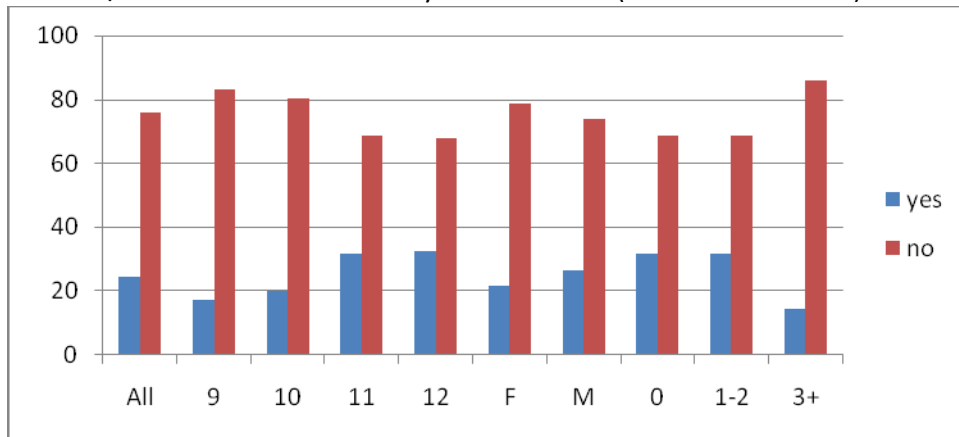
Overall 79% checked **advising**, which was similar by grade and gender, but differed according to number of Acc/AP classes (71% 0, 78% 1-2, 84% 3+).

Overall 28% checked **actively involved**, with grades 9 and 11 having the highest percentages (33% 9, 21% 10, 31% 11, 19% 12), males (32%) higher than females (23%), and increasing as number of Acc/AP courses decreases (44% 0, 28% 1-2, 19% 3+).



Question 20. Have you employed a tutor in at least one subject this school year? (no, yes)

Overall 24% of parents answered yes. Hiring a tutor was less common in the lower grades (18% 9-10 than upper grades (32% 11-12), but similar according to gender (79% F, 74% M). Parents of students taking 3 or more Acc/AP courses were less likely to hire a tutor (14% 3+ vs. 31% 0-2).



Question 21. How often do you check Powerschool to view your son/daughter’s grades? (never, monthly, weekly, daily)

Overall 73% of parents answered that they have checked Powerschool to view grades. Powerschool use was more common in the lower grades (78% 9-10 than upper grades (66% 11-12), and more common for female students (34% F, 20% M). Used decreased with level (84% 0, 75% 1-2, 65% 3+).

Among those who checked Powerschool, monthly was most common (64%), followed by weekly (30%) and daily (6%). A higher percentage of parents whose student took no Acc/AP courses checked more often (44%, weekly+daily) compared with 1 or more courses (33%).

