

No Homework? No Problem.

Eminent education school dean Smug Snidely sees the decline in take-home assignments as allowing students more time to be their authentic selves

[Education Next](#), by Rick Hess, March 18, 2026

A few weeks back, *Education Week* [reported on a new survey](#) of what teachers had to say about homework. The results were illuminating. Forty percent of teachers said they had assigned less homework over the last two years, while just 3 percent said they'd assigned more. Twenty-four percent of teachers assigned no homework at all. Those assigning less homework typically offered one of three reasons: students refused to do it (47 percent), the reliance of students on AI or tech (29 percent), and equity (28 percent).

The whole thing struck me as a dismal window into classroom culture today. For more insight into what to make of it all, I reached out to [S. Smug Snidely](#), renowned education school dean at Paymore U and author of the *New York Times* bestseller *Pay, Meme, Cognicize*.

When we connected over Zoom, I asked what he made of these findings about homework. Did he see them as a troubling sign of indifference about teaching and learning?

“Noooo!” he thundered on my screen. “Not at all! This is marvelous. Students are taking ownership of their learning. Teachers are rethinking expectations. And schools are addressing systemic inequities. What I see is a heartening embrace of pedagogical best practices.”

“Aren’t those just high-minded justifications for students and teachers to do less?” I asked.

“I fear you’re missing the point,” he chuffed.

Pushing his Chuck Schumer glasses slightly higher on the bridge of his nose, Dean Snidely settled into a practiced censorious tone. “First,” he said, “in the *real world*, you don’t have assignments with due dates. I’ve been a professor for three decades, and I’ve never delivered anything by someone’s arbitrary idea of a ‘deadline’. Currently, I’m hard at work on a paper I’ve been writing since 2017. I can’t even imagine the stress of being told, ‘You must finish this for tomorrow!’ Why would we subject students to that?”

“Second,” he continued, “in the AI era, tutoring algorithms allow students to master an hour of learning in 12 minutes. We call this ‘5x learning.’ If students are doing 10 hours of learning in two hours of class, who needs homework?”

“But don’t students benefit from some extra practice and reinforcement?” I asked.

“You seem to think practicing math makes you better at math,” Smug smirked. “That reflects a naïve assumption that students need to learn ‘math facts’—that the goal, as with Pavlov and his famous canines, is for students to mindlessly shout ‘56!’ the moment they hear the stimulus ‘What is seven times eight?’ But that’s just ‘[mindless mimicry mathematics](#),’ as the National Research Council has so aptly put it. What students truly need is to grapple with the moral and sociocultural underpinnings of math. Homework doesn’t help with that.”

“I don’t know,” I said. “I’ve always understood content knowledge and computation to be foundational when it comes to learning math.”

The dean tented his fingers. “This is one of those outdated, hard-to-kill myths,” he explained. “In my book, I call them ‘zombie myths,’ because they’re hard to kill.” He paused. “Like zombies,” he added, in case I missed his subtle pop culture allusion.

“In fact,” he continued, “when you delve deep into the epistemological dimensions of knowing and contemplate the implications for neo-Rousseauian epistolary inquiry, it’s extraordinarily difficult to truly say whether practicing math is beneficial. Given that, how can we justify the mental health burdens that homework imposes?”

“Then there’s the devastating impact on families,” he added. “Homework turns parents into nags. After not seeing their children all day, parents don’t want to ask, ‘Did you finish your homework?’ One mother told me how homework wrecked her relationship with her daughter, by turning her from a loving mom into an academic enforcer.”

“Okay,” I said, “but teachers are reporting that students are simply refusing to do homework. Whatever you may think of the homework itself, that’s got to be a problem, right?”

“You’re clinging to some outdated notions of hegemonic authority,” he sighed. “In throwing off the shackles of routine, students are manifesting Paulo Freire’s liberationist mindset. They’re rejecting repressive pedagogy and reclaiming their time from the voracious capitalist hierarchy. How can one not be inspired?”

“But what if students are just using that reclaimed time to scroll, game, and watch reels?” I asked.

“What a curiously reactionary response,” mused Smug. “Why belittle the trappings of adolescents’ modernity? Every generation has its own pastimes. In my day, I quite liked

going to the library to eat paste; other children rode bicycles and hit balls with large sticks. Today, children mostly aspire to be Instagram influencers. We should welcome the chance to engage students as their authentic selves.”

“What if their authentic selves just don’t like doing work?” I asked. “Schools are dealing with declining achievement and stubborn absenteeism. What if what students really need is a firm kick in the shorts?”

Smug jaw dropped, aghast.

“That’s so . . . primitive. Let me put this in terms you might understand,” he said. “Imagine you’re not very athletic but still yearn to partake in one of those sporty ball games where players hit touchdowns or jam the puck into the basket. You could spend long hours exhausting yourself with Jazzercise, Pilates, and such. But doing so is sweaty and boring. And you might not own the right shoes. You see the problem?”

I wasn’t sure I did, but I nodded.

“Okay, so imagine a new technology permits you to play without the tedious exercises or those coaches with dirty windbreakers and gas-guzzling pickup trucks. That’s what we have with AI. It’s changed everything. Schools need to keep up.”

“What’s that mean for homework?” I asked.

“Homework was about the knowledge and skills to do things,” Smug mused. “Well, AI will soon do everything. The race is over. We lost. It’s time for students to enjoy the spoils of defeat.”

This [post](#) originally appeared on the blog [Old School with Rick Hess](#) at [Education Next](#).