

TDSB Students (Grades 7-12): Homework Habits

Based on the TDSB's 2011-12 Student Census results, this Fact Sheet examines issues related to homework. Relevant questions asked about: students' own perceptions of their time management skills; who usually helps them with their homework; what factors frequently prevent them from completing their homework; and how many hours a week they spend on homework and studying and on part-time work for pay.

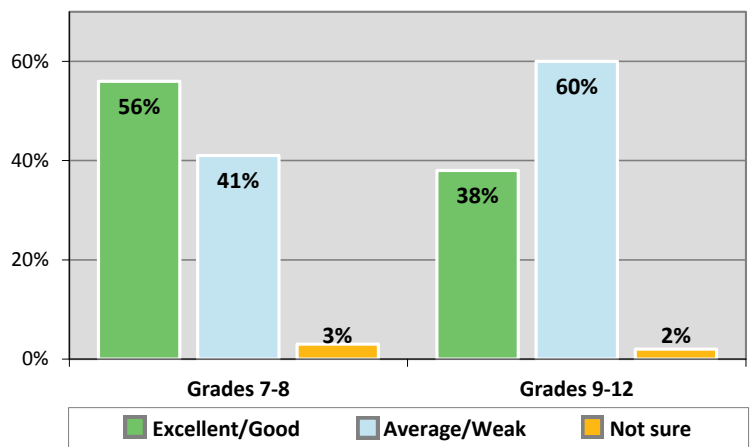
This Fact Sheet first discusses overall results and differences between students in Grades 7-8 and Grades 9-12 for each topic; followed by descriptions of any notable variations by demographic characteristics within the combined Grade 7-12 results. Demographic patterns were found to be quite similar across the grade panels.

Time Management Skills

Although there is room for improvement, middle school students in Grades 7 and 8 were much more positive about their time management skills than students in Grades 9 -12.

- More than half the students (56%) in Grades 7-8 rated their time management abilities as excellent or good, while another 41% said those skills were average or weak. In contrast, 6 out of 10 students in Grades 9-12 (60%) considered their time management skills to be only average or weak (see figure at right).
- One noticeable demographic difference was that students in Grades 7-12 with two parents born outside of Canada tended to rate their time management skills slightly higher than students with two Canadian-born parents or with one Canadian and one foreign-born parent (46% excellent or good versus 39% and 38%).
- Students of South Asian (53%) and Middle Eastern (51%) backgrounds assigned themselves the highest ratings (excellent/ good) for their time management abilities, compared to the overall Grades 7-12 average of 44%.

Student Ratings of their Time Management Skills by Grade



Barriers to Homework Completion

Spending time with friends was the number one reason that often or always prevented students in Grades 9-12 from completing their homework (28%). That was also selected as a top reason for students in Grades 7-8, along with participating in sports or recreation activities (21% each).

- The top five reasons why students did not finish their homework either all the time or often were the same for students in Grades 7-8 and for secondary school level students, although relative rankings were slightly different. As illustrated in the next figure, a larger proportion of students in Grades 9-12 said they had difficulty with the homework (23% versus 15%); had frequent distractions at home (23% versus 15%); or cited some other reasons (37% versus 22%) which were often related to time spent playing video games, on the internet or using the computer for social networking; or self-described laziness and procrastination.



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Barriers to Homework Completion (Cont'd)

Based on a further breakdown of results for all students in Grades 7-12, there was evidence of some demographic differences regarding barriers to completing homework.

Gender

- Males (24%) were more likely than females (16%) to say sports and recreation activities interfered with homework completion.

Parents' Place of Birth

- Fewer students with both parents born outside of Canada said spending time with friends (23%) and participating in sports and recreation activities (17%) was an issue. The percentages for students with two Canadian-born parents were about 10% higher.

Parental presence

- Generally students who live with two parents or share time with both parents reported fewer homework distractions than students who live with their father only or in another less traditional type of household (e.g., guardian, foster, alone, etc.). For example, the latter two groups were more likely to say that spending time with friends (34-30% respectively); having household chores to do (21-24%); working part-time (10-13%); or not having internet access at home (11-12%) always or often prevented them from completing their homework. Those figures were about 6-10% higher than for students in two-parent families. The differences between two-parent families and mother-only families in these same areas were less than 5%.

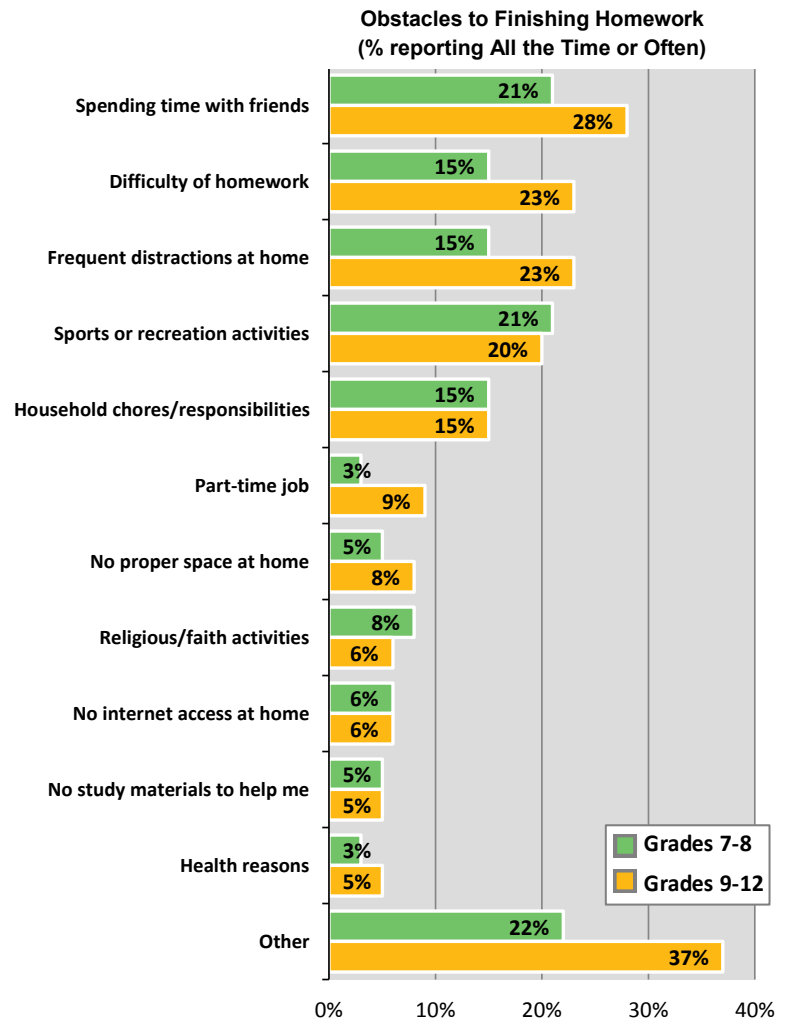
Sexual Orientation (Grades 9-12)

- Students identifying their sexual orientation as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning (LGBTQ), and to a lesser extent those who were "not sure", reported more frequent barriers to homework completion in almost every area. With responses at least 8% and up to 18% higher than respondents who identified as heterosexual, LGBTQ students often or always did not complete homework because of distractions at home (39%); being with friends (37%); homework difficulty (31%); household chores (22%); part-time job (17%); or some "other" reason (57%).

Ethno-racial Background

Compared to Grade 7-12 averages, differences of about 6% or more in the "all the time/ often" category were evident for some self-identified racial sub-groups:

- White students were the most likely to say they didn't finish their homework due to spending time with friends (31%) or doing sports/ recreation activities (26%);
- Students of South Asian background were least likely to mention spending time with friends (19%);
- Southeast Asian students had the most difficulty with their homework (27%);
- Aboriginal students were the most likely to say that frequent distractions (28%) or lack of internet access (13%) at home prevented homework completion; and
- Household chores and responsibilities were an issue for certain groups – Aboriginal, Black, Latin American, Southeast Asian (21-22%) – and less so for White (11%) and East Asian (12%) students.



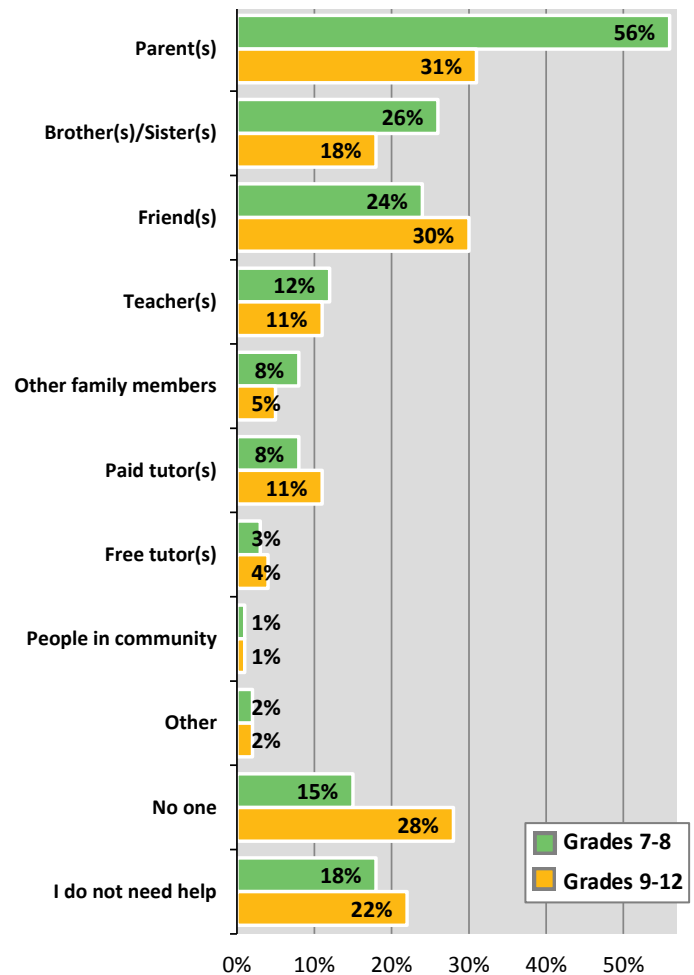
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Who Helps Students with their Homework?

For a majority of students in Grades 7 and 8, parents are the primary source of help for after-school homework support. By secondary school, that number drops considerably and students in Grades 9-12 are equally likely to say they get homework help from their parents, their friends, or no one.

- While most students in Grades 7-8 get homework help from their parents (56%), about one-quarter of them also mentioned brothers and sisters (26%) or their friends (24%) as sources of support.
- Parents were much less involved in assisting with after-school homework for students in Grades 9-12 (31%). Alternatively, high school students indicated they get homework help from their friends (30%) or their siblings (18%); while some say that no one usually helps them (28%) or that they don't need any help (22%).
- In Grades 7-8, girls were twice as likely as boys to say they work on homework with their friends (32% versus 16%). That gender gap was similar in high school as well (37% females versus 23% males).

After School, Who Usually Helps with your Homework?



Looking at demographic factors within the Grade 7-12 results, certain sub-groups were either more or less likely to get homework help after school than others (especially in regards to parental support).

- Compared to students with either one or two Canadian-born parents, students with both parents who were foreign-born get less help from their parents (33% vs. 51-52%) but more help from their siblings (23% vs. 16%).
- Although only 1 in 10 students got homework help from a paid tutor, those students were most likely to be from a two-parent family (11%); with professional/ semi-professional/ managerial parents working in the top two socio-economic status (SES) occupational sectors* (13%); and either South Asian (15%), East Asian (11%) or White (10%).

*Higher SES sectors include parents of students working in professional and senior management sectors, and parents working in semi-professional and middle management sectors. Lower SES sectors include parents of students in Grades 7-12 who work in skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled clerical and trades occupations, and parents who are non-remunerative, including homemakers, unemployed, or retired.

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Who Helps Students with their Homework? (Cont'd)

Higher rates of parental homework support were reported by several demographic sub-groups including:

- Students with two parents present (42%) posted rates 10% or higher than all other household types;
- Students with university-educated parents (49%) compared to those with secondary school only (25%);
- Parents who work in the top two SES occupational sectors (48%) compared to the bottom three (35%); and
- Students who identified as heterosexual (31%) compared to those who identified as LGBTQ (23%).

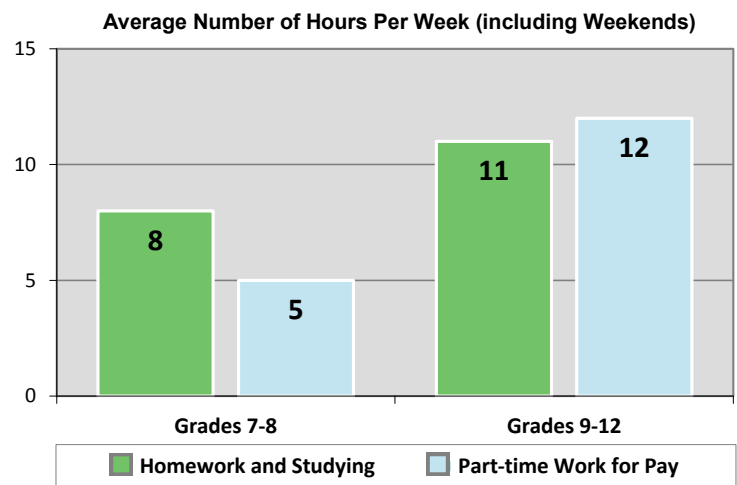
The sub-groups with the least parental support were also most likely to say they did not get help from anyone.

By examining the high and low responses across the ethno-racial-based demographic results for students in Grades 7-12, there were also some differences in “who” usually provided homework help to students of various racial backgrounds as described below.

- Parents: (High) White 50%, Aboriginal 44% and (Low) Southeast Asian 29%, East Asian 28%;
- Brother/ Sister: (High) South Asian 28%, Middle Eastern 27% and (Low) Aboriginal 12%;
- Friends: (High) East Asian 41%, Southeast Asian 38% and (Low) Black 20%, Aboriginal 16%; and,
- No one helps me: (High) Latin American 32%.

Time Spent on Homework/ Studying and on Part-time Work for Pay

- About 22% of students in Grades 9-12 and 12% of students in Grades 7-8 work part-time for pay. Students with a paid part-time job work an average of 5 hours per week in Grades 7-8 and 12 hours per week in Grades 9-12.
- On average, students in Grades 7-8 spend almost 8 hours a week (including weekends) doing homework or studying, which increases to almost 11 hours per week for students in Grades 9-12.



- Based on the disaggregation of Grade 7-12 data by demographic variables, the sub-groups who tended to study or do homework more than the overall average of 10 hours a week included: females in secondary schools (12 hours); students with both parents born outside of Canada (11 hours); students with university-educated parents (11 hours); students whose parents worked in the highest occupational sectors (11 hours); and East Asian (13 hours) and South Asian (12 hours) students.
- Somewhat less time was spent on studying and homework by Aboriginal students (5 hours); Latin American students (7 hours), and students with two Canadian-born parents (8 hours).

With a few exceptions, the sub-groups who spent more time working at a part-time job (> 10 hours/week) were generally not the same students who were putting in extra homework time. Slightly longer part-time working hours (from 11.5 to more than 13 hours/week) were recorded by students with both parents born outside Canada; students living in non-two parent families; students whose parents' highest education level was college or secondary school and/or who worked in the bottom three tiers of the SES occupation scale; self-identified LGBTQ students; and self-identified Southeast Asian, Middle Eastern and Latin American students.