

Ban Homework in Half Moon Bay? Pupils See a Half-Baked Idea

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HALF MOON BAY, Calif., Oct. 28 — When an iconoclastic school board member proposed abolishing homework for students in this coastal community south of San Francisco, the board president jokingly accused him of trying to become the patron saint of all high school students. A ban on homework sounded like the answer to every young person's prayer.

But in the two weeks since the board member, Garrett Redmond, touched off a national debate on the value of homework, many of the school district's 3,500 students have expressed a conclusion sure to delight their teachers: homework is essential to their education, and they do not want it taken away.

Faced with opposition from the four other trustees of the Cabrillo Unified School District, Mr. Redmond withdrew his proposal at a meeting on Thursday night. The board did agree, however, to establish a parent-student-teacher study group to review the district's homework policy thoroughly and to examine ways to restructure the students' school work. The homework policy, adopted in 1991, calls for a time commitment ranging from an average of two hours a week for elementary students to nine hours a week for high school students.

Mr. Redmond, a 65-year-old farmer, said he believed there was no link between homework and academic achievement. His remarks unexpectedly placed his community, which had been famous only for its annual



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Garrett Redmond, a school board member in Half Moon Bay, Calif., touched off a furor when he proposed that homework be abolished for students.

pumpkin festival, under the glare of widespread attention from news organizations.

"It was not my objective to create a media event," said Mr. Redmond, who is retiring from the board this year and who

has been accused of wanting to "go out with a bang." But, he said at the meeting, "We should take out this sacred cow and slaughter the critter."

Mr. Redmond contends most homework is busy work that can turn students sour on learning and rob them of valuable family time. He also said it was unfair to grade students on homework when some had a computer and helpful parents, while others went home to an environment that was less conducive to learning.

"Maybe we are burning out the students," he said in an interview before the board's vote. If students did not have nightly homework, he suggested, they might go to school in the morning "with a new, jaunty step and desire to learn more."

Many students at Half Moon Bay High School said they were embarrassed that Mr. Redmond's proposal had earned their district the ridicule of editorial writers.

Homework "is a way to practice at home what we learn," Jeanne Prieto, a sophomore at Half Moon Bay High School, said during her lunch break. In fact, there is a side benefit, she said, to the two or three hours a night that she spends doing homework. "I actually get to spend more time with my dad," who is a regular helper.

Miss Prieto noted that in the last five years the high school had added Advanced Placement courses and raised its Scholastic Aptitude Test scores significantly. In the last five years, the S.A.T. verbal scores have risen to an average of 467 from 439, and the

mathematics scores have risen to 536 from 472. "That wouldn't be possible without homework," she said. "That would definitely go away."

But several students interviewed said they would support a lighter, more flexible homework load. They also encouraged better coordination between teachers to avoid situations where students must prepare for several tests given the same day.

"I think that instead of cutting homework completely out, we should narrow it down a bit," Alicia Dahlen, a sixth grader, told the board.

The 11-year-old student said she had three hours of homework on a typical night, which left her virtually no time to spend with her family or to do her chores. She recommended that teachers assign a full week's worth of homework on Monday, allowing the students to decide how to pace themselves for the week.

Although no one at the school board meeting supported abolishing homework, many said Mr. Redmond deserved credit for questioning its effectiveness. One board member, Ruth Palmer, expressed her frustration at the dearth of hard data to prove that there was a clear advantage to homework.

"The problem with homework is, when you get right down to it and look at the data," Ms. Palmer said, "homework policies and practices begin looking less scientifically based and much more like chicken soup remedies my grandmother used to give me."