

HOMEWORK

(Compiled by Margaret Carr, Educational Consultant, for the LDAT Conference, November, 1999)

SUCCESSFUL HOMEWORK STRATEGIES FOR TEACHERS

Teachers play a vital role in the selection, assignment, and use of homework. Research indicates that where homework assignments are **meaningful and relevant**, student achievement increases. Teachers will maximize the effectiveness of homework if they will:

- Communicate to parents in the first meeting or correspondence of the year appropriate areas in which parental involvement can help reinforce their children's learning rates, performance, and confidence. Include suggestions to parents on how to provide homework assistance.
- Compare the amount of time the students required to complete homework assignments with an anticipated completion time, and modify assignments as needed.
- Learn student feelings about homework assignments by having them circle smiling, frowning or neutral faces on the corner of homework papers to indicate their feelings too easy, too difficult, or just right. Then modify assignments as needed.
- Plan with other teachers at your school in terms of length and frequency of homework assignments, adoption of similar homework practices, such as a standard style for headings.
- Assign activities such as age-appropriate games (made in class) or other activities that will be fun.
- Assign activities which are relevant to the child outside of the classroom. Assign homework that enriches, reinforces, or supplements classroom instruction.
- Randomly reward homework completion "Everyone finished their assignments last week, so you may have five minutes extra recess today."
- Use a homework planner. Just as adults use calendars or other aids to schedule activities, students can benefit from structured notes. They can be taught to enter assignments, note due dates, and indicate completion. The planner can also be used to communicate with parents by asking parents to sign when homework is completed and to pass notes between school and home (and vice versa).
- Communicate with parents regarding the amount of homework you plan to assign, and approximate time required for completion. If there is a discrepancy between the child's performance and your expectations, treat this as diagnostic information.
- Suggest activities that parents can do with their children so enhance learning.
- Review homework promptly and provide students with feedback and additional instruction as appropriate.
- Explain the purpose of homework assignments and ensure that the assignment is understood.
- Teach study skills such as note taking, strategies to increase reading comprehension, and use of mnemonic memory devices. A number of study skills programs are commercially available.
- Homework assigned to students with disabilities may result in greater acquisition of independent study skills and increase time spent on academic tasks.

HOMEWORK AND STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

Research indicates that homework accounts for about one-fifth (20%) of all the time that students spend on academic tasks. Fifty-six percent of students with learning disabilities have difficulties completing homework. Students with learning disabilities reported boredom and resistance to homework and that they received less help and more criticism from parents.

SUCCESSFUL HOMEWORK STRATEGIES FOR PARENTS OF STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

Parents play a very important role in helping students believe that time spent completing homework assignments can and does make a difference in successful learning. Parents are helping their child with homework when they:

- Stress the importance of homework by providing a time, a place, and supplies for it.
- Reinforce the belief that homework is important by supporting, encouraging, and praising the child's efforts. Remember, we all perform best in a supportive atmosphere in which we are valued as individuals.
- Reassure the child that some subjects are most difficult than others if a child is working hard but with disappointing results. Feel free to discuss what you can do to help the situation with both the student and the teacher.
- Say, "**Tell** me about your homework" instead of asking the child if he/she has homework.
- Provide the child with a clear surface on which to work, good light, appropriate tools, and a comfortable chair. (Not too comfortable - an easy chair may encourage napping.)
- Provide a homework environment that is free from background distractions of television, loud conversation, or pets. For some children "white noise" provided by soft instrumental music helps mask such sounds, for others silence is more effective.
- Intercept drop-in playmates of the child as well as those of his/her siblings.
- Realize that a child may be distracted by subtle things, such as white paper against a dark desktop. If a child is unable to focus after you have eliminated obvious distractions, check out less obvious sources of distraction.
- Recognize that a child may become tired. Even busy walls or buzzing light fixtures may cause the child fatigue!
- Listen to or discuss the main points of a homework assignment.
- Work one or two examples together and make sure that the child understands the assignment.
- Communicate with teachers when more information is needed about assignments.
- Keep in touch with your child's teacher to learn about what the class is studying.
- Look over your child's paper after the teacher returns it.
- **Help** the child to place finished homework into a backpack so that it can be turned in on time.
- Suggest a telephone break during the time that homework is done. Friends will need to be alerted, and the parent can volunteer to take messages for any stray calls.

HOMEWORK REMEDIES AND THE IEP

If a child has difficulty completing homework assignments, he/she may need modifications that coincide with modifications required on the individualized education program (IEP). The following suggestions might be considered:

- Specify the amount of time to be spent each evening on homework.
- Include an agreement to grade only the homework which the child has completed.
- Determine and address the purpose of the homework.
- Consider alternatives to long-term written assignments:
 - Allow the child to use an audio cassette record rather than write assignments.
 - Allow the child's parent to write assignments dictated by the child.
 - Provide graph paper for computation if the student has mathematical disabilities.
 - Numerals can be written in the boxes to avoid failure to line them up vertically.
 - Allow the child to make a model and/or drawing rather than complete a written assignment. For example, make a paper model of a favorite scene in a book, an historical event, etc.
 - Allow the child to do a science experiment and record the results with a video camera (if available), photographs, or drawings. Have the child tell about the experiment.
 - Provide the child with an opportunity to present a short dramatic sketch of a character in a reading assignment, complete with simple costumes, etc.
 - Allow the child to use a computer to complete written assignments.
- If the child has difficulty bringing assignments home, specify that a copy of assignments will be given to the child. You might suggest that the teacher copy his/her weekly lesson plan book for the parent, blocking out personal information or allow the child to have a classmate provide a copy of written assignments (using carbon paper).
- Provide a set of textbooks for home use by the student. Allow parents to highlight topic sentences or significant facts, particularly in social studies and science texts.
- Allow the child to use taped or audio textbooks. These are available from the Texas State Library as well as commercial sources.
- If a student has difficulty copying from a paper or from the board, teach the the child "copy procedures" such as those in *Structures and Techniques: Remedial Language Training*.

References and Resources

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