

## Close-Up #1

# Homework

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## DEFINITION

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Homework is the time students spend outside the classroom in assigned activities to practice, reinforce or apply newly-acquired skills and knowledge and to learn necessary skills of independent study.

## NATURE AND PURPOSE

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### HOMEWORK CAN:

- Provide additional practice, increasing the amount of time students are actively engaged in learning and extending time on task.
- Be useful to teachers for monitoring student progress and diagnosing student learning problems.
- Be an effective way to increase student personal responsibility and individual accountability.
- Facilitate more rapid movement through the curriculum: students augment class time with outside study, freeing teachers to introduce new material more quickly.
- Lead to increased communications between parents and the schools and encourage parent awareness of student learning.
- Contribute to students' and parents' understanding that the school holds high expectations of students.

### RESEARCH INDICATES:

- Schools in which homework is routinely assigned and graded tend to have higher achieving students.
- Traditional homework assignments (pencil/paper work, preparatory reading assignments, etc.) in the early school years are not very effective and should be given sparingly, possibly not at all in primary grades.
- Elementary grade homework should focus on establishing study habits and learning skills.
- There is general agreement that the amount of homework increases significantly as a student progresses through school.
- Homework should be necessary and useful, appropriate to the ability and maturity level of students, well explained and motivational, and clearly understood by students and parents.
- Students complete more homework when teachers make it central to course work, collect it routinely and spend class time reviewing it.

- Homework should be tied to current subject matter, assigned in amounts and levels of difficulty which students can complete successfully and should be checked quickly, with feedback to students.
- Giving homework on a regular basis may increase achievement and improve attitudes toward learning.

## **ACTIONS FOR EFFECTIVENESS**

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### **BOARD AND ADMINISTRATORS**

Create a district or schoolwide homework policy.

- Involve teachers and parents in planning.
- Use research as the basis for formulating policy.

### **CLASSROOM TEACHERS**

Assign homework regularly.

- NEVER give homework as punishment; NEVER use "no homework" as a reward.
- Vary homework assignments: short-term and longterm; practice of new skills; written or oral reports; preparation for new lessons; research projects; enrichment exercises; assignments to spur creativity; etc.
- Daily assignments should not be overly long: research shows that teachers usually underestimate the amount of time necessary for students to complete homework.
- Give classroom assignments built on homework to reinforce the value of homework.
- Give importance to homework through oral comments and by scoring papers regularly.
- Apply effective instructional practice to homework: frequent practice, good preparation, high success rate, check for understanding, correction and reteaching as necessary.
- Assure that students have concepts and skills necessary to do the assignment: insufficient preparation for homework may result in higher levels of student frustration.
- Review the assignment before giving it to students and anticipate difficulties.
- Teach students, especially middle school and up, the skills they need to study: organizing, listening, outlining, note-taking, etc.

Give clear instructions.

- Be clear in informing students that they are responsible for the work and must complete assignments.
- Be clear on how homework assignments are tied to grades.
- Define "late" for assignments and consequences for lateness, and clearly communicate both to students. Repeat periodically.
- Make sure students understand the reasons for the assignment.
- Have students write down assignments or hand out written assignments rather than relying only on communicating assignments orally.

Correct homework.

- Correct homework quickly.
- Have students exchange and correct papers in class.
- Correct all papers/assignments yourself.

- Instead of correcting homework in class, have all students do new work related to homework concepts and correct/discuss them in class.
- Do not accept incomplete homework: return it to students for completion and enforce appropriate, announced consequences.
- Grade homework quickly and routinely so each student will be aware of individual progress: without feedback, homework may result in repetition of errors.

Give feedback.

- In giving feedback, stress developmental comment: rather than give the correct answer, lead students through the process again so understanding is assured.
- Emphasize improvements and successes indicated by completed homework assignments.
- If some homework is not graded, give recognition to students for its completion.

Involve parents.

- Have parents sign an agreement promising that students will do homework without television.
- Provide parents, particularly of elementary students, with study guides to help them help their children learn.
- Contact parents early if the student begins to develop a pattern of late or incomplete work.
- Parents are often asked by students for help: if there is a major change in approach (e.g., the "new math"), alert parents and provide them with information: this avoids parental frustration that can lead to student frustration and disinterest.
- Let parents know they are partners in the student's education and that the sooner a good pattern of study is established, the better.

## PARENTS

- Set a regular study time each day that is not to be interrupted by family plans, school activities or television and with a definite beginning and ending time.
- Establish a study area, away from household distractions, with good light and space for studying.
- Make sure students have the materials they need to do assignments (paper, colored pencils, etc.) and a safe place to store them.
- Have the students organize school materials: study notes, assignments, books, papers, etc.
- Have the student make a daily list of homework assignments so parent and student can both monitor progress on work.
- Help the student work to find the answer rather than doing the work just to get it done.
- Be supportive and give assistance when students get frustrated or discouraged with particularly difficult assignments.
- Contact the teacher to clear up any misunderstandings, troubleshoot problems and be better informed about the students' learning progress.

## STUDENTS

- Write down assignments.
- Be sure all assignments are clear: don't be afraid to ask questions if necessary.
- Set aside a regular time for studying.
- Find a quiet, well-lit place to study.

## **SPECIAL OPTIONS**

Create a homework assistance program.

- Older students tutoring younger students; more advanced students tutoring less advanced students.
- "Hotline" approach wherein teachers are available for set hours each weekday to answer telephone inquiries from parents and students about homework assignments.

Parent awareness program.

- Seminars for parents to help them help students learn: make clear the link of good homework performance to overall student achievement.

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## **EXAMPLE: DISTRICT HOMEWORK POLICY #1**

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The Seattle Public Schools (Washington) in 1983 adopted districtwide homework policy and procedures. A single policy statement applied to all schools in the district:

It is the policy of the Seattle School District that homework is required for all students. Homework standards and procedures will be established within each individual building following the guidelines established by the district.

In addition to this policy, the board also formally adopted procedures, one set for each of three levels: high school, middle school and elementary school. Each set of procedures includes an introduction describing the district homework policy, procedural guidelines for homework standards at individual buildings to assure uniformity, fairness and flexibility, and lists of responsibilities for the school/staff, parents and students. One example follows.

### **MIDDLE SCHOOL HOMEWORK PROCEDURES (G 60.02, ADOPTED JUNE 1983)**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Homework includes any class-related assignments to be accomplished outside of class time, whether voluntary or teacher assigned.

Homework will be used by teachers as an extension of classroom instruction to expand or enrich the regular classwork or to assure mastery of a particular skill or concept.

#### **PROCEDURES**

Each school will develop homework standards and procedures based upon the following guidelines. These standards and procedures will be reviewed and explained to staff, students and parents at the beginning of each school year.

##### **1. SCHOOL/STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES**

The teacher's responsibilities in implementing homework policies are to:

1. Be sure your students understand and know how to complete assignments successfully.

Opportunity should be provided during regular class time to monitor the students' understanding of the assignment.

2. Coordinate homework assignments with other teachers so that no student receives excessive assignments on a single night. Care should also be taken to prevent any one subject from dominating a student's homework time.
  3. Flexibility is important when teachers become aware of student homework overload.
  4. Avoid routine assignments over holiday and vacation time.
  5. Give special consideration to limiting weekend assignments.
  6. Provide specific written explanation of long-range assignments so that the requirements and expectations are clearly understood by the students and their parents.
  7. No teacher should fail to assign needed homework when, in their judgment, homework is required to accomplish academic goals and objectives.
  8. Follow a general guideline of 5-10 hours per week (1-2 hours per night) while giving consideration to individual student needs and ability levels.
  9. Homework will be considered as a part of the total learning process and will be monitored (specific feedback, check in, graded, etc.) in light of lesson objective to be accomplished.
10. PARENT RESPONSIBILITIES

The parent's responsibilities are to:

1. Assist students to develop good study habits by providing a specific time and place for study which is free of television and other distraction.
2. Contact students' teachers or counselors regarding concerns about homework.
3. Student Responsibilities

The student's responsibilities are to:

1. Be sure they understand the assignments.
2. Complete the assignments.
3. Turn the assignments in by the specific due date.

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## **EXAMPLE: DISTRICT HOMEWORK POLICY #2**

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The following is the homework policy for the Indianapolis, Indiana, Public Schools:

### **MESSAGE TO PARENTS FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT**

It is the policy of the Indianapolis Public Schools that homework is, in general, an important pupil activity which contributes to the educative progress. Homework may serve to tie the school more closely to the home. It is a demonstration of teacher expectations to both pupil and parent. By definition, homework is a task initiated and/or motivated in the classroom related to the objective of the course studied which is normally completed during out-of-class time. Homework may take the form of additional practice on exercises, reading of material on a specified subject, in-depth follow-up of classroom activities, or independent project work related to the subject.

### **WHAT ARE THE PURPOSES OF HOMEWORK?**

Homework should:

1. Reinforce skills introduced in the classroom.
2. Achieve mastery of basic learning such as arithmetic facts.

3. Promote independent indepth study of the chosen topics.
4. Provide opportunities for broad enrichment activities.
5. Promote wise and orderly use of time.

## **HOW MUCH HOMEWORK SHOULD BE ASSIGNED?**

**PRIMARY LEVEL.** Homework is usually voluntary at the primary level. Pupils may complete work at home which was begun in class. Special projects may be undertaken which require more time and materials than the school can provide. Additional reading for pleasure should be encouraged. Work missed due to absence may be a proper basis for homework at the primary level. In general, daily or regularly scheduled homework is not assigned.

**INTERMEDIATE LEVEL.** Homework in certain areas may be assigned on a regular basis, especially in reading and mathematics. The homework should be meaningful and consistent with course objectives. In general, homework at this level should not total more than one hour, on the average, per day. Little or no homework should be assigned over weekends except voluntary projects.

**JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL (7-8).** Homework at this level should be regularly assigned, not necessarily daily. Emphasis should be on reading and mathematics. Whenever possible, study time at school should be provided for homework with guidance and assistance from teachers made available. As a guideline, the total daily homework assignments should not require more than two hours and rarely more than one hour for out-of-class preparation time. Weekend or holiday assignments should be largely on voluntary projects or make-up work. Teachers should plan cooperatively in making assignments, so that an equitable load results.

**HIGH SCHOOL (9-12).** Regular homework should be assigned and expected for most high school courses. Typically, the initial phase of homework will begin in the classroom and be completed out-of-class, either at school or at home. Length of assignments will vary according to purpose and level, but it is suggested that moderate assignments completed and well done are more effective than lengthy or difficult ones poorly done. Generally, homework on weekends or holidays should be limited to review, voluntary projects or make-up work.

## **WHAT ARE TEACHERS' RESPONSIBILITIES?**

Teachers should be sure that:

1. The objectives of the lesson and resultant homework are fully understood.
2. The direction, extent and options in homework are clear.
3. Background and reference materials are available.
4. Students at various levels of achievement have a reasonable chance of completing assignments successfully.
5. An unfair burden of homework for a subject is not placed on the pupil.
6. Homework is collected promptly and a record made for each pupil.
7. Homework is checked and evaluated.
8. Homework is normally returned in a short period of time, but not to exceed two weeks, with an indication of the evaluation. Certain material may be retained for display purposes.
9. Parents are informed of their responsibilities.

## **WHAT ARE PARENTS' RESPONSIBILITIES?**

Parents should:

1. Observe closely how well the pupil does his homework and send a note to the teacher whenever the pupil is observed to be having difficulty with a particular assignment.
2. Support the school and the teachers in providing a suitable environment for homework.
3. Provide time and encouragement for their children to do good schoolwork, including homework.
4. Coordinate homework efforts with the teacher in special cases.
5. Guide or assist in homework when unusual difficulties arise (but never do the homework for their child).
6. Provide educational activities that broaden the child's interests, such as visits to museums, the zoo and other places where learning can take place.
7. Monitor television and radio viewing and listening so that homework and other school activities do not suffer.
8. In unusual cases, provide opportunities for specialized help, such as tutoring, when progress falters and all school resources have not been as successful as desired.

## CONCLUDING STATEMENT

The Indianapolis Board of School commissioners is eager to provide the best possible educational opportunities for all the school children in IPS schools. These include physical facilities, professional and supportive staff, learning materials and other resources. Only about six hours per day, on the average, of a pupil's time is under control of the schools. Therefore, parents and the public share the responsibility for educating children in all aspects of life. Homework, along with sports, special programs and other activities is an important link in a total educational program.

## EXAMPLE: A "HOMEWORK HOTLINE"

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The "Help with Homework Hotline" was developed in a cooperative effort among the Duval County Public Schools (Florida), the University of North Florida, Jacksonville University and Edward Waters College. The following describes the "hotline":

### 1. PURPOSE

The Help with Homework Hotline was developed to achieve the following goals:

1. Provide a source of immediate aid for students and/or parents who are encountering problems in the completion of homework assignments.
2. Provide referral services for parents needing information or aid regarding school-related matters.

### 3. ORGANIZATIONAL FORMAT

The Help with Homework Hotline is a telephone resource service developed as a cooperative venture between the Duval County Public School System and the University of North Florida. A bank of four telephones is housed in the school system's Professional Library and manned by certificated classroom teachers. A fifth telephone line is connected to a recorder which is activated when all incoming lines are busy. The recorded message requests caller's name and phone number and these calls are returned by the teachers prior to leaving each evening.

## 3. STAFFING

The Homework Hotline is staffed by four teams of certified teachers. Each team includes at least

two elementary teachers and at least one teacher certificated in secondary language arts and one certificated in secondary math. Teams vary from six to eight members.

Teachers serving as Hotline operators are enrolled in a mentor's level course offered by the College of Education, University of North Florida, and earn three hours of credit for the semester. The University of North Florida provides a faculty member who conducts training for the Hotline operators and who helps provide ongoing supervision of the staff. Tuition and registration fees for each operator enrolled at UNF are funded by the Duval County School System.

#### **4. PROJECT SUPERVISION**

Overall supervision of the Hotline is the responsibility of district level Community Education staff assisted by a UNF faculty member. Two certificated master teachers are employed on a parttime basis to help provide nightly, on-site supervision.

#### **5. DAYS AND HOURS OF SERVICE**

The Homework Hotline is open from 5 - 8 p.m., Monday through Thursday on days public schools are in session.

#### **6. PUBLICITY**

Posters announcing the Homework Hotline have been placed in every classroom in Duval County. Each student receives an adhesive backed sticker which gives the telephone number of the Homework Hotline and which may be attached to a notebook or telephone. Public Service Announcements for both radio and television have been distributed and are broadcast frequently.

#### **7. DATA COLLECTION/EVALUATION**

Each incoming call is logged in by the operator. A data sheet which includes information about the caller's grade level, subject matter, type of skill, etc., is completed by the operator. Evaluation of this information will be accomplished by the Research and Evaluation Department of the Duval County Public School System.

#### **8. COST**

The approximate annual cost of the Homework Hotline is \$7,800. This includes expenses for part-time employees (\$4,500), supplies (\$1,000), telephone service (\$2,000) and telephone installation (\$300).

#### **9. RESULTS OF THE INITIAL ELEVEN WEEKS OF OPERATION**

During the first 11 weeks of operation (October 5 through December 17, 1981) the Homework Hotline operators assisted 5,714 callers for a weekly average of 521 calls and a nightly average of 140 calls.

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### **KEY STUDIES AND REPORTS**

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The following list provides a sampling of key studies and reports which will serve as an introduction to the extensive literature on homework.

England, David A. and Flatley, Joannis K. **HOMEWORK-- AND WHY** (PDK Fastback No. 218). Bloomington, Indiana: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, 1985.

A description of the research background supporting homework, general approaches to homework and guidelines for homework "dos and don'ts."

Good, Thomas L. and Grouws, Douglas A. "Teaching and Mathematics Learning." **EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP**, 37:1, 39-45, October 1979.

A study of teacher behaviors that contributed to increased student learning identifies homework as key instructional behavior.

Keith, T.Z. "Time Spent on Homework and High School Grades: A Large-Sample Path Analysis." **JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY**, 74:2, 248-253, 1982.

Self-report data from about 20,000 high school seniors show a relationship between amount of homework and grade point average.

Knorr, Cynthia L. **A SYNTHESIS OF HOMEWORK RESEARCH AND RELATED LITERATURE**. Paper presented to the Lehigh Chapter of Phi Delta Kappa, Bethlehem, PA: January 24, 1981. (ED 199 933)

Review of literature and research on homework including historical trends in educators' attitudes and a synthesis of experimental findings regarding the effects of homework.

LaConte, Ronald T. **HOMEWORK AS A LEARNING EXPERIENCE: WHAT RESEARCH SAYS TO THE TEACHER**. Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1981. (ED 217 022)

Descriptions of the nature and purposes of homework and synthesis of the research on the usefulness of homework. Recommendations.

Walberg, Herbert J., Paschal, Rosanne A. and Weinstein, Thomas. "Homework's Powerful Effects on Learning." **EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP**, 42:7, 76-79, April 1985.

A synthesis of 15 studies indicates homework benefits student achievement and attitudes, especially if it is commented upon or graded.

## **OTHER RESOURCES**

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American Association of School Administrators. **HOMEWORK: HELPING STUDENTS ACHIEVE**. Arlington, VA: American Association of School Administrators, 1985.

Based on research on successful teaching and learning practices, a publication offering practical advice to parents and students on ways to be successful with homework.

Austin, Joe Dan. "Homework Research in Mathematics." **SCHOOL SCIENCE AND MATHEMATICS**, 79, 115-121, 1979.

Summarization of the research on the effects of homework on mathematics achievement.

Belmont School District, California. HOMEWORK SURVEYS. (ED 233 464.)

A series of surveys, each including the current district homework policy, for parents, teachers and students.

Brophy, J. and Good, T. "Teacher Behavior and Student Achievement." In Wittrock, Merlin C., (Ed.), HANDBOOK OF RESEARCH ON TEACHING (Third Edition). New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 328-375, 1986.

In review of research linking teacher behavior to student performance, homework is cited as contributing to student achievement.

Carney, Juanita. IDEAS AND TIPS FOR STRENGTHENING HOME/SCHOOL RELATIONS San Diego Office of Education, 1984.

Offers suggestions for improving home/school relations, including actions concerning homework to be taken by principal, parents, teachers.

Coulter, Frank. SECONDARY SCHOOL HOMEWORK (Cooperative Research Study Report No. 7). Perth: University of Western Australia, Education Department of Western Australia, 1980. (ED 209 200)

Research results support homework as a way to extend learning time and increase student achievement.

Duckett, Jean C. HELPING CHILDREN DEVELOP GOOD STUDY HABITS: A PARENTS' GUIDE. 1983. (ED 240 061.)

Suggestions to help parents guide their children in the development of good study habits, ranging from setting a definite time for study through provision of support and guidance.

Foyle, Harvey C. "Homework: The Connection Between School and Home." NASSP BULLETIN, 70:487, 36-38, February 1986.

An outline of policy and classroom practice that can increase the effectiveness of homework as an instructional tool.

Goldstein, A. "Does Homework Help? A Review of Research." THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL JOURNAL, 60, 212-224, 1960.

A review of 17 experimental homework studies: four indicate a positive relationship between homework and achievement, four indicate no relationship, nine have mixed results.

Harvard Graduate School of Education in association with Harvard University Press. "Homework." EDUCATION LETTER, 1:1, 1-3, February 1985.

A review of research and issues raised in the ongoing dialogue about homework as an instructional practice.

Irvine Unified School District. HOMEWORK ASSISTANCE NETWORK. Citation as outstanding

program. 1983. (ED 238 425.)

Description of district's cable television homework assistance program wherein high school honor students demonstrate assignments in response to parent or student telephone calls.

Lee, Jackson F., Jr., and Pruitt, K. Wayne. "Homework Assignments: Classroom Games or Teaching Tools?" *CLEARING HOUSE*, 53:1, 31-35, September 1979.

Presentation of a taxonomy for homework assignments and suggestions for pre-service and in-service teachers: practice, preparation, extension, creative homework assignments.

Page, E. B. and Keith, T. Z. "Effects of U.S. Private Schools: A Technical Analysis of Two Recent Claims." *EDUCATIONAL RESEARCHER*, 10:7, 7-17, 1981.

Data from private and public schools show that amount of study time had an effect on student achievement.

Rich, Dorothy et al. "Families as Educators of Their Own Children." In Brandt, Ronald S. (Ed.) *PARTNERS, PARENTS AND SCHOOLS*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 26-40, 1979.

Involvement of parents in homework as means to increase student achievement, including examples of successful programs.

Ritchie, Joy S. *A GUIDE TO EFFECTIVE HOMEWORK PRACTICES*. Lincoln, NE: Nebraska Association of Elementary School Principals, University of NebraskaLincoln Teachers College. (ND)

A description of research results and of approaches to using homework as an effective instructional tool.

Rutter, M., et al. *FIFTEEN THOUSAND HOURS: SECONDARY SCHOOLS AND THEIR EFFECTS ON CHILDREN*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979.

In this study homework distinguished more effective from less effective secondary schools; portrays homework as an important school policy issue.

San Mateo County School District, SMERC Information Center. *HOMEWORK POLICIES OF SAN MATEO COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT*. (ED 233 463.)

Individual homework policies developed by six elementary schools in a California District; adopted in 1980-1982. Some in draft form.

South Carolina State Department of Education. *PALS: PARENT ACTIVITIES FOR LEARNING BASIC SKILLS*. June 1979. (ED 241 120).

Activities to be sent home to parents of K-3 students; learning activities and games to help reinforce students' language arts and math skills and to enhance parental involvement.

Strother, Deborah Burnett. "Homework: Too Much, Just Right, or Not Enough?" PHI DELTA KAPPAN, 65:6, 423-426, February 1984.

A discussion of practical application of the homework research: parental expectations, extended time for learning, effects on achievement and practical suggestions.

Turner, Thomas N. "The Joy of Homework." THE EDUCATION DIGEST, 44-47, February 1985.

Discussion and suggestions for planning and giving homework assignments to assure student engagement and enjoyment of learning via homework assignments.

Turvey, Joel S. "Homework: Its Importance to Student Achievement." NASSP BULLETIN, 70:487, 27-35, February 1986.

Research review and recommendations for action by district/school and individual teachers.

Walberg, Herbert J. "Improving the Productivity of America's Schools." EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP, 41:8, 19- 27, May 1984.

Discussion of nine factors to improve affective, behavioral and cognitive learning. Relationship of television viewing to homework explored.

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