
Core Function: Classroom Instruction

**Effective Practice****Use sound homework practices and communicate with parents**

Overview: Sound instructional practice includes regular use of effective homework practices to reinforce and extend learning, and teacher-parent communication that fosters parents' understanding of their child's academic progress. To be effective, homework should be purposeful and engaging where possible to build student interest, assigned in the appropriate amounts and at the appropriate level of difficulty, and promote parent involvement when possible. Teachers should be aware of their students' home environment and potential barriers to completing homework, and help students develop the metacognitive skills necessary to work independently. Teachers must systematically inform parents of their children's progress towards mastery of objectives and standards, and provide ways for parents to access, understand, and take action based on their child's progress data. Teachers should also record all communications with parents for record-keeping and accountability purposes.

Evaluate Your Practice: Does your school have a consistent and age-appropriate homework policy implemented by all teachers? Have parents received training or information on how to support their child's successful homework completion? Do all teachers teach the metacognitive skills that build students' self-regulation so that they can complete homework assignments independently? What school support structures are in place that help struggling students complete their homework? What, if any, expectations are set regarding teachers' assignment of interactive homework? How do teachers record students' progress toward standards-based objectives? Is this information reported to parents and if so, in what manner and how often? Does the school provide parent training to help with understanding their child's progress data? Is there a common format and schedule for reporting across the school? Is the information discussed at parent-teacher conferences? How does the school connect families with resources based on their child's academic progress? Does the school require all teachers to use a method of documentation of their communications with parents?

Introduction

Classroom instruction can be reinforced and complemented by assigning homework that reinforces and extends student learning, and teacher-parent communication that builds parents' capacity to support their child's learning at home. Homework, when implemented effectively, can serve as an important point of connection between the school and the home; parents must understand both what is expected of their child and their role in monitoring and supporting their child's completion of homework (Redding, 2007). Positive two-way communication between home and school, which involves listening as well as informing, sets the stage for developing a relationship built on trust and respect (Byrk & Schneider, 2003; Hiatt-Michael, 2010). Effective teachers regularly communicate with parents to keep them up to date on their child's progress, and assign homework that reinforces classroom learning and regularly involves parent-child interaction around what is learned in school. This brief will summarize research related to the use of sound homework practices and teachers' use of effective communication with parents regarding their child's progress.

How can homework be used to effectively reinforce, complement, and extend classroom learning?

Research has demonstrated that homework, when used effectively, generally contributes to positive student achievement, study habit and skills, time management, self-regulation, self-efficacy, and stronger school-parent connections (Bembenutty, 2011; Carr, 2013; Cooper, 1989; Cooper, Robinson, & Patell, 2006; Hattie, 2017; Marzano & Pickering,

2007; Xu, 2009). Stronger effects are seen at the middle and high school level (grades 7-12) than at the elementary level, in which students see few benefits, particularly at the youngest ages (Cooper, 1989; Cooper, et al., 2006; Marzano & Pickering, 2007). It is important to note that some researchers have pointed to the potential pitfalls of homework, such as decreased family time, poor performance resulting from too much homework, and the fact that students' ability to complete homework may depend on factors outside of their control (Cooper, et al., 2006; Fernández-Alonso, Suárez-Álvarez, & Muñiz, 2015; OECD, 2014). However, appropriately assigned regular homework (4 or more days a week) can avoid these issues, while positively impacting student learning. Research-based guidelines for effective use of homework (see Marzano & Pickering, 2007) include:

- **Ensuring that homework is purposeful rather than assigned as a matter of routine:** Homework should be used to elicit feedback about students' comprehension (Redding, 2000), and students should leave class understanding why the homework is important for them academically (Xu, 2011). If possible time should be allotted at the end of class for students to begin homework and receive teacher feedback (Darling-Hammond & Ifill-Lynch, 2006). Connecting homework assignments to student interests and providing choices within these assignments can personalize learning and promote student ownership of the learning process (Xu, 2011). Teachers can also make homework engaging and authentic through approaches such as project-based learning, in which students are deeply involved and responsible for homework that contributes meaningfully to a group effort (Darling-Hammond & Ifill-Lynch, 2006). Homework is more effective when it is promptly graded and discussed by teachers in class, and returned promptly to students (Redding, 2000; 2006).
- **Assigning homework at the appropriate level of difficulty and monitoring the amount given:** Students should feel competent in completing homework, and assignments should be differentiated so that students do not get discouraged when they are too difficult, or face boredom when they are too easy (Carr, 2013). Homework is more effective for older students, and the "ten-minute" rule (ten minutes of homework per grade level, per night) is generally recommended (Redding, 2000; Cooper, et al., 2006; Cooper, 2010 as cited in Terada, 2015). Students

should be taught, through teacher modeling and scaffolding, the necessary metacognitive skills such as goal setting, selecting appropriate learning strategies, progress monitoring, and self-evaluation, so that they can self-regulate their independent learning outside the classroom (Xu, 2009; Bembunty, 2011). For example, teachers can model for students how to use planners for time management and also reinforce students' use within the classroom (Carr, 2013).

- **Involving parents in appropriate ways:** Parents should provide support for homework by creating an environment conducive to learning (e.g., providing a specific time/place for homework and a distraction-free environment) (Redding, 2000, 2006). Interactive homework, in which parents receive clear guidelines on their expected roles and ask questions that can help their child summarize, clarify, or extend what they have learned, has been shown to enhance the effectiveness of homework (Van Voorhis, 2003, 2011a, 2011b). Interactive homework should not require the parent to teach content, but should include engaging assignments that stimulate student interest and are appealing to parents whose children are excited to share their learning with them. Examples include parent-child science experiments, sharing ideas and getting parent feedback on written work, and surveys and interviews of parents' experiences and memories (Van Voorhis, 2010).

Teachers should consider that many students face barriers and inequities when completing homework, such as lack of technology at home or lack of supervision due to parents working multiple jobs; extending time for completion can convey the message that all students are held accountable for a high quality of work, rather than a compliance message of "just get it done" (Carr, 2013).

How can teachers communicate effectively with parents regarding their children's progress?

Research has demonstrated that schools can improve their students' learning by engaging parents in ways that directly relate to their children's academic progress; sustained family engagement in students' learning is associated with higher achievement, better grades, increased motivation, and college enrollment (Weiss, Buffard, Bridgall, & Gordon, 2009). Schools at all levels should make parents aware of benchmarks and learning standards mastered by their child, from early childhood through

the school years to allow them to track their child’s progress and stay on track for graduation and college/career readiness (Weiss & Lopez, 2011). Teachers and schools can share progress data effectively by promoting the following (see Weiss & Lopez, 2011):

1. **Access:** Timely and relevant data on academic progress and performance, attendance and behavior can be shared through teacher-parent conferences, and in many cases through electronic sources. However, schools should be aware of families’ internet/computer access, and provide supports as necessary (e.g., extending computer lab hours or working with community partners to set up computer kiosks).
2. **Understanding:** Understanding student data requires time and regular training. Schools should help parents understand educational terminology and student data within a standards-based framework by providing face-to-face training. This training can include developing parent knowledge about what their child should be able to know and do for each of the skill areas being assessed. Parent-teacher conferences can serve as the setting to share student progress data. For example, Academic Parent-Teacher Teams involve teachers explaining standards, goals, and aggregate classroom progress for reading and math to parents in a group setting, along with sharing individual student data for each parent to allow for easy interpretation (Paredes, 2010, 2011).
3. **Action:** Data shared should be actionable; once they understand their child’s data, parents need clear guidance and resources to allow them to take action to help their child overcome challenges and further enhance their strengths. Teachers and schools can provide parents with recommended home activities and link them with community resources (e.g., museums and after-school programs), for example, that can foster their child’s progress towards learning objectives and standards.

Communication with parents about their child’s progress should be child-centered, constructive, clear and concrete (avoid educational lingo and acronyms), and continuous (Mart, Dusenbury, & Weissburg, 2011). Teachers should keep records of their communications with parents, for purposes of accountability and for record-keeping to ensure that they are aware of the frequency and nature of contacts they have with parents of each student. Communication documentation logs can protect

teachers in case of conflict with parents, and provide data to help the teacher develop more effective communication strategies and prepare for IEP team meetings (e.g., see: Webster, 2017). Increasingly digital technology (e.g., apps such as Remind, email, etc.) can allow teachers to seamlessly communicate with parents, while simultaneously providing records and documentation of teacher-parent communications (Knutson, 2016).

Indicators to Support the Effective Practice
All teachers maintain a file of communication with parents.
All teachers regularly assign homework (4 or more days a week).
All teachers check, mark, and return homework.
All teachers systematically report to parents the student’s mastery of specific standards-based objectives.
All teachers regularly make “interactive” assignments that encourage parent-child interaction relative to school learning.

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