

Parent Involvement: Keys to Success

A podcast series from the Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center

Parent Involvement: Helping with Homework

Transcript

Narrator: Homework is a part of a student’s life. There is no getting around it. Even kindergarteners have homework! In this podcast, one of a series on parent involvement in the schools, we take a look at the role state education agencies play in supporting district and school staff regarding the hot-topic issue of homework.

Educators at all levels can provide valuable resources to parents. State-level educators are in a unique position to provide leadership and resources to all stakeholders in the education system—from superintendents to parents. This podcast provides research, ideas, and strategies that can be shared with educators and parents to help them help students.

Helping Your Child with Homework, a U.S. Department of Education booklet, states that according to research, children are more likely to succeed in learning when their families actively support them. “When family members read with their children, talk with their teachers, participate in school or other learning activities, and help them with homework, they give children a tremendous advantage.”

In presenting research findings, the National Education Association publication titled *Getting Involved in Your Child’s Education* points out that there are three kinds of parent involvement at home that are consistently associated with higher student achievement. They include actively organizing and monitoring a child’s time, helping with homework, and discussing school matters.

Research supports the idea that homework can have a positive impact on learning. Homework and practice is one of nine strategies identified by Dr. Robert Marzano and his colleagues as being most likely to improve student achievement. However, the researchers caution that homework must be used properly to have a positive impact on students.

According to the U.S. Department of Education booklet *Homework Tips for Parents*, homework has four main purposes. First is **practice**. These assignments are intended to reinforce learning and help students master skills presented in class. Second is **preparation**. This work introduces materials that will be presented in future lessons to activate background knowledge and increase learning. Third is **extension homework**. These assignments require students to apply skills they have already learned to new situations. Fourth is **integration homework**. It asks students to apply many different skills to a single task, such as writing reports or completing science fair projects. Knowing these purposes for homework may help educators and parents answer the question, “Why do I have to do this homework?”

In addition to increasing content knowledge and skills, homework can help students develop good study habits and positive attitudes, especially in younger children. Through regularly completing homework, children learn time-management and independent work skills. Homework can help children learn self-discipline, and help them develop good study habits. These are skills we all need in the work environment, and it is good to begin to instill those good habits at an early age.

But what role should parents have in their child’s homework? Do parents know how to help? Let’s listen as a parent, Amy Jones, tells what happens at her school in North Carolina.

Amy: “During the school year, parent education nights occur very frequently. They cover various topics from homework—how to help your child complete their homework—to just going over what is in the curriculum and how you can help your child. There will also be nights that focus on reading and reading literacy, and give you tips to improve your child’s reading. We have a newsletter that comes home from the school that also includes a lot of tips on how to help your children.”

Narrator: As Amy mentions, bringing parents together to learn strategies for helping children with homework is a great way for parents to learn and share ideas. Teachers, however, may need guidance on how to design family-friendly homework assignments.

Authors Sara Bennett and Nancy Kalish suggest that teachers often do not receive proper training on how to assign homework. Researchers Robert Marzano and Debra Pickering assert that homework should be purposeful and directly related to classroom learning. In addition, researchers remind us that the positive learning effects of homework relate only to the amount of homework that is completed by students, not the amount of homework that is assigned by teachers. Teachers, therefore, must design homework that can be successfully completed by students and also directly relates to what they are learning in class.

Researchers at Johns Hopkins University developed the *Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) Interactive Homework* process to assist teachers in assigning meaningful homework. Using the TIPS process, teachers design homework that requires students to talk to someone at home about something interesting they are learning in class. The interactive assignments require students to demonstrate or discuss their homework with a family member. For example, the students may interview someone, ask for reactions, discuss real-world applications of skills, ask about a family member’s experiences, or read aloud things they have written. Parents monitor, interact with, and support their child, and are asked to add observations, comments, or questions for the teacher. This process was designed to keep the parents aware of what their children are learning while helping students master important skills.

Many parents feel unprepared to help their children with homework. Research indicates, however, that parent involvement in homework can enhance learning when the assignments engage students in conversations with their parents or other family members. Joyce Epstein, director of the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships, suggests that parent involvement can enhance homework under these conditions:

- First, homework is interactive.
- Second, parents receive clear directions on how to assist their child.
- Third, parents are not expected to teach the content.
- Fourth, parents pose questions that help students summarize or clarify their learning.

Let’s listen as Reginald Smith, a parent from North Carolina, describes how he tries to help link the learning that is going on in his child’s class with things done at home and as a family.

Reginald: “I believe that my role at the school, in the setting where we live in Durham, my role is to really accentuate what I know the teachers are trying to convey to my particular kid. And so what we actually do is create as many pieces at home that will support what we know is under way. For example, while the school might take them on science adventures while they are still in K through 5, my wife and I might take it to another level and buy her, ‘how to actually set up a volcanic reaction.’ So I think that one of the pieces that I believe parent involvement would help with for so many parents is how to give your kids what I call ‘experiential experiences,’ so that they can actually see and touch some additional pieces around science—around some of the subjects that really get advanced when they move up to middle school, and I know that science is one of them.”

Narrator: SEAs can

- share research and information with educators to help them learn to design purposeful and meaningful homework that has a positive impact on student learning
- help educators learn to align homework and assignments with standards and individual student learning goals, and
- provide guidance and resources to school and district staff to support them in their work with parents and students.

The U.S. Department of Education booklet, *Homework Tips for Parents*, provides strategies and guidance for parents on how they can best assist their child with homework. A link to this booklet, as well as links to other resources, is available on the podcast launch page.

Continuing communication between parents and teachers is essential. Homework help may be one way to strengthen the connection between school and home. We hope you have found the ideas in this podcast helpful in thinking about how to use homework as a way to bring together students, parents, and teachers to impact student learning.

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