Homework Supports Learning Toolkit

Just as students need to engage in meaningful activities in school, their homework assignments should engage them in tasks that are challenging and focused on worthwhile subject matter content (see the “Planning and Evaluating Activities for Students” section for more tools). Parents play an important role in assuring that the activities you assign actually get done. They also can play a central role in supporting students’ learning.

The following four tools are designed to help you think about how to communicate with parents and support them in making homework activities worthwhile.

1 of 4. How will parents know about my homework policies and routines? Because homework will typically require a regular block of time, parents need to know what is expected of their student and of them. They also need to know how you think homework fits into their child’s educational program and how it contributes to their child’s learning.

The following newsletter provides a template that can be adapted to your situation. Information like this could be sent home at the beginning of the year/semester, or included in your classroom newsletter or handbook.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Making Connections: Homework Policies and Routines</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dear Parents,</td>
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<td>Homework is an important way to extend and support the learning that your child is experiencing at school. The following information about policies and routines will help us work together to support your child’s learning. I hope that you will contact me if you have questions!</td>
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<td>Sincerely,</td>
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<td>[your name]</td>
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<td>• What types of activities will be assigned?</td>
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<td>• How often will homework be assigned?</td>
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<td>• How much time will a typical homework assignment take to complete?</td>
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<td>• How much and what type of help should parents give?</td>
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<td>• What if parents have questions about a homework assignment?</td>
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<td>• What happens if the student is absent?</td>
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2 of 4. How do I help parents support their student’s learning? Parents are typically willing to support homework policies and routines, but may be uncertain as to exactly what role they can play. Below is a notice that can be adapted to your grade level and situation. It could be sent home as a flier, or included in a newsletter or handbook.

**Making Connections: How can homework support learning?**

Dear Parents,

I think of homework as a way to extend the learning that your student is doing at school. It can provide extra practice to understand concepts and develop skills. It also teaches students organizational skills and gives them a chance to work independently and take responsibility for their learning. Here are some ways you can support their learning. I hope you will find this information to be helpful!

Sincerely,
[your name]

**Create a study area and routine:**
- Find a place in your home where materials are available (books, paper, pencil, lighting, place to read/write) and distractions are minimal.
- Establish a schedule and routine for homework so you and your student know what to expect. Try to schedule at least some of the homework time when you are available for questions and assistance. This also provides opportunities to discuss your student’s work.

**Establish your role in their homework:**
- Your student should take the lead in scheduling and doing homework. Your role is to provide support if guidance is needed.
- Show interest in homework activities on a regular basis so you’re not involved only if there are problems.
- Reward progress in completing activities and in the learning that is going on.
- When providing help, ask how the class typically approaches an activity and follow the routines your child is familiar with.
- Help your child seek additional resources as needed (e.g., locate materials on a specific topic, find someone who can help with an activity if you are not familiar with the content)
How can I build in more active parent involvement in the homework that I assign?

Some teachers design homework activities that require families to become involved in the activity itself.

Interactive Homework: the National Network of Partnership Schools (http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/) has developed a process called Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) Interactive Homework.

Interactive Homework assignments require students to talk with someone at home about a question, issue, or project that is connected to what students are learning in class. Often, these activities move beyond having students ask for help with an activity and get family members involved in contributing to the activity. In this way, families are discussing subject matter with students and finding out more about what they are talking about learning at school.

You can access http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/tips/TIPSmain.htm for more information about TIPS interactive homework, sample activities, and blank TIPS templates.

Here are a few examples of the types of TIPS activities you will find:

- Students are asked to interview a family member about a topic.
- Students are asked to survey family members of a certain age group about a topic.
- Students are asked to write a draft of a story, share it with a family member, and ask the family member for more examples related to their topic.
- Students are asked to find examples of objects at home related to a topic being studied, such as products that come from animals. Or they may be asked to document whether/how families participate in activities such as recycling.

Does regular family involvement have to be done as homework activities? Rather than sending activities home as single homework assignments, teachers can organize ways for students to take materials home so parents can work with their children on a regular basis. The following example can be adapted to your grade level and subject matter.

Home Literacy Kits: Michelle Hubbard (http://www.hubbardscupboard.org/index.html) has developed an idea for sending materials home for a one-week time period approximately 1-2 times per month. The kits contain 3-5 fiction and non-fiction books related to a particular theme, and activities (with direction sheets) that support learning in literacy, math and/or science (see http://www.hubbardscupboard.org/literacy_kits.html for more information). Sample topics include:

- Action rhymes
- Colors
- One, two, three count with me
- Pumpkin time
- Fish tales