



HOMework & OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME PROGRAMS:

*Filling the Need,
Finding a Balance*

Susan O'Connor
Kate McGuire



*The MOST Initiative
National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST)
Center for Research on Women
Wellesley College
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Introduction

Homework has become a hot topic for school-age care providers. Ten years ago, providers believed that families were responsible for helping children with homework. But the needs of children, families and communities are changing. This booklet is designed to help providers and parents think about the role of out-of-school time programs in helping children with their homework. It will provide information about the purposes and effects of homework. It will also help providers and parents think about whether their program should provide homework help. Finally, it will introduce ideas and strategies for supporting children's learning.

What is the Purpose of Homework?

- To practice lessons learned in school.
- To introduce material that will be learned the next day in school.
- To apply skills to new situations.
- To apply many skills to one project (ex: book reports, science projects).



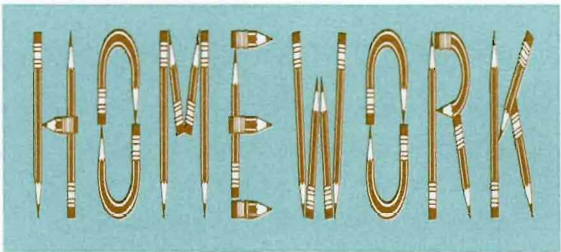
NIOS's Position on Homework Assistance

- The best homework policy reflects the opinions and needs of children, families, program staff and schools. Staff and parents can look at the research on homework, and the resources available, when designing their policy.
- Homework help and learning activities are especially important for children who are struggling in school or whose families are not able to help with homework.
- Homework is only one way to support school success. Programs can also offer recreational reading, tutoring, and many other learning activities.
- Children's academic needs must be balanced with their needs to relax, have snacks, learn new skills, get exercise, and develop social skills.



What research tells us¹

- Homework is more effective for youth in middle school and high school. Homework has a smaller effect on school achievement for children in elementary school.
- Short, frequent assignments are most effective.
- The recommended amount of homework time per day increases as children get older:
 - Grades 1-3: 10-45 minutes
 - Grades 4-6: 45-90 minutes
 - Grades 7-9: 60-90 minutes



¹Cooper, Harris. 1989. *Homework*. New York: Longman.



Possible positive effects of homework:

- + Children learn how to study. Children get in the habit of doing work on their own. They know they can learn and succeed.
- + Children practice skills they have learned in school. They also learn new skills.
- + Children see school as their responsibility. They learn to solve problems on their own. They learn to plan ahead and save time for their work.

Possible negative effects of homework:

- Children may spend too much time on homework. They may get tired. They may lose interest in school.
- Children may not have enough time to relax and make friends. Children may not have time to learn new skills like sports, art or music.
- Children who do not have the support to finish homework may fall further behind in school.



Learning what people think

When deciding if your program should provide homework help, it is important to think about the needs and opinions of everyone involved. Here are some sample questions to ask.

Children

1. When do you do your homework now?
2. Do you have the time, supplies and help that you need to do it?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of doing homework at the program?

Program Staff

1. Would it help children and families if homework was done at the program?
2. What are the advantages/disadvantages?
3. Would you feel comfortable helping children with their homework?
4. What kinds of training and support would help you give quality homework assistance to children?

Families

1. Would you like your child to do her/his homework at the program? How would this be helpful or not helpful for your child? For you as a family?
2. What kind of help does your child need?



School Staff

1. Do you feel that after-school staff should provide homework help?
2. What are the advantages/disadvantages?
3. Would you be willing to help program staff by giving them information about:
 - individual students: strengths, learning styles
 - what is taught in the school and how it is taught
 - school district learning goals.

Setting a Homework Policy: A Discussion Guide

1. Will we just offer the time and place to do homework or will we offer homework help?
2. Who will offer it (program staff, teachers from school, volunteers, tutors, etc.)?
3. What training and supervision will they need?
4. How much time should be set aside for homework? Should children have to complete their homework?
5. Where can we locate a homework corner?
6. What resources are needed?
7. How can good communication be maintained between families, schools, and providers if homework is to be done in the program?
8. How will you follow-up to be sure this homework policy is working?

Different Models for Homework Assistance

Homework as One Activity Choice

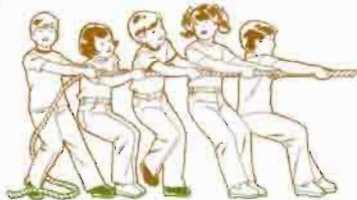
Some programs create a homework space. Each day children decide if they want to go to the homework space or not. They also decide when to go to the homework space.

Advantages

- Gives children the chance to make thoughtful decisions about homework.
- Lets children relax or blow off steam when they need to.

Disadvantages

- Homework may not get done.
- Children who have problems with homework may not do it.



Homework as a Contracted Activity

Children, families and programs enter into a contract about homework. The contract says how much homework a child will do, and when they will do it.



Advantages

- Allows children and families to work out decisions about homework together.
- Both staff and children know what the child is expected to do.

Disadvantages

- Adds a layer of paperwork.
- Parents may pressure children to sign a contract that the children do not agree with.



Homework as Part of the Daily Schedule for Every Child

A mandatory homework time is set for every day.



Advantages

- Provides quiet time for programs with limited space.
- Offers structured homework time for children who are easily distracted.

Disadvantages

- Children have no choice. There is no flexibility to meet their different needs and moods.
- Children who don't have homework may:
 - 1) have nothing to do
 - 2) be given worksheets that are too hard or too easy.
- Young children may be expected to spend as much time on homework as older children.

Homework Help that Includes Tutoring, Mentoring or Learning Activities

Advantages

- Builds academic skills. This is especially important for children who are struggling in school.
- Provides positive role models and relationships.
- Offers one-on-one help to meet the different needs of each child.

Disadvantages

- Reduces time for children to relax or blow off steam.
- Leaves less time for children to build relationships with other children.
- Decreases time for social, creative and physical activities.





Tips for Helping Children with Homework

It is helpful when people:

- ✓ are patient
- ✓ are respectful
- ✓ are genuine
- ✓ walk children through the problem one step at a time
- ✓ find out what the child already knows, then encourage problem-solving by asking open ended questions
- ✓ guide children to the answer.

It is not helpful when people:

- ✗ are too busy to help
- ✗ are condescending
- ✗ are judgmental
- ✗ are sarcastic
- ✗ take over
- ✗ go into lecture mode.

Children who Struggle with Homework

If a child struggles with homework on a regular basis, the child may be having an academic problem.

- The child may be behind in school.
- The homework may be too hard.
- The child may need extra help in a subject.
- The child may have a learning disability.

When a child is having problems, it is important for program staff to talk with parents and school staff. Together they may find the best way to help the child.



Finding a Balance: What do Children Need?



Homework is important. But children also need time to:

- relax and have a healthy snack
- develop a strong sense of self
- build relationships with children and adults
- explore their creative talents
- learn about the world around them
- practice physical skills.

Schools often focus on reading, math and language arts. It is also important for children to learn art, music, and “people skills.” They need to explore their communities and cultures. There are many ways to be smart and many skills that will help children succeed in life. Out-of-school time providers can offer children age-appropriate, culturally relevant activities. These experiences let children develop new skills and strengthen ones they already have. Providers can support skills learned in school by creating fun projects or through field trips.



Examples of Fun Learning Projects

- Take a field trip to a local science or art museum.
- Ask children to interview members of their families about where they have lived and what they have done. Younger children can share the stories of their families. Older children can write down what they learned. They can collect the stories and make a book to keep at the program.
- Have children make up new words for their favorite songs.
- Once a week during winter, take the children out to look at the moon. Children can draw the different phases. They can get a book from the library and learn the names of the phases. They can make paper mache models of them. They can use glow-in-the-dark stickers to map moon phases on the wall or ceiling.



For more information:

This booklet is based on a research paper by the same authors. The paper provides in-depth information about all of the topics covered in this booklet, plus:

- program models from around the country
- a sample homework agreement
- a resource guide
- a sample agenda for training providers to help with homework.

To order the full text version of this paper, contact:

NIOST Publications

Center for Research on Women

Wellesley College

106 Central Street

Wellesley, MA 02181

or call the NIOST Publications Department
at (781) 283-2525

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