

# Homework Plans

## A Tool for Promoting Independence

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*With long brown braids and a huge smile, Kelly is a 12-year-old sixth grader attending an intermediate school in a large suburban community. Kelly is currently receiving special education services to address academic and behavioral learning needs. When given extended time and reminded (sometimes repeatedly) to think about what she has to do, Kelly usually completes at least part of her school and homework assignments.*

*At school, Kelly spends the majority of her day in the general education classroom. Debbie, her general education teacher, works hard to include Kelly in daily classroom activities. Kelly's special education teacher, Tina, works with Kelly for 1 hour each day. In addition to her individualized education program (IEP), Kelly has a behavior intervention plan that focuses on reducing task-avoidant behavior (described as verbal protestations, laying her head down on the table, and/or trying to run away from the work environment).*

*Homework has been a long-standing challenge for Kelly. Her mother, JoAnna, reports "major battles" during homework time, resulting in tantrums and incomplete assignments. Tina and JoAnna have recently been discussing Kelly's transition to junior high next year. Both are concerned about the increased amount of homework that she will be expected to complete then.*

### Is Homework Worthwhile?

For many students, parents, and teachers, the word *homework* elicits

feelings of dread. For students, the thought of having free time after school is often a key motivator, helping them get through the school day. Homework can make the "school day" seem endless, with the idea of sitting down to additional schoolwork after 3 o'clock seeming pointless and unfair.

For parents, especially parents who work, homework may seem an unwanted extension of the workday as well. Thoughts of relaxing on the couch and watching a favorite television show disappear when a parent learns that a child has homework and needs help. Teachers may view homework as yet another demanding task in an already overwhelming workday. Homework assignments require not only advance planning and preparation but also the subsequent review of completed work and the provision of feedback to students. Overall, it is not surprising that families, students, and teachers might question the value of homework from time to time.

However, homework has been found to directly relate to academic achievement overall (e.g., Cooper, Robinson, & Patall, 2006; Coutts, 2004). Homework is also associated with improved student attitudes toward school and increased parent involvement in the educational process. In addition, it may serve to promote better study habits and facilitate understanding of course material (Coutts, 2004).

Homework may be especially effective in promoting the academic skills of students with disabilities

(Lynch, Theodore, Bray, & Kehle, 2009). Studies examining homework and students with disabilities have reported that time spent on homework has important positive effects on learning (Bempechat, 2004; Lynch et al., 2009). Specific potential advantages include increased time on task, enhanced review skills, and potentially greater practice with and generalization of newly acquired skills (Axelrod, Zhe, Haugen, & Klein, 2009).

Homework can help students develop organizational skills and promote self-management. By learning to self-manage, students also build self-determination skills. Such life skills as setting goals, determining steps for reaching those goals, and effectively problem solving can all be enhanced through carefully planned and relevant homework assignments.

### What Is the Appropriate Role of Homework?

Although homework is common in most educational settings, not all students benefit from this learning tool, especially without careful planning and forethought. For students with mild disabilities, determining the specific ways in which homework might enhance student skills and success is a critical first step. For many students—especially those with intellectual, learning, or behavioral issues—homework may be especially important in providing the extra time required for any newly taught skills to become established (e.g., Lequia, Machalicek, & Lyons, 2013).

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**What Role Should Parents Play in Homework?**

Parents can play a variety of roles in homework for students with disabilities, all of which can support students' individual learning goals. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) describes a central role for parents in the planning and implementation of school experiences. Homework assignments can be an extension of school experiences for students with disabilities.

Although it is important for students with disabilities to develop independence and personal responsibility in homework completion, research has demonstrated that parent involvement with homework activities can help students achieve higher rates of completion (Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008). Cancio, West, and Young (2004) found that a combination of self-management strategies and parent participation was effective in helping students with emotional and behavioral disorders successfully complete homework assignments. A realistic compromise between student self-management and parental support might seek to provide parents with a clear understanding of homework expectations and suggested appropriate levels of parental support, while avoiding undermining students' personal responsibility and independence.

Not all parents will have sophisticated curricular knowledge and skills, which can be an issue with homework that may become significant as students move into junior and senior high. Similarly, parents should not be asked to develop and implement homework assignments, adaptations,

and accommodations. These roles should be assumed primarily by the student's teachers who are creating the homework assignments. The primary role of the parent in the homework routine should be one of monitoring already accommodated homework assignments. This could include (a) prompting (as appropriate) to help the student begin and stay on the homework task, (b) helping the student problem-solve with such issues as directions and finding information, and (c) praising and otherwise reinforcing the student for staying on task and completing assignments.

In addition, teachers might offer suggestions for parents that incorporate preexisting household tasks and roles that can serve to further extend skills being covered at school. For example, when covering the addition of numbers with two decimal places at school, the teacher might ask that, in the future, the student bring a calculator when shopping at the grocery store with a family member. While there, the student can maintain an ongoing tally of the amount of the items to be purchased and then compare the amount with the cashier. Similarly, when classroom instruction targets measurement, a parent might be asked to have the student measure the proper amounts of detergent, bleach, and fabric softener needed for each load during laundry time at home. Options such as these facilitate generalization of skills taught at school and have meaning within daily living tasks that families need to complete.

As is the case for teachers, parents may initially have to provide higher levels of support as students begin to acquire these new skills. As students begin to demonstrate higher levels of homework independence, parents can begin to withdraw those supports.

**Establishing a Homework Plan**

Homework is appropriate for students with disabilities when their individual learning goals align with the potential benefits of this learning tool.

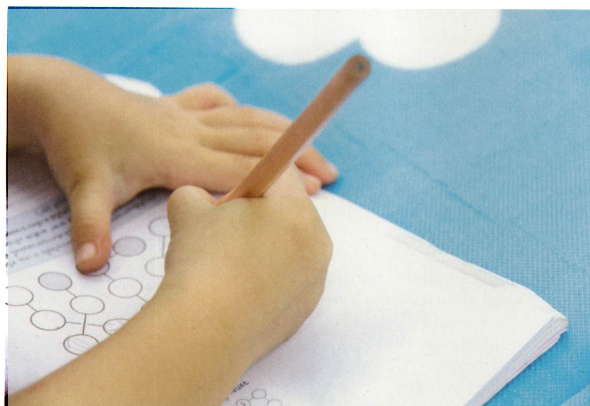
Particularly for those students who are in inclusive settings, homework provides an opportunity for practicing and generalizing new skills while gaining greater personal independence. Like Kelly, many students benefit from the extra opportunities to practice and reinforce newly acquired skills that well-planned homework assignments provide.

**Homework is appropriate for students with disabilities when their individual learning goals align with the potential benefits of this learning tool.**

Yet, too often, students with disabilities who participate in general education are simply expected to complete homework assignments along with their peers. However, if students require and are provided curricular or instructional accommodations in classroom settings, similar adjustments may be required for homework. The professional literature on homework for students with disabilities outlines a variety of approaches: daily report card systems (Riley-Tillman, Chafouleas, & Briesch, 2007), home-school partnerships (Habboushe et al., 2001), and parent involvement (Cancio et al., 2004; Tam & Chan, 2009).

Hughes, Ruhl, Schumaker, and Deshler (2002) reported that students with disabilities often struggle with the organization and motivation components of homework. In making decisions about homework for students with disabilities, teachers must consider the following: what types and amounts of homework to assign; how to incorporate accommodations or adaptations in these assignments; how to give feedback about completed homework; and how to communicate effectively about homework with parents, including individualized suggestions for appropriate types and levels of parental support. Several authors have reported on promising approaches to developing and





implementing strategies for more successful homework experiences (Axelrod et al., 2009; Evans, Langberg, Raggi, Allen, & Buvinger, 2005; Hampshire, Butera, & Bellini, 2011; Myles, Ferguson, & Hagiwara, 2007). The development of a homework plan offers great promise in enhancing the educational experience of students with mild disabilities.

### **Participants and Roles in Developing the Homework Plan**

The first step in developing a homework plan is to determine who will be involved and what role each person will play. Although parents play an important role in any instructional planning for learners with disabilities, their role may be even greater in homework planning, as they may have significant direct responsibilities in these assignments. Both special and any general education teachers who assign homework to students with disabilities should be represented in the development of the homework plan to ensure consistency within school settings. As with IEP planning and development, the homework plan team might also include related service personnel as appropriate (e.g., school psychologist, speech therapist, occupational therapist). Finally, the student should be included so that he or she is provided with a way to express

needs and contribute to the design of the plan.

### **The first step in developing a homework plan is to determine who will be involved and what role each person will play.**

Clarifying the role of each person on the team is necessary. Identifying a school "point person" to coordinate homework assignments from all teachers and serve as a central contact person for parents is essential. This is especially important for students who have several teachers throughout their day (e.g., junior or senior high).

Determining the student's role and level of responsibility in the homework plan is important to establish early on. Certainly, parents and school professionals will share some responsibility in the plan. However, a substantial rationale for assigning homework to students with mild disabilities is to help them develop greater levels of personal responsibility for completing assigned tasks. A homework plan typically incorporates strategies to promote greater student independence in this task over time while systematically minimizing the roles of teachers and parents. Such an outcome may be more likely when

students are encouraged to participate in such self-advocacy activities as self-directed IEP (e.g., Martin et al., 2006).

*Kelly's homework plan team included her mother, JoAnna; the special education teacher, Tina; the general education teacher, Debbie; and, importantly, Kelly. In early discussions, Kelly agreed with her mother's report that homework completion was a long-standing issue for her and that the quality of her school experience would be enhanced if she could improve in this area.*

*Because Tina communicates with Kelly's teachers throughout the week, the consensus was that Tina would be the school point person in the homework plan. In this role, Tina would help Kelly keep a daily list of assignments that were due in each subject. In addition, as part of the plan, Kelly was provided with a homework checklist template that included both morning and end-of-the-day routines—including checking in with her teachers, submitting assignments, and keeping her desk area organized.*

### **What Goals Should Be Addressed in Homework Plans?**

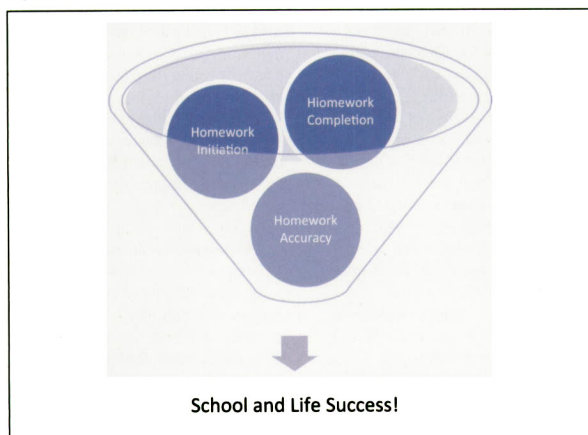
Once the members' roles have been determined, consensus should determine the goals of the homework assignments. In general, homework assignments should target work that the student is likely to be able to complete successfully with minimal support, not new material with which the student is likely unfamiliar.

This determination of specific homework goals for the student with mild disabilities should be based on the individual needs of the student. There are many possible goals that a homework plan might target, including the academic dimensions of accuracy in the homework and the personal responsibility dimensions of beginning and completing that work independently.

### **Homework Initiation**

Some students appear to be unable to begin any assigned task without repeated reminders from a parent or

**Figure 1. Possible Goals for Homework**



teacher. In these cases, consistent and independent initiation of assigned tasks may be an overall goal for some students with mild disabilities who struggle in this way. One goal might be for the student to begin homework consistently at a predetermined time with minimal prompting from a parent.

### **Homework Completion**

For other students, the goal might instead be to increase completion of assigned tasks. Many students, including some with mild disabilities, may appropriately begin homework assignments only to quit partway through the task. They may come to rely too heavily on parents for ongoing prompting and motivation to complete homework. Without change, this can result in long-term dependence by the learner on outside prompting to complete tasks. A homework plan goal for such students may be to complete some predetermined proportion of homework assignments at some minimal level of accuracy as external supports are gradually withdrawn (i.e., parental supervision). For these students, the overall goal of homework assignments is to facilitate the development of greater levels of independent task completion in the learner.

### **Homework Accuracy**

Perhaps one of the most common rationales for assigning homework is to provide an opportunity for additional practice with opportunities for application of newly acquired knowledge and skills (e.g., Vatterott, 2010). For many students, a primary goal of homework assignments is the reinforcement and enhancement of academic skills introduced at school. In so doing, it is critical that students not practice incorrect or incompletely acquired application of a new skill. Parental monitoring may be especially necessary to avoid this incorrect learning.

Students who rush through homework assignments or fail to check their completed work may not experience maximal academic success. For these students, completing homework accurately to reinforce and document classroom learning may be a primary focus of the intervention (see Figure 1).

*Kelly's team determined that independent homework initiation, independent homework completion, and homework accuracy were all appropriate goals for her homework plan. Unless JoAnna monitored her carefully, Kelly tended to avoid*

*homework tasks by saying that she was tired. Kelly has shown little independence in beginning or completing homework assignments, and her grades on homework assignments are usually well below 50% correctness.*

*Kelly's IEP annual goals included increasing her present low levels of independence and personal responsibility. JoAnna reported that Kelly was very dependent on her when completing a variety of tasks, including homework assignments. Given this, Kelly's homework plan included goals to increase her independence in both initiating and completing homework assignments, as well as improving the accuracy of that work.*

### **What Accommodations Should Be Incorporated in Homework?**

In developing the homework plan, the team of school professionals, parent, and student must consider the incorporation of individualized accommodations in any assigned homework as appropriate to the student. Common homework accommodations include decreasing the length of assignments (e.g., a mathematics worksheet with five problems instead of 10), allowing writing projects to be completed on a computer rather than handwritten (which allows the use of such computer-based assistive technologies as spell-check and grammar-check), and breaking larger assignments into smaller parts that are completed over time. In its initial planning, the team should also determine who will be responsible for developing and implementing each proposed accommodation.

*In considering Kelly's academic needs and her upcoming transition to seventh grade, the team decided that she should complete all assigned homework in each of her core classes with accommodations as needed. The team concluded that Kelly was easily overwhelmed by homework assignments that appeared to her to be too lengthy or time-consuming. To*



this end, an accommodation was developed wherein nearly all homework assignments were shortened by 50% to 75%.

## **Additional Considerations**

### **Routines**

The establishment of a consistent homework routine, with a regular time and place for homework (e.g., upon arrival at home from school, immediately after supper, or at 7 o'clock every evening), can contribute to success. In addition, for many students, knowing where to start when faced with a complex task such as a complex homework assignment may be daunting. Utilizing a homework checklist is one way to help students better understand what is expected of them at school and at home.

A homework checklist is a tool designed to help the student monitor his or her own homework behavior. The checklist outlines individualized multiple components of successful homework completion, each of which the student can check off upon completion. Typical homework checklists include reminders for the student to

- review all homework assignments before leaving school;
- gather any school materials needed for homework assignments before leaving school;
- prepare the work area at home, including placing all anticipated needed materials at hand;
- review the proposed schedule for homework completion for that day;
- review individualized reminders of successful homework strategies;
- review proposed routine when homework is completed; and
- submit completed homework to the appropriate teachers.

In addition to enhancing homework performance on any given assignment, the provision of homework checklists helps students learn that seemingly undoable complex tasks are composed of very doable smaller steps, providing a potentially generalizable

understanding of how most complex tasks throughout life can be simplified and completed. The Teacher/Parent Homework Self-Management Planning Form (Figure 2) provides a framework for helping parents and teachers think through the steps required to develop a homework checklist for a student.

*Kelly's homework checklist detailed the homework steps that she needed to complete while in the school and at home. While at school, her plan specified that she was to check the list of homework assignments as assembled by Tina and write down each assignment on the appropriate line on her checklist. At home, the checklist noted that as she finished each assignment, she was to bring her work to JoAnna, who would check it for accuracy. If there were any corrections, Kelly was to fix them and then bring her work back to her mother. The checklist noted that as she completed each assignment, she was to place it in her homework folder and then the homework folder in her backpack. The last item on her homework checklist targeted her arrival at school the next morning, when she was to put her completed work in the homework box on the teacher's desk (see Figure 3 for Kelly's homework checklist).*

### **Kelly's Homework Checklist**

In addition to a making checklist, identifying and writing out any rules that the student is expected to follow during homework activities is important. These rules should include expectations for completing homework tasks in a successful manner while reinforcing behaviors appropriate for classroom settings. For example, a supervising parent may ask the student to clean up the homework area when he or she is finished with homework. Asking the student to read these rules aloud before each homework session is one way to establish the homework routine. Over time, as the routine becomes established, reading these rules may no longer be necessary.

*Kelly, Debbie, Tina, and JoAnna brainstormed a set of homework rules*

*for Kelly that were designed to integrate the unique routines of the home and classroom. Kelly had often struggled to make corrections in the past. In Kelly's homework plan, the team included the expectation that corrections must be made before checking something off the checklist. Kelly's homework plan also included rules for appropriately asking for help and putting completed assignments away.*

### **Online homework assignments.**

Although most parents are familiar with traditional paper-based homework assignments, they may not be initially as comfortable with online versions of these assignments. With online assignments, parents need to understand (a) the schedule under which assignments will be posted online, (b) how such assignments are to be accessed and downloaded, (c) how the student's work is to be submitted online, and (d) when and how teacher feedback on that work can be accessed. In addition, teachers must know when a household does not have access to the Internet and in such situations make appropriate accommodations.

*Tina agreed to be the school's contact person for online homework assignments. To that end, early in the academic year, Tina ascertained that JoAnna had a Windows-based computer at home with Internet access that Kelly could use. At a meeting at school shortly thereafter with JoAnna and Kelly, for demonstration purposes Tina had available for them a Windows-based computer similar to the one that JoAnna and Kelly had at home. Tina provided them with a simple handout explaining how to access any Internet-based homework assignments. She then showed JoAnna and Kelly how to access these assignments using a short assignment that had been preloaded onto the school's website. Finally, Tina had JoAnna and then Kelly go through the steps necessary to download that assignment and submit the completed work.*

**Increasing motivation.** With a homework plan, student motivation

**Figure 2. Teacher/Parent Homework Self-Management Planning Form**

<b>Teacher/Parent Homework Self-Management Planning Form</b> *In planning a student's homework self-management plan, this form may help guide the development of an individual checklist.		Include in the student's checklist?	
		Yes	No
Teacher-monitored	Before the student leaves school:		
	○ Are all assignments recorded?		
	○ Are all materials in backpack?		
	○ Final student check-in with teacher?		
	Other:		
Parent-monitored	When the student gets home from school:		
	○ Is a snack appropriate?		
	○ Has a consistent start time been determined?		
	○ Should the student have an initial break? (Specify amount of time.)		
	Other:		
Parent-monitored	When the student is preparing to do homework:		
	○ Do homework materials need to be gathered?		
	○ Is the area free of distractions?		
	○ Is a drink/bathroom break needed?		
	Other:		
Parent-monitored	When the student is working on homework:		
	○ Is there a plan for when the student needs help?		
	○ How should the student signal that he/she is finished?		
	Other:		
Parent-monitored	When the student is finished with homework:		
	○ Does the student need to bring completed work to the parent for review?		
	○ Does the student need to make corrections?		
	○ Does the student require a reminder to put away materials?		
	Other:		
Teacher-monitored	When the student is finished with homework:		
	○ Does the student need reminders at school to turn in completed work?		
	Other:		

*Note:* Adapted with permission from "Self-Management and Parents as Interventionists: Improving Homework Performance in Middle School Students With Disabilities" by P. K. Hampshire, G. Butera, & S. Bellini, 2011, *Beyond Behavior*. Copyright 2011 by the Council for Exceptional Children.



may be an issue at first. In such cases, temporarily using an external reinforcer can help. In this, the team must determine what is motivating to the student, what behaviors are most important to reinforce, and how often and under what circumstances the reinforcement will be delivered. As part of the plan, students may develop a reinforcer menu with the help of the team, which may suggest parameters about the choices (e.g., no food items, time limits on activities). Given their role at home, parents clearly have the ultimate say in these determinations.

Over time, the frequency of reinforcement should fade as the student shows greater independence and skill. One strategy for fading reinforcement is to attach a point system to the items on the reinforcer menu. The student can then earn points for specific behaviors during the homework routine (e.g., checking off all items on the list, making corrections, raising one's hand to get attention) to coincide with the student's goals. Then, at a predetermined time, the student can trade in those points for specific items on their reinforcer menu. As student skill and independence grow, the external reinforcement system can be gradually withdrawn.

*When the intervention began, Kelly and JoAnna decided what items would be placed on the reinforcer menu. JoAnna and Kelly agreed that snack items could not contain sugar and that computer activities and television time should be limited to a daily total of 60 minutes. During the first month of the intervention, Kelly received access to one choice from the reinforcer menu once she had successfully completed both her homework and her homework checklist.*

**Parental support.** During development of a homework intervention plan, it is essential to consider any supports that the parent may need. Some parents may request initial support from school personnel to acquire the skills necessary to best support the goals of the homework plan. For example, using a coaching

model can be effective wherein the parent observes a teacher applying some agreed-on strategy (e.g., offering some level of support) and then practices those same skills while receiving feedback.

*JoAnna met with Kelly's teachers twice to discuss the emergent homework plan. The goal of the first meeting, which included Kelly, was to begin thinking about what Kelly's plan might look like and what each team member's role might be. During the second meeting, the teachers reviewed an initial draft of the homework plan for Kelly with JoAnna, made edits to the materials based on everyone's feedback, reviewed possible data collection forms, and identified steps for JoAnna to provide reinforcement when Kelly was on task and completing her checklist. Throughout the school year, JoAnna periodically met with Tina (i.e., one or two times per semester) to continue to plan for how to best support Kelly's use of the self-management checklist and discuss how to resolve challenging behaviors.*

**Choice.** Providing students with disabilities the opportunities to make choices in their lives is important for a number of reasons. Foremost among these is the fundamental value that individuals with disabilities should have some degree of control in their lives. The provision of choice possibilities to students with disabilities enhances subsequent self-determination skills and reduces undesirable behaviors (Shogren, Faggella-Luby, Sung, & Wehmeyer, 2004). In addition, providing choice has been found to increase time on task and task completion (Ramsey, Jolivette, Puckett Patterson, & Kennedy, 2010). In homework assignments, teachers might help achieve these goals (while making the parent's role easier) by providing homework choices.

*In collaboration with Debbie, Tina identified two potential homework assignments associated with Kelly's present classroom work in reading comprehension. Each possibility began with the same task: reading a short story. She was then given two choices*

*for completing the homework assignment. After reading the short story, Kelly could choose to answer a set of five comprehension questions with a one- to two-sentence response to each, or draw a series of three pictures illustrating highlights of the story, adding a complete descriptive sentence under each drawing. Kelly loves drawing and so eagerly took the latter option. Either option allowed her to demonstrate her understanding of the story.*

**Relevance.** Most teachers (including Kelly's) have heard students complain, "But why do we have to learn this?" One way to address this is to demonstrate the applicability of a targeted academic skill in practical use.

*In the classroom, Kelly was acquiring skills in using a calculator. To establish the daily functional relevance of this skill, Tina (in conjunction with JoAnna) structured a homework assignment in which Kelly and her mother went to the supermarket. During the shopping trip, Kelly was to use the calculator to keep a running total of the purchased items. Her amount was then compared with the amount shown at the cash register. If a discrepancy emerged, Kelly then repeated the exercise at home using the cash register receipt.*

## **Progress Monitoring**

To determine if any intervention is successful, teachers must collect meaningful data. Collecting baseline data before the start of the intervention provides a point of comparison for interpreting subsequent data and determining progress toward the preestablished goals and overall program effectiveness. Once students have met the goals, data should continue to be collected periodically to confirm ongoing progress. This process of using data to inform decision making prevents team members from drawing ill-founded and incorrect conclusions about the homework plan and its effectiveness.

*Before beginning the plan, Tina collected data on Kelly's three targeted*

**Figure 3. Kelly's Homework Checklist**

Task	Finished	Notes
<p>Before I leave school:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Copy assignments from the board into my checklist.</li> <li>○ Put books and binder in my backpack.</li> <li>○ Check in with Ms. Debbie.</li> </ul>		
<p>When I get home:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Snack.</li> <li>○ Break for 30 minutes (set the timer).</li> </ul>		
<p>When it is time to do homework:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Get out my work.</li> <li>○ Get a glass of water.</li> <li>○ Get a pencil, eraser, calculator and scratch paper.</li> </ul>		
<p>My homework:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Assignment 1: _____</li> <li>○ Assignment 2: _____</li> <li>○ Assignment 3: _____</li> <li>○ If I need help: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Re-read the directions.</li> <li>✓ Use my calculator.</li> <li>✓ Ask mom for help.</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ Keep my area organized.</li> </ul>		
<p>When I am done with my work:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Bring my assignments to mom and wait while she checks.</li> <li>○ Make corrections.</li> <li>○ Check off my assignments .</li> <li>○ Put my work in my homework folder in my binder.</li> <li>○ Put my binder in my backpack.</li> <li>○ Put my backpack by the front door.</li> <li>○ Put away work materials.</li> </ul>		
<p>When I get to school the next day:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Put my homework in the box on the teacher's desk.</li> </ul>		



goals—independent homework initiation, independent homework completion, and homework accuracy. Homework initiation was measured by how many minutes it took between Kelly's arrival home and when she sat down at the kitchen table to begin her homework. The goal was for Kelly to begin homework within 15 minutes of arriving home.

Every day, JoAnna noted the time that Kelly arrived home and how many minutes it took before Kelly began her work, after the initial 15-minute arrival period. For the second goal of independent homework completion, when JoAnna helped Kelly with any items, she circled them. JoAnna then calculated for each day what percentage of items Kelly did without assistance.

The third and final goal of homework accuracy was calculated by Tina, the special education teacher. In conjunction with Debbie (the general education teacher), Tina graded each assignment on a percentage basis (maximum of 100%) and averaged all assignment grades each day.










### Additional Considerations

The homework checklist can be used with a variety of learners. Individualization of the checklist may be based on the students' age, disability-specific characteristics, typical routines in school and home settings, and individual learning styles and skill levels (e.g., reading level). For example, for students who are visual in their learning styles, adding picture icons to the homework checklist may help to increase comprehension and success (see Figure 4).

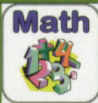



Figure 5 illustrates a simplified homework checklist specifically designed for younger students or others new to homework activities to facilitate completion of individual assignments.

This easy homework checklist has only four sections (Math, Reading, Spelling, Backpack), each of which is divided into two columns (To Do and Done). Each of the eight sections has Velcro backing. The student simply moves a laminated task-specific icon

**Figure 4. Homework Checklist With Picture Icons**

My Homework Checklist		"X" when Finished
<b>Before I leave school:</b>		
Books in backpack		
Check in with Mrs. Turner		
<b>When I get home:</b>		
Lay my homework on the kitchen table		
Get my supply box		
Check my agenda and start work		
<b>When I am done:</b>		
Have dad check answers		
Make corrections		
Put work in binder		
<b>Finished!</b>		

**Figure 5. Homework Checklist for a Younger Student Who Is First Learning the Routine**

To Do	Done
	
	
	
	

card (also with Velcro backing) from the To Do column to the Done column after that assignment has been completed. As students gain new skills and increase their levels of independence, they may move to more sophisticated versions of the checklist.

## Conclusions

As students seek to complete school assignments at home, they are faced with a variety of potential distractions that are not present in most classrooms (e.g., siblings, music/television playing in the background). In addition, highly preferred activities (e.g., computer access, video games, outside play) can present strong competition for student attention. Parents are also challenged in the home by a variety of demands (e.g., answering the phone, attending to the needs of other children, completing household tasks; Lequia et al., 2013). These issues make it even more important that homework assignments be made after an initial collaborative planning process.

Although additional time may be needed up front to meet and design components of the homework plan, this preparation will pay off as the student increasingly acquires the long-term independent skills needed for self-management and organization. In addition, a collaborative approach to planning will help to promote a positive relationship between families and school professionals.

**Although additional time may be needed up front to meet and design components of the homework plan, this preparation will pay off as the student increasingly acquires the long-term independent skills needed for self-management and organization.**

As noted earlier, it is important that both parents and teachers identify beforehand the specific purpose of any homework assignments. Although many would say that the primary purpose of homework is the improvement of some set of academic skills, using homework assignments to enhance such student skills as personal responsibility might well have greater life implications.

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