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The Homework Debate: What Parents Should Know

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Thanks go to many, many researchers that have provided information and inspiration for this talk, particularly those I have collaborated with .

Basic definitions

What is *homework*?

Tasks assigned to students by school teachers that are intended to be carried out during non-instructional time

Excludes:

- Extra-curricular activities
- Home study courses
- Tutoring

Harris Cooper (2006)

Questions for today

- What is the controversy over homework about?
- Does homework improve achievement and what else is homework good for or not so good for?
- Can parents make homework more effective?
- What are some homework tips for parents?



Media spotlight on **homework...**

Motherlode



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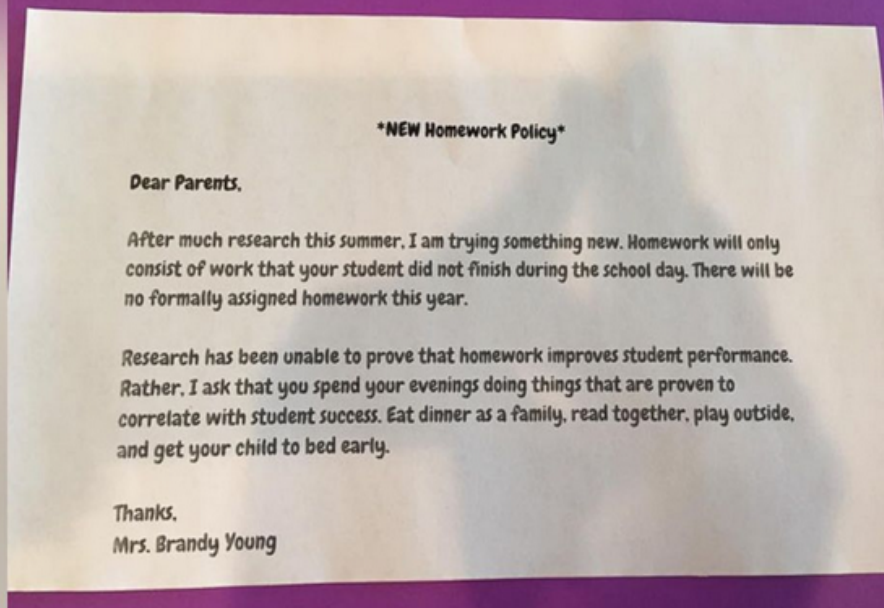
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By JULIA JACOBO · Aug 23, 2016, 4:45 PM ET

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Do you think homework is beneficial?

What is America's attitude toward homework?

Media attention vacillates between support and opposition in 30-year cycles

Public attitudes -- little change over 50+ years

80 - 90% of parents and teachers believe homework is important and helps students learn

- Black and Hispanic parents have more positive attitudes than white parents

77% of students think homework is important

What do you think...

How much homework are kids assigned?

Do you think it is too much or too little?

Amount of homework assigned and completed has not changed over 50+ years

...it's also not that much...

Over 80% of parents and teachers believe kids get the right amount or too little homework

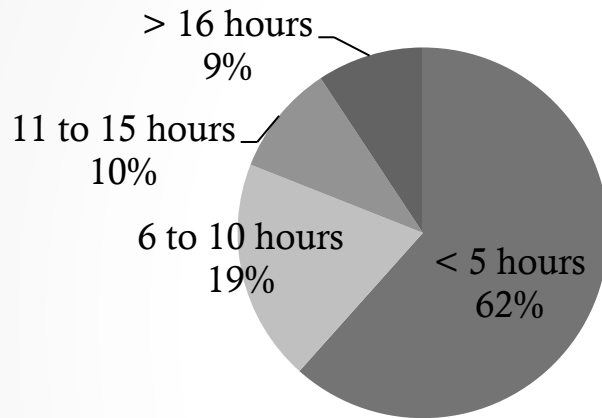
Percentage of Students Reporting Less Than an Hour of Daily Homework

Age	Percent
9 Year Olds	83%
13 Year Olds	66%
17 Year Olds	65%

This has not changed much since 1984.

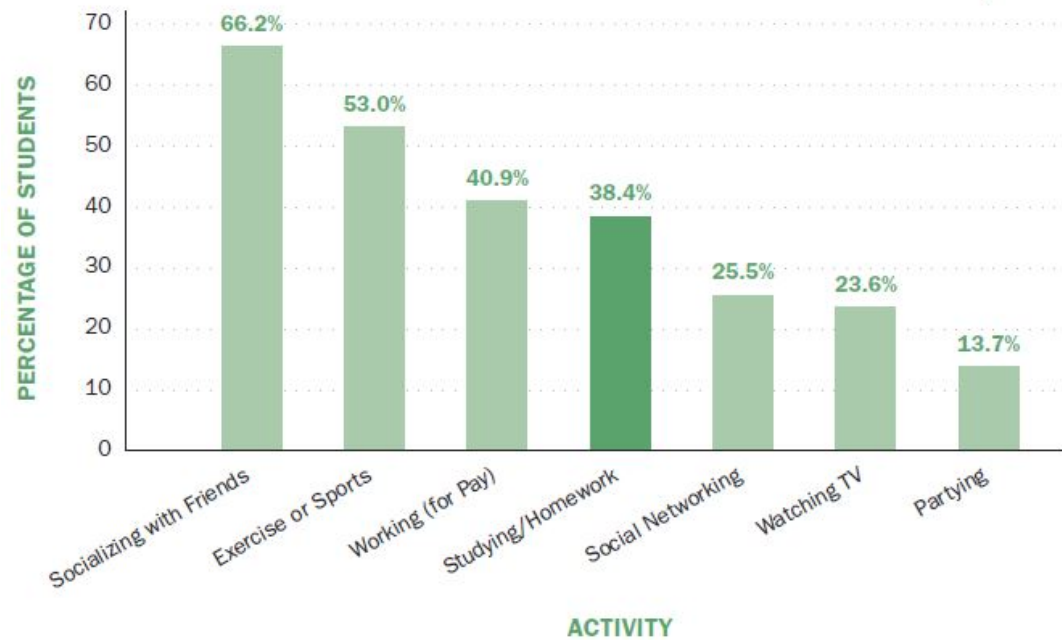
AOL learning services Poll, 2006; Gill & Scholssman, 2003; Loveless, 2003; Ginsburg & Chudowsky, 2012

Time per week college freshman spent on homework during last year of high school



Students Spending Six or More Hours Per Week on Activities in their Last Year of High School (percent of students)

Figure
2-1



Source: John H. Pryor, K. Eagan, L. Palucki Blake, S. Hurtado, J. Berdan, and M. Case. "The American Freshman: National Norms Fall 2012," Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA, 2012.

Who *is* doing lots of homework?

Maybe kids from high income families.

Table 4d. Percentages of public and private students by mathematics homework time teacher assigns per day at grades 4 and 8, 2011

	Grade 4				Grade 8		
	None	15 min	30 min	45 or more min	None	Less than 1 hour	1 hour or more
Public	3	48	43	5	2	82	16
Private	5	41	48	6	1	74	25

Source: NAEP Data Explorer

Average Homework among Privileged High School Students

TABLE 1
Nightly Homework Hours, by Grade and Gender

Grade	<i>Boys</i>		<i>Girls</i>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
9th	2.75	1.26	3.11	1.25
10th	2.91	1.42	3.43	1.37
11th	3.03	1.48	3.66	1.44
12th	2.49	1.47	3.35	1.67

What do you think homework is good for?

Potential effects of homework

Positive

Academic

- Better retention
- Increased understanding
- Better critical thinking and information processing
- Curriculum enrichment
- Better study habits and skills

Non-academic

- Greater self-direction, self-discipline and time management
- Greater parent involvement/appreciation of school

Societal

- Reduces gap between SES groups

Negative

Satiation

- Loss of interest
- Physical and emotional fatigue

Well-being

- Stress
- Poorer physical health
- Sleep deprivation

Social costs

- Denial of access to leisure and other activities
- Parental pressure or interference

Societal

- Increases gap between ability and SES groups

Spoiler: All the proposed effects of homework are very likely true to some extent.

So then, do the benefits outweigh the costs?

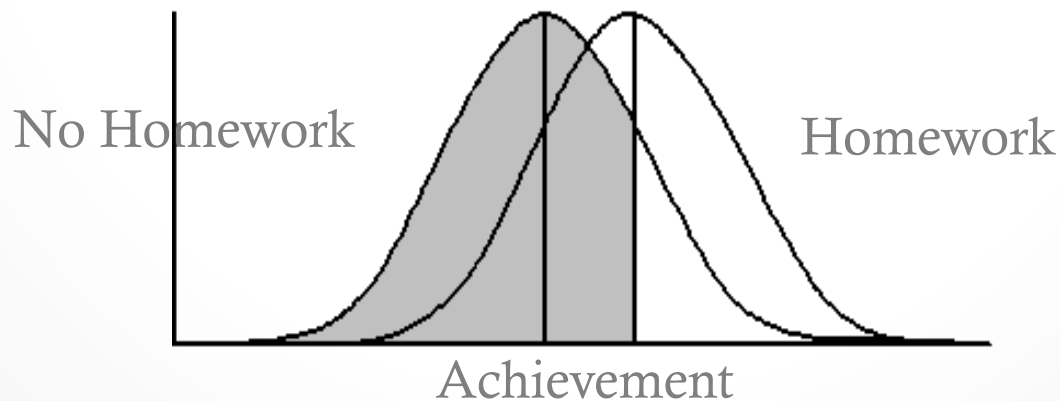
Does homework enhance achievement?

Yes.

According to our comprehensive review (meta-analysis) of all the research in which homework was manipulated (with mostly elementary students)...

On unit tests, the average student doing homework performed **better than about 73%** of students doing no homework

$d = .60$ Percentile Rank = 73%



“Grading” Interventions on a Curve

When only the average student gets intervention, her or his grade moves

... to here >

... from here >

Grade	% of scores
A	4
A-	5
B+	6.5
B	7
B-	8.5
C+	11.5
C	15
C-	11.5
D+	8.5
D	7
D-	6.5
F+	5
F	4

(This is a tough curve!)

Change in Class Rank Due to Homework

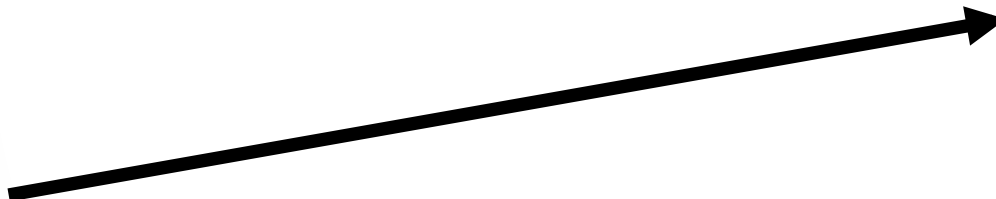
Class Rank without Intervention

Average Student's Class Rank When Only She or He Gets Intervention

1
5
10
15
20
25
30
35
40
45
50
55
60
65
70
75
80
85
90
95
100

Intervention moves the average student's class rank from 50 to 27

1
5
10
15
20
27
30
35
40
45
50
55
60
65
70
75
80
85
90
95
100



Is more time on homework related to higher achievement?

Yes.

Results from studies correlating
homework time and achievement

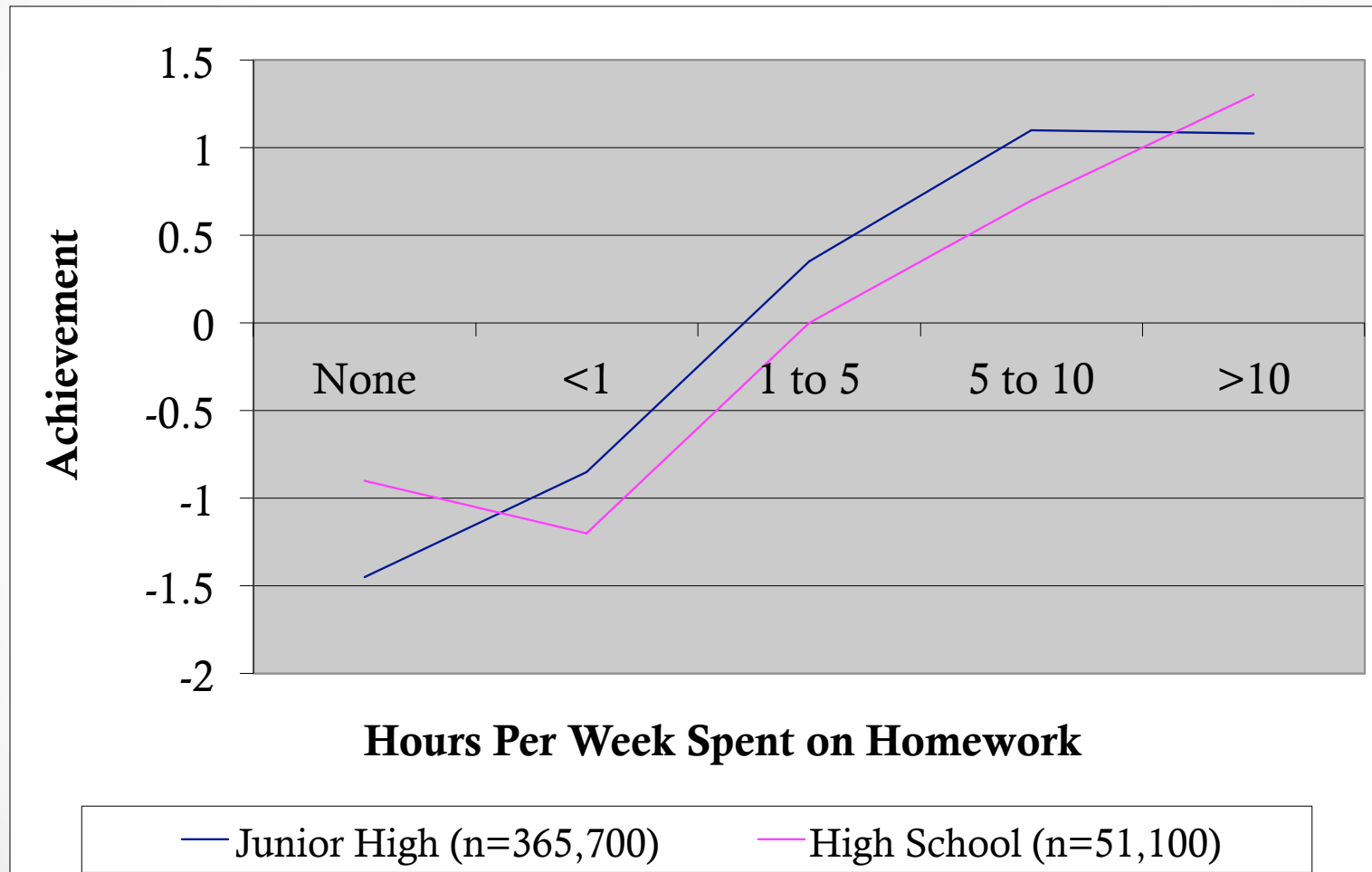
Average <i>r</i>-index	.24
95% CI Low	.24
95% CI High	.25

Does the link between homework and achievement vary by grade?

Yes!

K-6	$r = -.04^*$
7-12	$r = +.25^*$

So, is there an optimum amount of time to spend on homework?



...implications...

- Homework is an effective educational strategy. It can be replaced by other strategies (i.e. in-class study), but those require more time at school.
- The 10 minutes per grade level rule is a basic guideline.
- Younger kids (and students with disabilities) should not be overloaded with homework.

What else does homework influence?

Evidence can be found that homework is linked with...

- positive attitudes toward school, engagement in school, and interest
- development of study skills and self-regulation
 - (particularly when parents and teachers use the homework to scaffold those skills)
- Depressed mood/emotion and frustration
- More stress and anxiety
- Lack of friend/family time and dropping out of extracurricular activities

...other takeaways

- It is to be expected that not all the effects of homework are positive.
- But, in general, positives seem to outweigh the negatives when the amount of homework is kept to a reasonable amount (10 minute rule!)
- Unimpressive relationships between homework time and achievement among younger students may be balanced out by effects on self-regulation and motivation.
 - Teachers and parents need to keep this purpose in mind when designing homework and helping with homework for younger students.

Important caveat...

Going beyond “homework time”

Just thinking about “homework time” not good enough...

What may be more critical?

Answer: Quality of homework experience (e.g., homework effort and homework engagement)

So, what influences these homework variables?

...the quality of the homework assignment to a large extent, but...



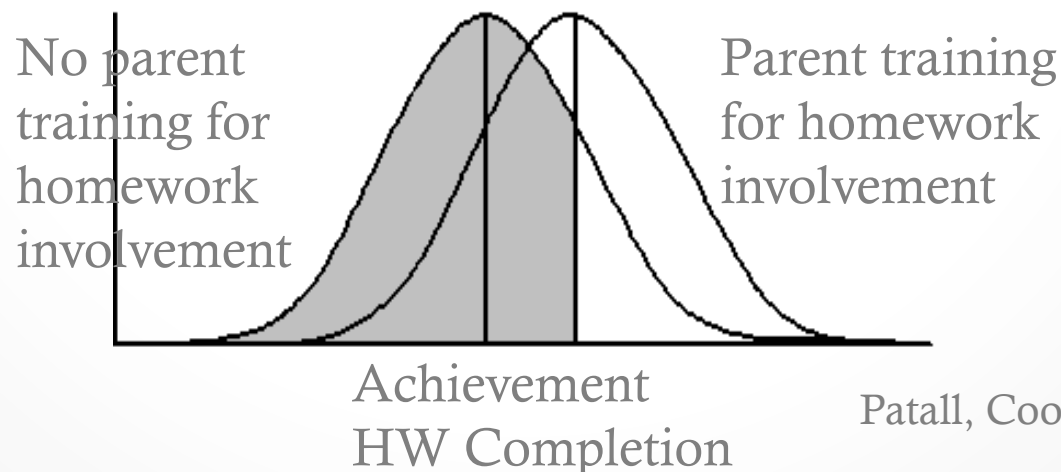
Can parents make homework more effective?

Does parent involvement in homework enhance achievement?

Somewhat, particularly for elementary age students.

According to our comprehensive review (meta-analysis) of all the research...

The average elementary student who had parents trained to be involved in homework performed **better than about 59 to 61%** of students whose parents were not trained.



Patall, Cooper, Robinson, 2008

Is parent involvement good for achievement at all grade levels?

Maybe not...

Based on randomized experiments training parents to be involved in homework or not:

Elementary $d = +.22^*$

Middle $d = -.18$

....Uh oh!

Is the type of parent involvement in homework matter?

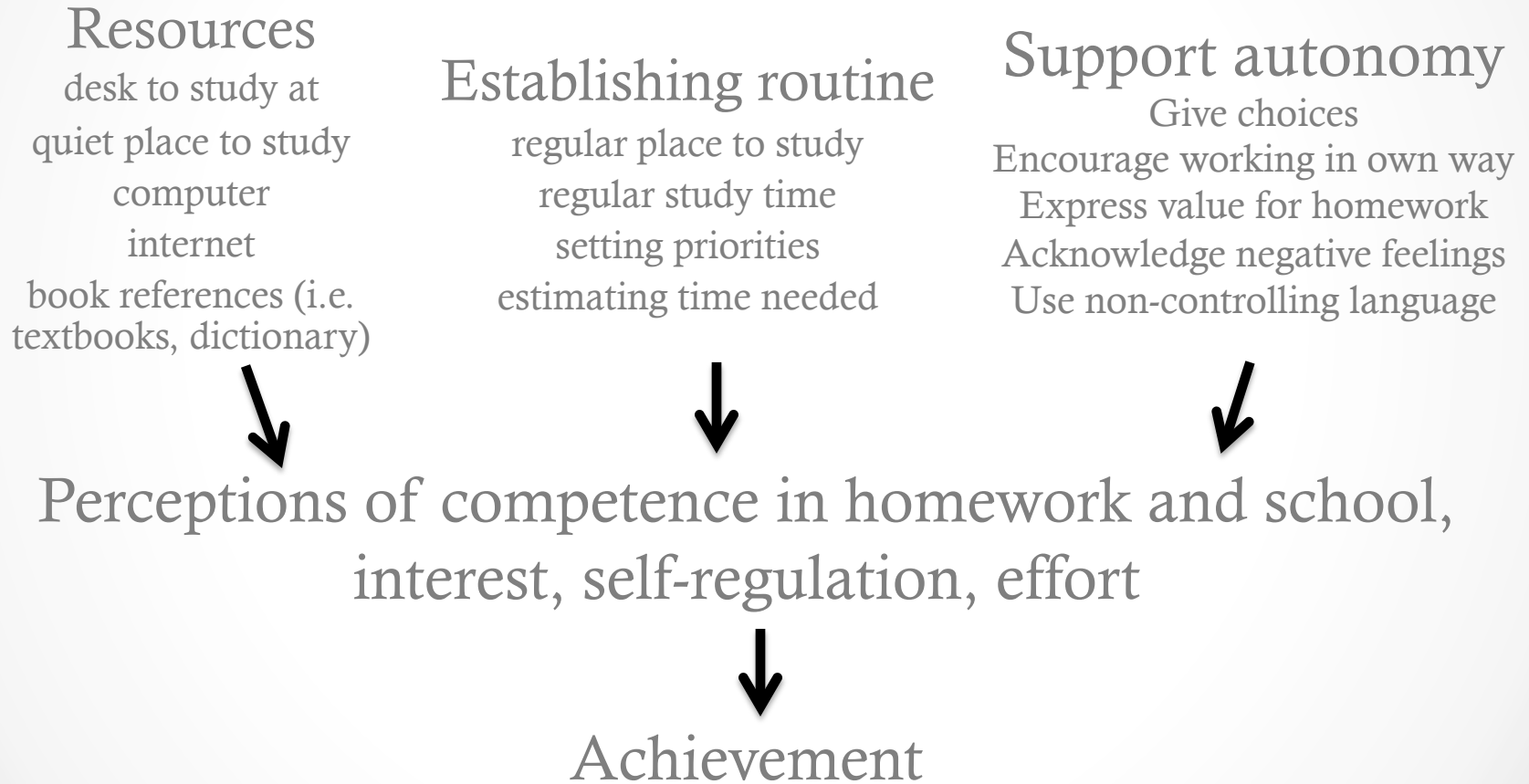
Yes.

Monitoring $r = -.09^*$

Rules $r = +.54^*$

Instruction $r = +.10^*$

So how should parents be involved?...



e.g., Patall, Dent, Oyer & Wynn, 2013; Patall et al., 2008; Vasquez, Patall, Fong, Pine, 2015; Cooper, Lindsay, Nye, 2000 ; Xu, 2007; Patall et al., 2008; Kitsantas et al., 2011; Ramdass & Zimmerman, 2011; Hong et al., 2004

Homework Tips for Parents

Be a stage **manager**:

- Make sure your child has a quiet, well-lit place to do homework
- Make sure the needed materials (paper, pencils, dictionary) are available
- Help your child create a routine for homework – time? place? goals? priorities? expectations? study strategies?

Homework Tips for Parents

Be a **motivator** and **monitor**:

- Homework provides a great opportunity for you to tell your child how important school is
- Be positive about homework and explain why it is important -- the attitude you express about homework will be the attitude your child acquires
- Watch for signs of failure and frustration and if frustration sets in --- express understanding and suggest a short break

Homework Tips for Parents

Be a role **model** and a **mentor**

- When your child does homework, don't watch TV. If your child is reading, read too. If your child is doing math, balance your checkbook
- Help your child see that the skills they are practicing relate to things you do as an adult
- Don't provide answers -- if your child asks for help, provide guidance
- Homework is a great way for kids to develop independent, life-long learning skills -- over-involvement is a bad thing

Questions?

THANK YOU



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