

IMPROVING HOMEWORK COMPLETION AND MOTIVATION OF
MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS THROUGH
BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION, GRAPHING, AND PARENT COMMUNICATION

Dawn L. Hein, B.A.
Sandra L. Wimer, B.A.

An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
School of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

Saint Xavier University and Pearson Achievement Solutions, Inc.

Field-Based Master's Program

Chicago, IL

April 2007

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
CHAPTER 1: PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT	1
General Statement of the Problem	1
Immediate Context of the Problem	1
Local Context of the Problem	9
National Context of the Problem	13
CHAPTER 2: PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION	14
Evidence of the Problem	14
Probable Causes	43
CHAPTER 3: THE SOLUTION STRATEGY	54
Review of the Literature	54
Project Objective and Processing Statements	65
Project Action Plan	65
Methods of Assessment	67
CHAPTER 4: PROJECT RESULTS	69
Historical Description of the Intervention	69
Presentation and Analysis of Results	76
Conclusions and Recommendations	86
REFERENCES	89
APPENDICES	92
Appendix A: Teacher Survey	92
Appendix B: Consent to Participate.....	93

Appendix C: Parent Survey	96
Appendix D: Teacher Record Book.....	97
Appendix E: Teacher Researcher's Weekly Log	98
Appendix F: Student Survey	99
Appendix G: Behavior Modification Chart.....	100
Appendix H: Weekly Home Note.....	101

ABSTRACT

Homework completion and motivation is an ongoing issue and debate within the public schools. This is especially true in the middle school setting. The teacher researchers of this project chose to conduct a study in order to increase homework completion and motivation of middle school students using Teacher Researcher B's reading/language arts 6th grade classroom. The study consisted of 30 student participants and took place during the time period of January 29, 2007, until May 9, 2007.

During the teacher researchers' review of the literature, numerous influences were revealed as to why homework completion and motivation is an area of frustration for teachers, parents, and students. These influences include poor student habits and study skills, lack of parental support and/or understanding, poor environment, parent complaints of schools and teachers, teacher concerns and lack of communication between home, school, and community, and finally the special education community of learners. Teacher researchers used parent and student surveys to document evidence of the problem.

There were three interventions/strategies the teacher researchers used for this action research project. Homework charting/graphing was used for each class. The students graphed their homework completion with teacher supervision on a daily basis. A ticket/reward system was implemented in conjunction with the graphing/charting giving the students an opportunity to earn prizes/rewards for homework completion. The parents were apprised weekly of their child's progress by receiving a home note on a weekly basis, outlining their child's weekly progress, or lack thereof.

The teacher researchers found the action research project to have both positive and negative results. Though student motivation increased at the beginning of the intervention, motivation seemed to decline by the end of the intervention. The teacher researchers believe this decline to be attributed to the intervention occurring toward the end of the school year. A lack of teacher consistency and enthusiasm toward the end of the intervention and a lack of parent consistency in responding to home notes were other factors believed to contribute to the lack of student motivation. The most positive feedback of the project came from parents. Parents responded positively to the consistent feedback concerning their child's progress. Though the teacher researchers would change several areas of the interventions, the weekly parent communication would be an intervention they would continue and recommend.

CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

The two teachers of this action research project found the lack of homework completion and motivation to be a reoccurring theme in the middle school setting. Teachers report this to be an area of continual frustration and concern. This is demonstrated by the students not completing assignments on time, lack of parental support, and a higher percentage of special education students in the regular education classrooms. Evidence for the existence of the problem was demonstrated via teacher surveys, parent surveys, student surveys, teacher record book, and daily observation logs.

This research is to be conducted at one site in one community. The targeted school is a middle school in the northeast corner of the community. The middle school consists of sixth, seventh and eighth grade students.

Immediate Context of the Problem

Two teacher researchers conducted this action research project. Both teachers were located at one site. One researcher taught sixth grade reading and language arts classes. The other researcher was a behavior specialist/case manager for sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students with Emotional Disturbances and/or Other Health Impairments. All information in this subsection was obtained from the Illinois School Report Card, 2004-2005, unless otherwise noted.

The middle school building had a primarily Caucasian student body according to the information shown in Table 1 below. The total enrollment of students at the school was 953 and the district enrollment was 2,714. The enrollment numbers for each gender were not available.

Eighty-nine percent of the students at the school were Caucasian compared to 87.2% for the district. These percentages were well above the state average of 56.7% of Caucasian students.

The low-income rate was also in contrast to the state averages of 40%, with only an 8.2% at the school level and 11.9% at the district level. The English Language Learners at this school was only 0.6%, which was well below the state level of 6.6%.

Table 1: *Racial/Ethnic Background by Percentage*

	<u>Caucasian</u>	<u>Hispanic</u>	<u>Asian/Pacific Islander</u>	<u>African American</u>	<u>Native American</u>	<u>Multi Racial/Ethnic</u>
School	89.3	5.7	2.4	2.0	0.4	0.2
District	87.2	6.0	2.8	2.7	0.4	0.9
State	56.7	18.3	3.7	20.3	0.2	0.7

The mobility rate was 8.4% for the school, 9.4% for the district, and 16.1% for the state.

The school and district attendance rate was 95.1% compared to the state average of 93.9%.

The student-to-teacher ratio at the school was 19.1, which was slightly above the state average of 18.9. The average class size for sixth grade was 31.9 and 32.9 for eighth grade. No information was provided for seventh grade. These averages were well above the state average of 23.4 for sixth grade and 22.9 for eighth grade.

According to the information in Table 2, 98.8% of the teachers in the district was Caucasian, which is above the state average of 84.3%. The middle school used in this research has 111 total staff members with 24% (n=26) males and 76% (n=85) female faculty members. There were 61 certified teachers in this school (Building Secretary, personal communication, August 1, 2006).

Table 2: *Teacher Information (Full-Time Equivalents) by Percentage*

	<u>Caucasian</u>	<u>Hispanic</u>	<u>Asian/Pacific Islander</u>	<u>African American</u>	<u>Native American</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Total Number</u>
District	98.8	0.0	0.0	1.2	0.0	16.1	83.9	165
State	84.3	4.5	1.2	9.9	0.2	23.5	76.5	128,079

The average teaching experience for the district was 10.8 years, with 61.2% (n=68) of the teacher's holding a master's degree or above. However, the average teachers' salary of the district was \$44,113 compared to the state average of \$55,558. The average administrator salaries of \$98,117 were above the state average of \$97,051.

The school's required curriculum consisted of mathematics, reading, language arts, social studies, science, physical education/health, and two exploratory classes (per quarter). These elective courses included computer application, technology education, graphic arts, art, band, choir, journalism, gifted, drama, and Spanish. Some of these classes were offered for more than one quarter depending on the grade of the student and class curriculum. Athletics and clubs were available for student participation. Enrichment summer-school classes were offered with a minimal fee per student for all grade levels. Core subjects were also available during summer school. Parental communication between home and school was maintained by: parent-teacher conferences, student-led conferences, e-mail correspondence, school/teacher web pages, on-line

grading and assignment information, telephone conferences, mid-term-progress reports, and quarterly report cards.

Student achievement was measured in the spring and the fall by administration of The Northwest Evaluation Association Measures of Academic Progress computerized adaptive tests. Students are measured in reading, language, and mathematics and scores are compared to see student growth. Remediation for students not meeting expected increases were not available. The Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) was also administered, to all three-grade levels, in the spring.

Figure 1 outlines the ISAT percentages for 7th grade in Science in each level. Each level represents the performance of the indicated students. Level 1 is academic warning, Level 2 is below standards, Level 3 is meets standards, and Level 4 is exceeds standards.

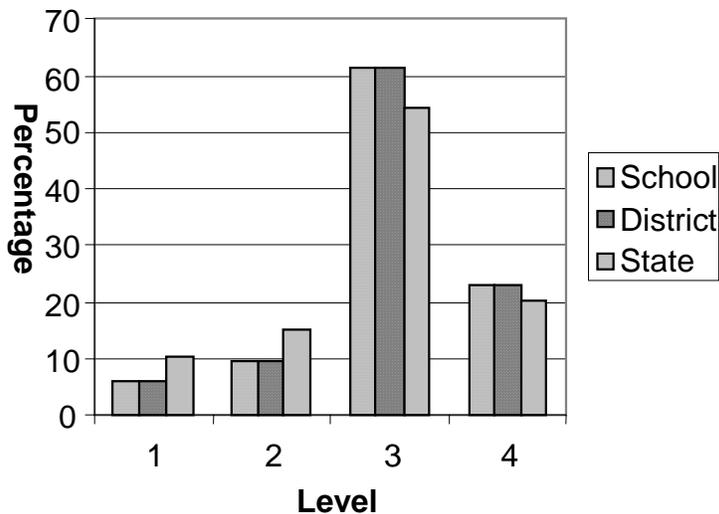


Figure 1: 2004-2005 ISAT Percentages of Seventh Grade Science Scores

Figure 2 outlines the results of their performances on the ISAT testing for eighth grade reading. Each level represents the performance of the indicated students. Level 1 is academic warning, Level 2 is below standards, Level 3 is meets standards, and Level 4 is exceeds standards.

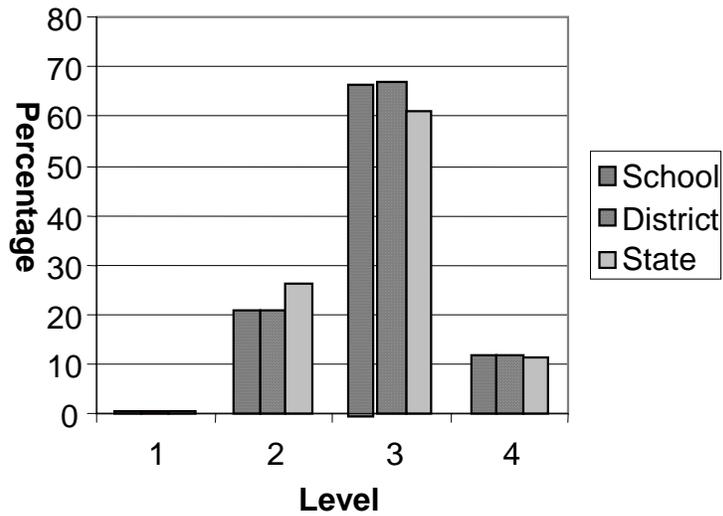


Figure 2: 2004-2005 ISAT Percentages of Eighth Grade Reading Scores

Figure 3 outlines the results of their performances on the ISAT testing for eighth grade mathematics. Each level represents the performance of the indicated students. Level 1 is academic warning, Level 2 is below standards, Level 3 is meets standards, and Level 4 is exceeds standards.

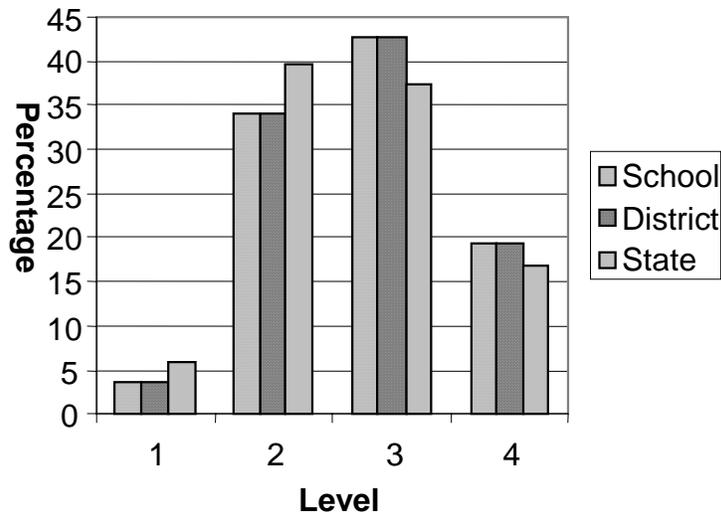


Figure 3: 2004-2005 ISAT Percentages of Eighth Grade Math Scores

Figures 1, 2, and 3 display performance levels above state standards in the levels of 3 (meets) and 4 (exceeds). In 2004, this school met Adequate Yearly Progress in all three-subject areas.

There were a total of 111 staff members at this school and the information shown in Table 3 shows the breakdown of departments and staff, with certified regular education staff accounting for 48% (n=53) of staff and teacher assistants accounting for 20% (n=22) of staff (Building Secretary, personal communication, July 18, 2006).

Table 3: *Staff Information*

<u>Classification of Staff</u>	<u>Number of Staff</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
Certified Regular Education Teacher	53	19	27
Teacher's Assistants (Special Education, Study Hall, Library, Special Services (Occupational Therapist, Social Worker, Behavior Specialist, Speech, Psychologist)	22	1	21
Certified Special Education Teacher	8	0	8
Custodial	7	0	7
Cafeteria	7	3	4
Secretarial/Nurse/Administrational Support Staff	6	1	5
Assistant Principle-Administration	5	0	5
Principal-Administration	2	1	1
	1	1	0

This school has many unique attributes and programs. The Parent Teacher Organization is extremely active and provides many opportunities to staff and students. Teen Canteen, winter dance, spring dance, and other events throughout the year, raise money and provide students with social activities on Friday evenings. Money raised has been used for staff appreciation, classroom supplies, student field trips, and the purchase of various items for the school. The school band is rated highly in the state and is regularly invited to perform for major functions in Illinois and other states.

The middle school was located in a residential area in the western part of the town. Once a person walks in the front door the administration offices were located on the left. The principal, two assistant principals and secretaries are also located in this area. The second set of main doors directs you to the main hallway of the school. Directly in front were the doors to the large school library. The school followed a set of hallways that were set up in a circular pattern; meaning all the hallways will eventually lead to the center of the school and converge on the main hall. Each set of rooms around these hallways were divided by grades; sixth, seven, and eighth grade core classes (reading, language arts, mathematics, and social studies). Science was the only exception to this arrangement. The science rooms were located along two sets of hallways that were connected by a storage area for all the science equipment. Physical education classes and locker rooms were located next to the gymnasium. Exploratory classes were located throughout the school but mainly concentrated along the middle section of the school. The school contained three computer laboratories; one for an exploratory class and the other two for check out and use by teachers and students. There were also two mobile laboratories that were accessible for classroom checkout. The school also had a full service cafeteria for students and staff. Several offices and additional spaces were available throughout the school for network server storage, special education teachers, social workers, a behavioral specialist, psychologists, a school nurse, custodial staff, and classroom aides. Outside students had an area for recreation time during their lunch period, baseball diamonds, field for physical education, and one portable classroom for the beginner band. The school busses for the entire district as well as one of the elementary schools were located within the same property boundaries of the middle school.

Looking at the school and district demographics, I do not see much that could be a cause for lack of homework completion at the middle school level. The percentage of low-income

students is low, test scores are well within state standards, the percentage of teachers with graduate degrees is fairly high, and the school has an excellent reputation within the community. Therefore, we do not see that it would contribute to the issue at hand. Within the school environment, we do see one thing as having a negative impact on students and the motivation to complete homework. Due to increased enrollment, the school is over capacity by approximately 200 students. Class sizes have increased and the number of students with special needs has increased. Because of this, students receive less one-on-one attention and could be less motivated. The topic of homework completion comes up at every team meeting we attend at every grade level. Teachers complain that most low and poor grades are due to students not turning in homework. It is quite unlikely that the reason for this phenomenon can be changed. We need to look at what we, as educators, can do to motivate students to achieve academically. Students that consistently do not do homework cannot experience academic success. As educators, we need to help break this cycle.

Local Context of the Problem

The middle school was located in northern Illinois in a residential area on the western side of the community. Also located on the same property were an elementary school and the district's transportation department. The community has grown in the last few years. The population in 2000 was 8,788 and had grown to 10,309 (Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, n.d.), and now holds a population of 20,858, with a median age of 36.4 years and 2.53 people per household. The median income for this community is \$66,589. Table 4 below, shows the ethnicity of the community (Sperlings, n.d.).

Table 4: *Demographics of Community*

<u>Ethnicity by percentage</u>	<u>Local Community</u>
Caucasian	97.53
African American	0.46
Asian	1.08
American Indian	0.14
Hispanic	2.15
Other	0.79

The community has various types of housing available for residents. Apartment rent averages \$901.00 per month and the average home price is \$229,000.00. The median age of homes in the community is 30.1 years and the property tax rate is \$18.82. Approximately 70% of the single-family homes in the community are owned, 20% are rented, and 10% are vacant (Sperlings Best Places, n.d.).

The community itself is a quiet community with a relatively low crime rate. In 2002, there were only two violent crimes and five property crimes reported (Sperlings, n.d.).

Most of the residents of the community commute to other communities for work. The easy access to the Metra, Interstate 94, and Highway 41 make it easy for residents to work elsewhere. The village has some small industry, including a world famous China maker. The downtown has a mixture of small retail and several restaurants. The most rapid growth is occurring in the western part of the city, where some large retailers are building or have already built. This growth is also encouraging many shops and restaurants to venture into a new area of town (Sperlings Best Places, n.d.).

Originally inhabited by the Pottawatomi Indians, the community itself was founded in 1843. Farming and ice harvesting were the major industries in this area. However, in the late

1800's this community became a popular vacation spot for Chicagoans due to the many lakes in the area and tourism grew quickly, which added to economic development of the community. Even today, this community continues to be one of the preferred summer and winter destinations for many Chicago residents (Sperlings Best Places, n.d.). The community has several recreational opportunities for children and families. Located in town are several parks, a pool, a summer band shell for weekly events, a movie theatre, and seasonal festivals. A local theatre company also calls this community home. For the outdoor enthusiasts; campgrounds, snowmobile trails, lakes, rivers, hiking, and fishing are all favorites. During the winter, many of the residents utilize the ski facility for snowboarding and skiing in a neighboring community.

The school district for this community includes four public elementary schools and a few private schools that feed into the site school. For the district there is one superintendent, one assistant superintendent, and a director of curriculum and instruction for the district. Each elementary school has one principal and an assistant principal and the middle school has one principal and two assistant principals. The 2002 school tax rate was at 2.58%. Currently a building referendum is on the book that is requesting a \$0.20 tax rate increase. This would bring the taxes on a home with a \$200,000 market value up by \$123.00. This referendum failed the first time it was put on the ballot in March 2006 (Superintendent, personal communication, July 18, 2006). The mission statement of the district is "to educate our children to become life-long learners by providing a child centered curriculum that challenges the potential of all learners." (Site a website, n.d.). The vision statement of the site school is more detailed and states:

...to provide our students with the skills they need to become independent, creative thinkers. This will be accomplished through the use of best practices, technology integration, and a variety of teaching strategies and learning experiences that allow

students to thrive in a safe, secure environment. We will provide the resources to enable our children to become life-long learners (Site school website, n.d., Site A school page).

Technology plays an important role in the school district. Each elementary school has one computer laboratory and least one computer in each classroom for student and teacher usage. The middle school contains five computer labs and two mobile labs; some of which are used exclusively for technology related classes whereas the rest are used for classroom checkout and use. Each teacher has their own classroom computer for their own use and most have an additional two to three extras in the classroom for student usage. The entire report card system is computer based and students and parents have access to their grades at anytime. The school website which has a place for homework to be listed is updated daily.

Based on the demographics and information from the community, there is little to indicate why so many students in the middle school setting have such a difficult time in completing homework. One idea is that students no longer have parents at home for assistance because most students have a family with one or more parents working outside the home. According to the information, many parents are working outside the community, so time at home may not be ideal for students finishing homework. Poverty does not seem to be a main indicator because of the percentages being so low and most of the families within the community make a respectable salary. As stated before however, we can see how the overcrowding of the entire district could possibly contribute to the decline of homework completion with the availability of teachers to provide a more one-on-one environment for each student. There needs to be something done to first determine why students are not completing homework and what can be done to help them meet the goals set by the school community to be successful students and life-long learners.

National Context of the Problem

Many causes have been attributed to difficulties with homework completion, from lack of motivation and poor attitudes to cultural differences in homework style and attitudes (Bryan & Burstein, 2004). Middle school students view homework negatively due to the interference of homework with social activities (Couts, 2004). Parental and family involvement and home environment also play a significant role in this dilemma (Corno, Pomerantz, Wang & Nye, 2000). Without community and parental support, teachers are fighting a losing battle when it comes to homework completion (Walberg, Paschal, & Weinstein, 1985).

Teachers complain that many students do not know how to behave academically by working independently, taking notes, and completing homework ((Darling-Hammond & Ifill-Lynch, 2006; Wright, 2006). There are structural adaptations that teachers can implement if they were willing to and had the support (Polloway, Epstein, Bursack, Jayanthi, & Cumblad, 1994).

Special education students in the classroom are an important factor when discussing homework completion and motivation. Students with learning disabilities are less likely to complete homework due to problems with frustration and distractibility (Gajria & Salend, 1995). Learning-disabled students are being held accountable to the same high standards as their non-disabled peers (Bursack, Harniss, Epstein, Polloway, Jayanthi, & Wissinger, 1999; Salend Duhaney, Anderson & Gottschalk, 2004).

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Evidence of the Problem

The following evidence was collected in order to substantiate the teacher researchers' view that homework completion and motivation is an ongoing issue for middle school students. The 30 student participants are in the teacher researchers' 6th grade reading and language arts. Evidence was collected using five data collection tools; teacher survey, parent survey, student record book, student observation log, and student survey, during the time period of January 29, 2007, until February 9, 2007.

Teacher Survey

Surveys were placed in all teacher mailboxes explaining the action research project and asking them to fill out the survey and return to the teacher researchers within a one-week time period (Appendix A). The purpose of the survey was to obtain the opinions of teachers about students' homework habits and motivation. Out of 61 teachers, 54% responded (n=33) to the survey. All surveys returned were anonymous.

The first part of the survey contained five questions concerning homework habits of students and teachers. The teachers responded to the questions using never, sometimes, often, and always. The second part of the survey consisted of two questions regarding the type of homework they assign and how they feel concerning homework and assessments. They responded to these questions with strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, strongly agree and agree. The following graphs illustrate the percentage of the teacher responses.

According to teacher responses represented in Figure 4, the teachers surveyed (n=33), 100% of teachers responded that they always or often record grades for homework assignments.

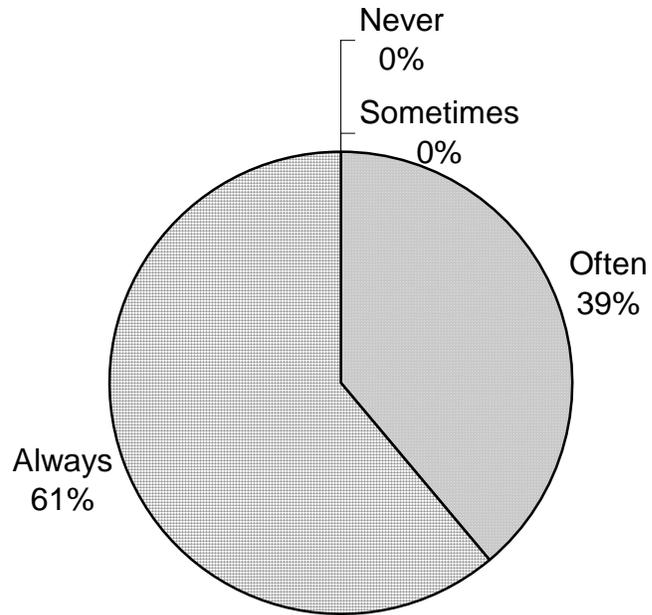


Figure 4: *Frequency of Grade Record* (n=33)

Figure 5 shows that according to teacher responses (n=33), the majority of teachers surveyed responded that they often or always provide time in class for students to begin homework (88%, n=29). None of the teachers surveyed responded to never providing time in class to begin homework.

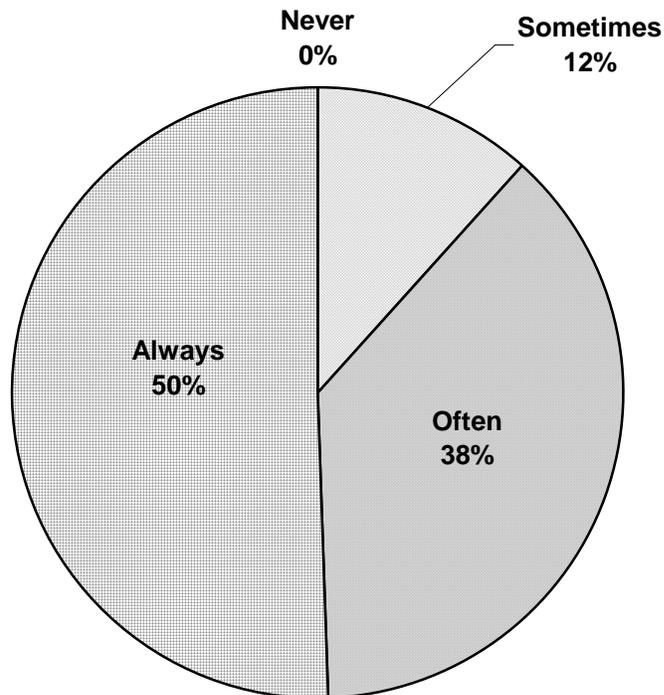


Figure 5: *Time Given for Homework* (n=33)

Figure 6 shows that according to teachers surveyed (n=33), 88% (n=29) responded that they often or always go over homework in class. Only 12% (n=4) of the teachers surveyed responded that they sometimes or never go over homework in class. It is important to note that some of the teachers surveyed do not give out homework due to the classes they teach (ex: art).

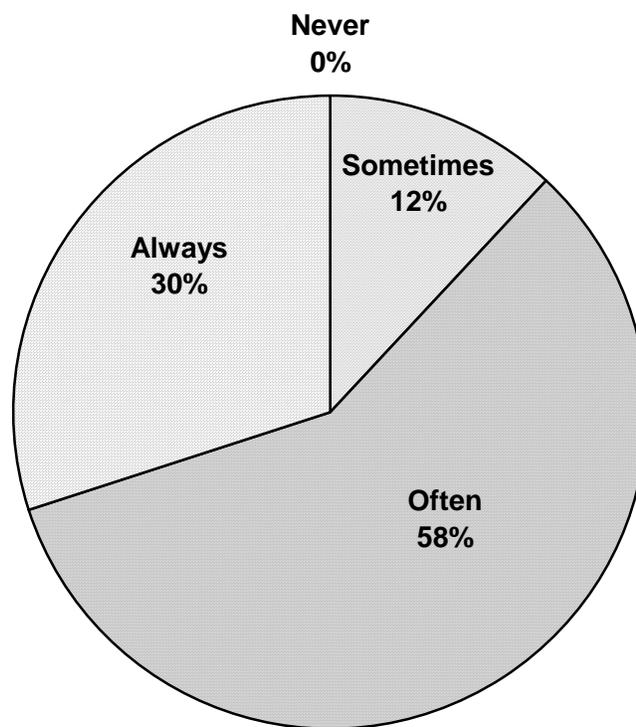


Figure 6: *Go Over Homework in Class?* (n=33)

Figure 7 shows that when questioned about the frequency of students writing down their homework in their assignment notebooks, 73% (n=25) responded that their students sometimes or never write down their assignments, whereas only 27% (n=9) reported that their students often or always write down their assignments in their assignment notebooks.

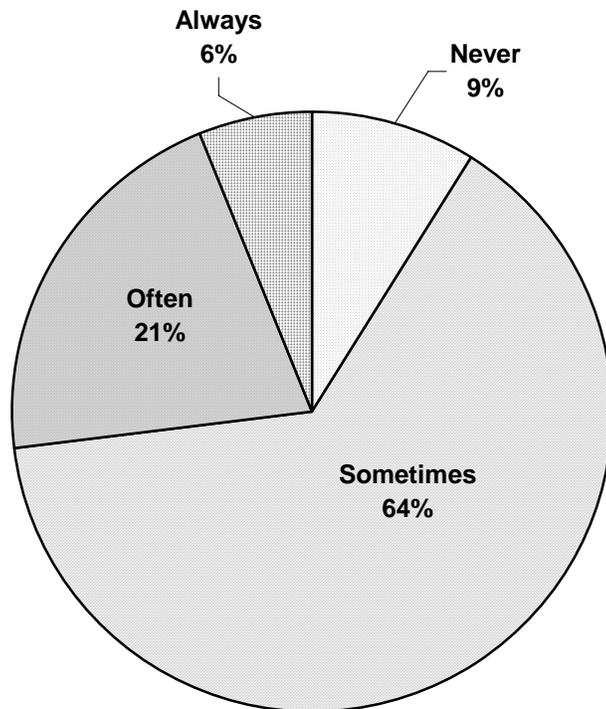


Figure 7: *Assignment Notebook Completion?* (n=33)

Figure 8 shows that according to teachers surveyed (n=33), 91% (n=30) of the teachers surveyed responded that they often or always update their website and/or homework hotline.

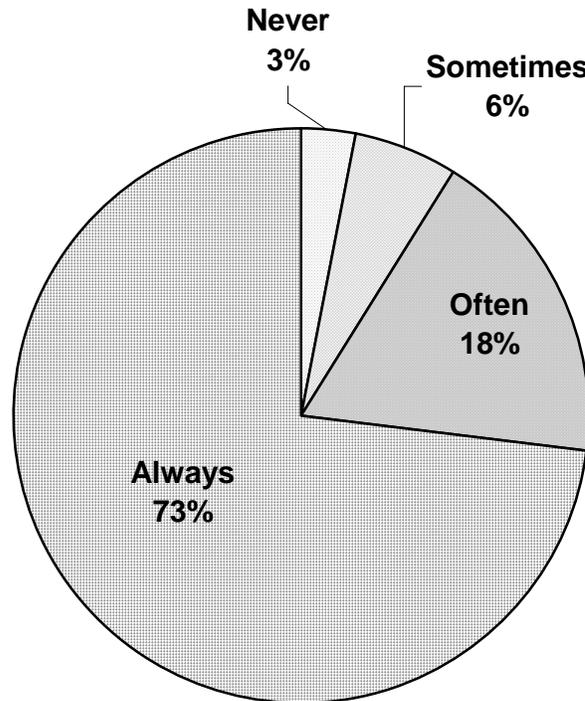


Figure 8: *Update Website and/or Homework Hotline?* (n=33)

According to the teachers surveyed, Figure 9 shows that 100% (n=33) feel that they have a fair homework/late work policy.

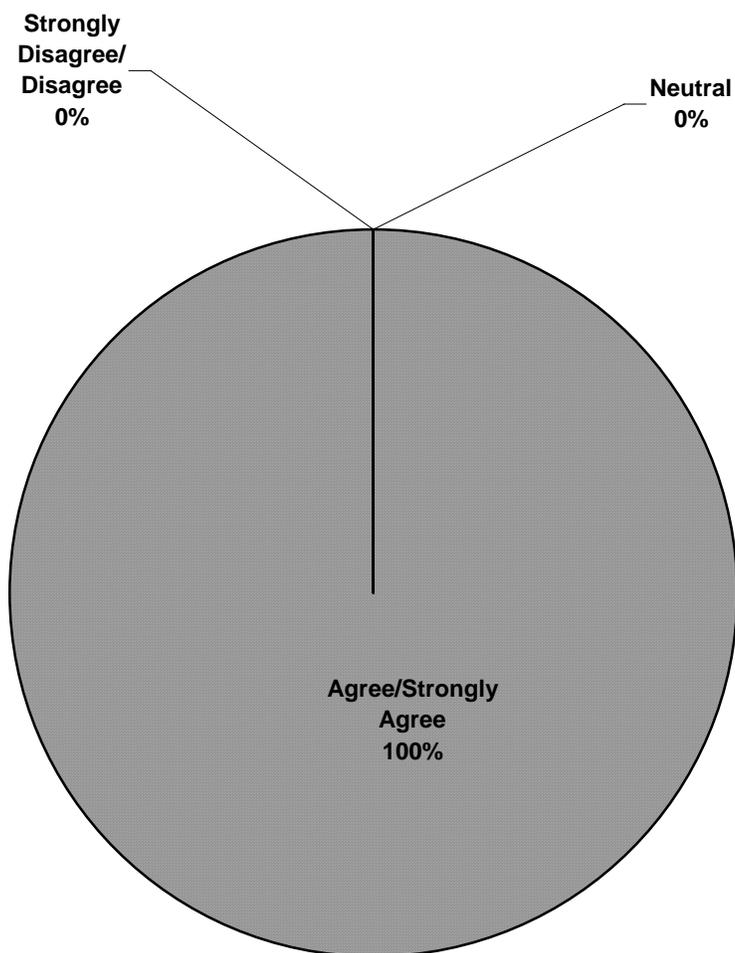


Figure 9: *Fair Homework and Late Work Policy?* (n=33)

According to the teachers surveyed (n=33), Figure 10 shows that 92% (n=30) responded that the homework they assign is a review or extension of already learned concepts. It is important to note that 8% (n=3) were neutral concerning this question and is possibly due to the fact that they do not give homework on a regular basis.

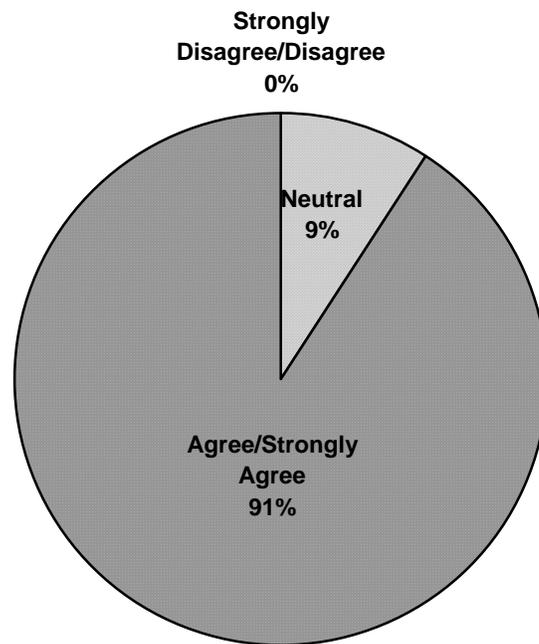


Figure 10: *Review or Extension of Learned Concepts?* (n=33)

Figure 11 shows that according to teachers surveyed (n=33), 85% (n=28) of the teachers feel that homework increases their students' achievement on assessments. Of the teachers surveyed, only 15% (n=5) are neutral or disagree that homework increases achievement on assessments.

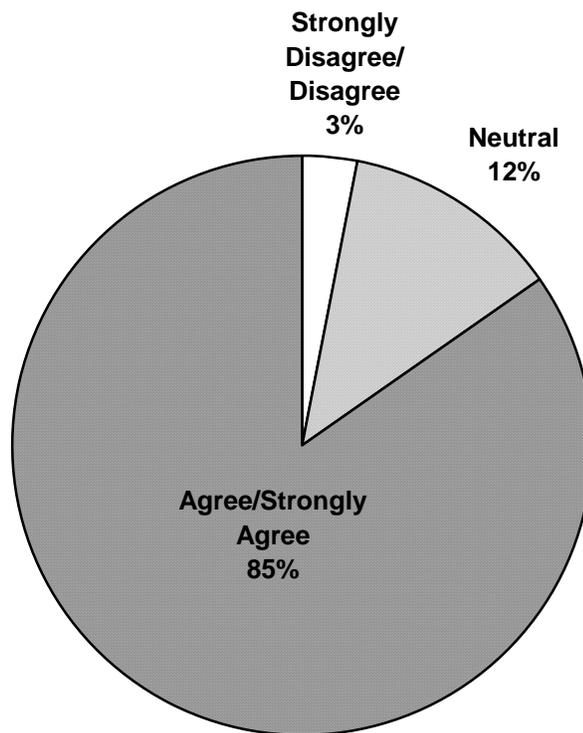


Figure 11: *Homework Increases Student Achievement on Assessments* (n=33)

Parent Survey

A letter was sent home to parents explaining the action research project (Appendix B). The purpose was to obtain information of regarding parents felt about homework and motivation of their children at home and at school. Surveys were distributed to parents of 6th grade students in the teacher researchers' reading/language arts classes (Appendix C). Thirty-four parent surveys were sent home. The percent rate of return was 68% (n=23). The reason 32% did not return the surveys was mainly due to the students' lack of conveying information to their parents and/or bringing completed surveys back to school.

The first part of the survey contained five questions concerning homework habits of students at home. The parents responded to the questions using never, sometimes, often, and always. The second part of the survey consisted of three questions regarding the impact of homework on assessments, how they feel concerning the homework and late work policy, and if their child has a quiet area to work at home. They responded to these questions with strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, strongly agree and agree. The following graphs illustrate the percentage of the parent responses.

According to parent responses (n=23) in Figure 12, there were two equal responses to the question of completing homework at home. The responses of often (39%, n=9) and sometimes (39%, n=9) were reported equally to total 78% (n=18). Please note that students in the teacher researcher's class have opportunities to begin homework in class and many students have study hall as well.

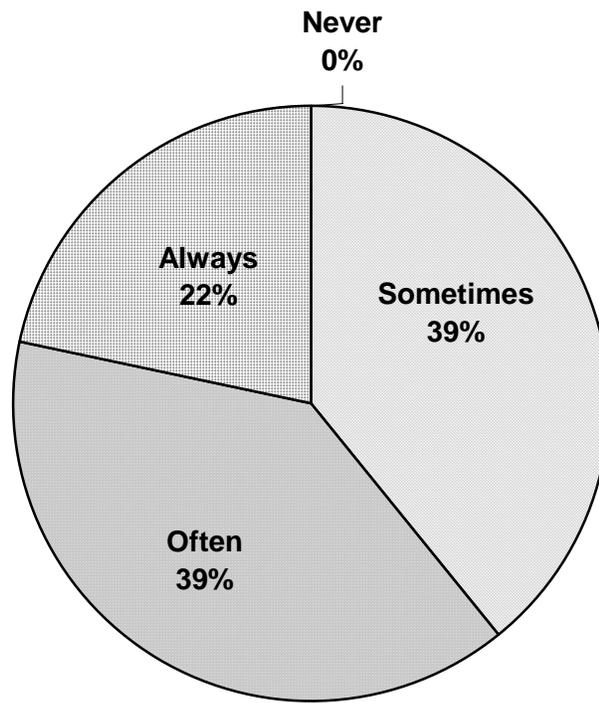


Figure 12: *Does your Child Complete Homework at Home?* (n=23)

Parent responses (n=23) in Figure 13 indicated that there were a marked percentage (57%, n=13) of their children that did not always complete homework due to non-understanding. However, 35% (n=8) did not have difficulty in completing homework due to not understanding it.

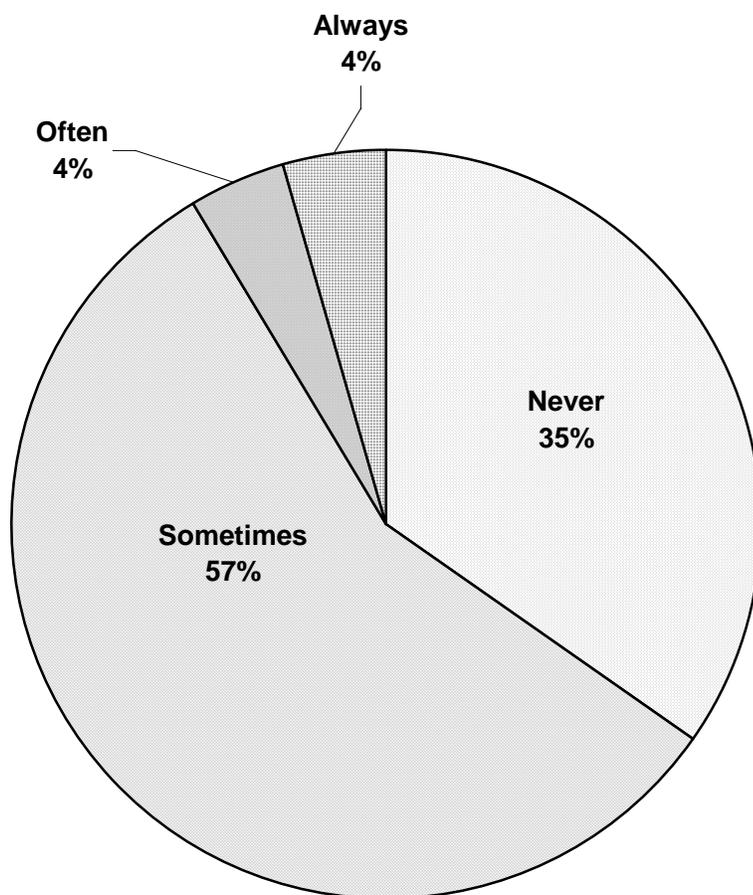


Figure 13: *Do Not Understand Homework* (n=23)

Figure 14 shows that according to the parent responses (n=23), 92% (n=21) sometimes help their children with homework, while 8% (n=2) often or always help their children with their homework.

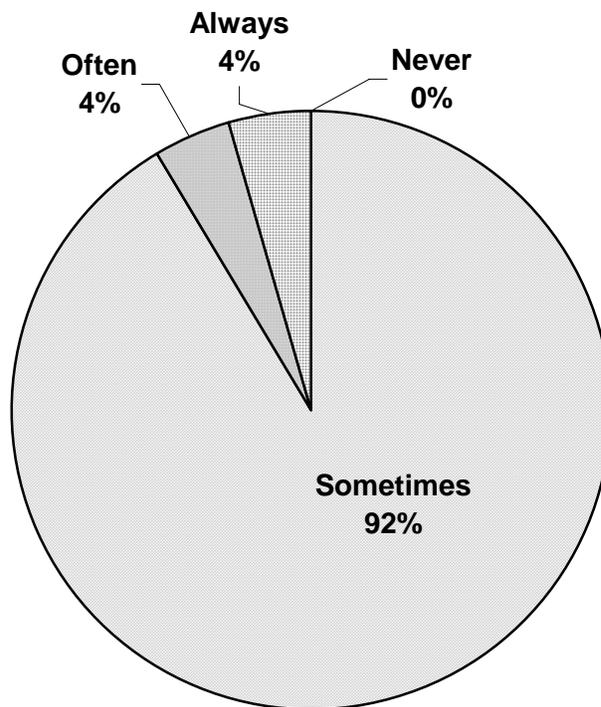


Figure 14: *Help with Homework* (n=23)

Based on the question of parents being available to help their child with homework, Figure 15 indicates there were a noteworthy percentage (78%, n=18) of parents that were always available.

It is also important to note that not all parents were available to assist their children.

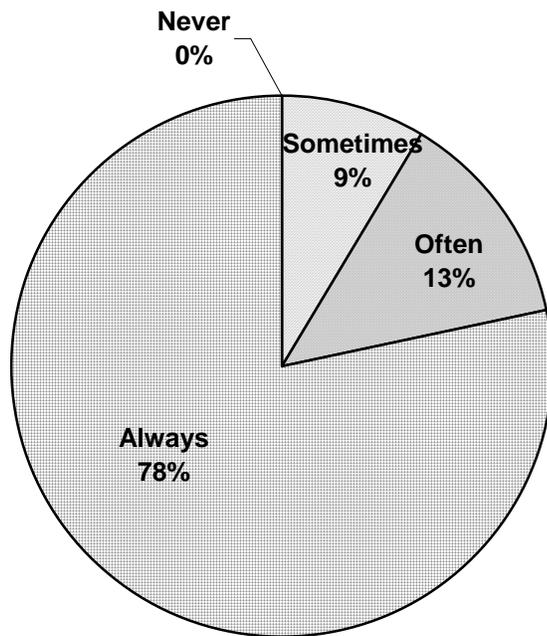


Figure 15: *Available to Help* (n=23)

Figure 16 shows that according to parents, there was a marked percentage (44%, n=10) that only checked Powerschool, teacher websites, or homework hotline sometimes or never. However, the majority of parents (56%, n=13) checked these resources often and always.

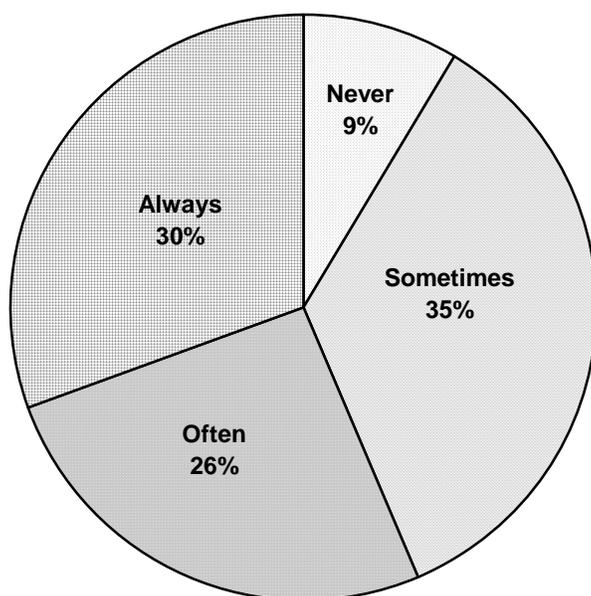


Figure 16: *Powerschool, Teacher Website, or Homework Hotline* (n=23)

One question asked if homework increased their child's achievement, which is shown in Figure 17. Parents responded that 79% (n=18) agree or strongly agree to this statement. However, there was a noted percentage (17%, n=4) that had a neutral response.

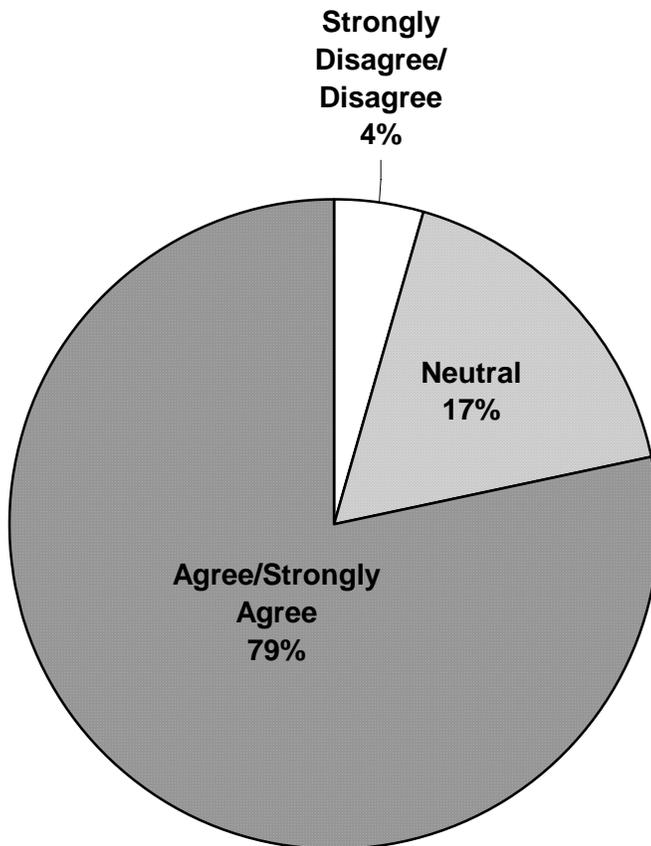


Figure 17: *Homework Increases your Child's Achievement* (n=23)

Figure 18 shows that parents responded that 96% (n=22) thought the teacher had a fair homework and late work policy. Only 4% (n=1) disagreed with the policy.

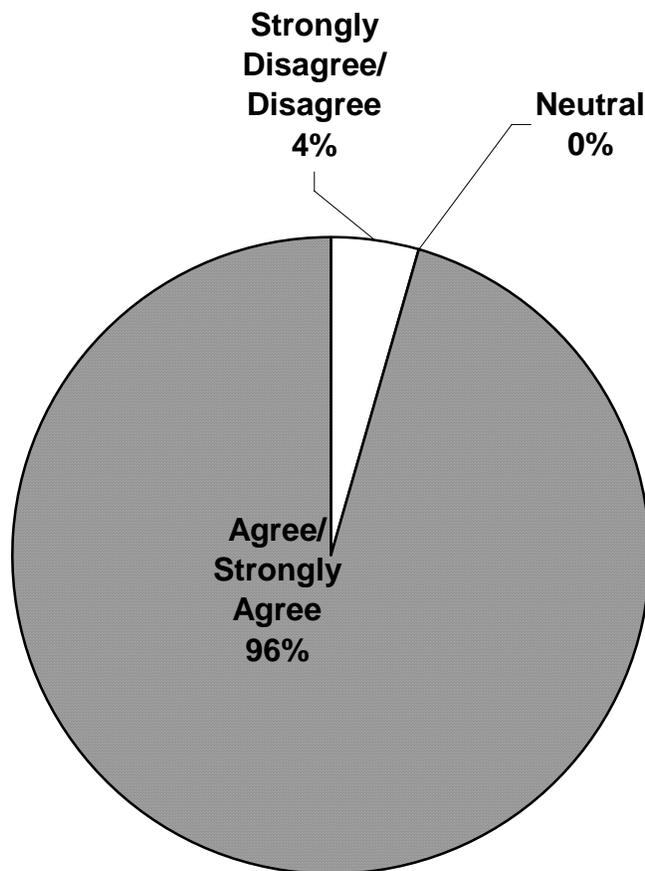


Figure 18: *Fair Homework Policy* (n=23)

The final parent question dealt with the work area of the children. Figure 19 shows that parents (n=23) responded that 83% (n=19) that they agree or strongly agree they provide a quiet and non-distracted area for the children.

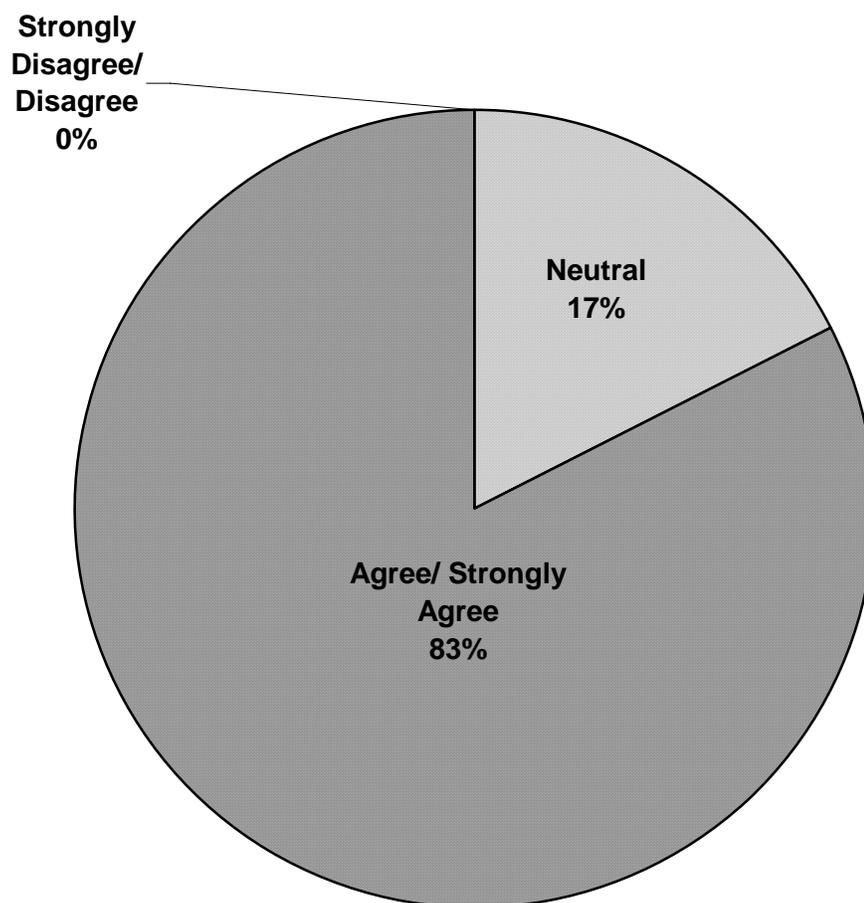


Figure 19: *Quiet Area to do Homework Without Distractions* (n=23)

Student Record Book

The student record book is the grade book that the teacher researcher uses to record grades on assignments and assessments and homework turned in on time or late (Appendix D). There were 300 entries written in the record book over a 3-week period, from January 29, 2007 until February 16, 2007. The following graphs illustrate the percentage of the homework completed and turned in on time or late.

Figure 20 shows that according to the Student Record Book (n=300) in the teacher researcher's Student Record Book, 85% (n=243) of the students turned in their homework on time. However, 15% (n=45) of the students turned in the work late or not at all.

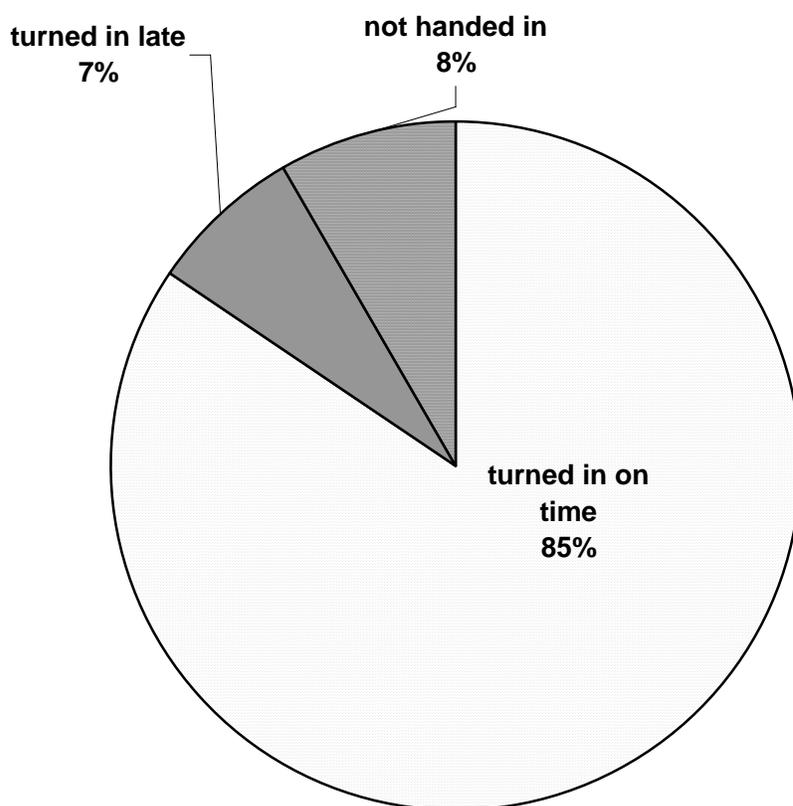


Figure 20: *Student Record Book* (n=300)

Student Observation Log

The teacher researcher on a per class basis completed the student observation log (Appendix E). There were 505 observations made over a three week period, January 29, 2007 until February 16, 2007, one time each class period, and were divided in the following categories; number of students in attendance, number of students with supplies, number of students with assignment notebooks, number of students with completed homework, and number

of students without completed homework. Averages for each week were calculated and the following graphs illustrate the percentages based on the observation log for each week.

In Figure 20, the Student Observation Log, the average number of students in attendance was 48 for week one, 53 for week two and 56 for week three. It is important to note that a project was given during week two (36%, n=24) and week three (25%, n=28) that required the students to have more supplies than usual. Week two had one snow day, one teacher in-service day, and no homework given this week. The number of students with assignment notebooks increased 13% (n=7) from week one to week three. Teacher researcher also noted an increase in the number of assignments turned in (12%, n=5) from week one to week three.

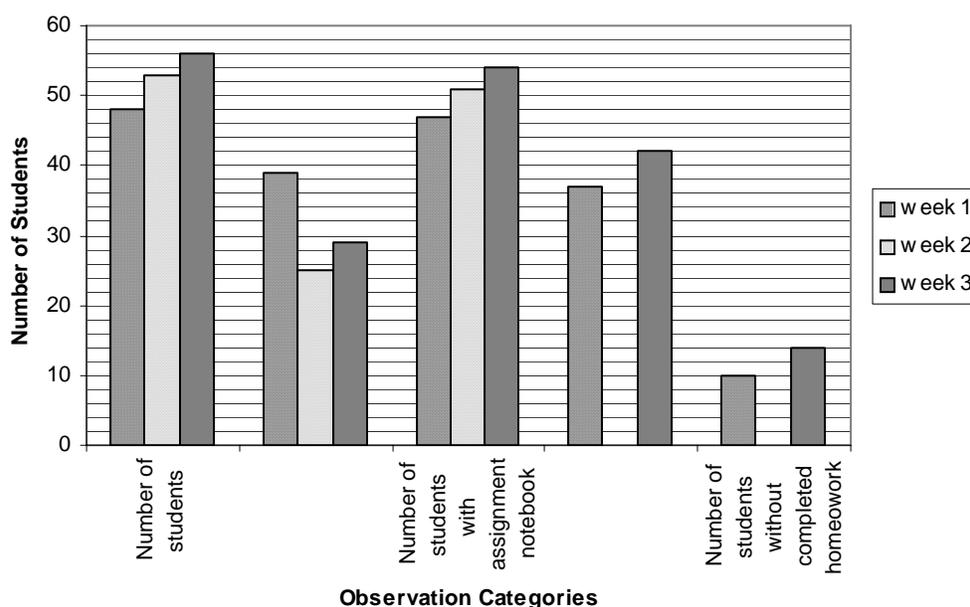


Figure 20: *Student Observation Log* (n=505)

Student Survey

Surveys and letters were sent home with students explaining the action research project and asking them to fill out the survey and return to the teacher researchers within a one-week time period (Appendix F). Out of 34 students in the teacher researchers class, 76% (n=26) of students were able to participate in the action research and responded to the survey. All surveys returned were anonymous.

The first part of the survey contained five questions concerning homework habits of students. The students responded to the questions using never, sometimes, often and always. The second part of the survey consisted of two questions regarding the affect of homework on quizzes and tests and the second question asked about homework and late work policy. They responded to these questions with strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, strongly agree, and agree. The following graphs illustrate the percentage of the student responses.

In Figure 21, student surveys (n=26), 92% (n=24) responded that they always or often turn in homework. Please note that this question did not ask whether the homework was turned in on time.

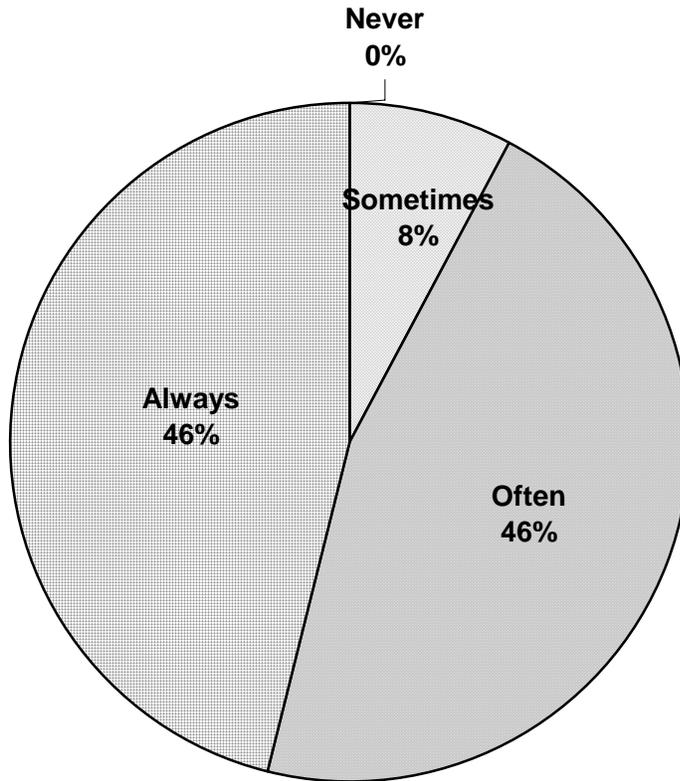


Figure 21: *Completion of Homework* (n=26)

According to the student surveys (n=26), Figure 22 shows that 69% (n=18) of students answered that they do not complete homework sometimes due to lack of understanding. This question did not indicate whether or not the lack of understanding was due to the content or the requirements of the assignment. However, 31% (n=8) of students responded that they do not fail to complete assignments due to lack of understanding.

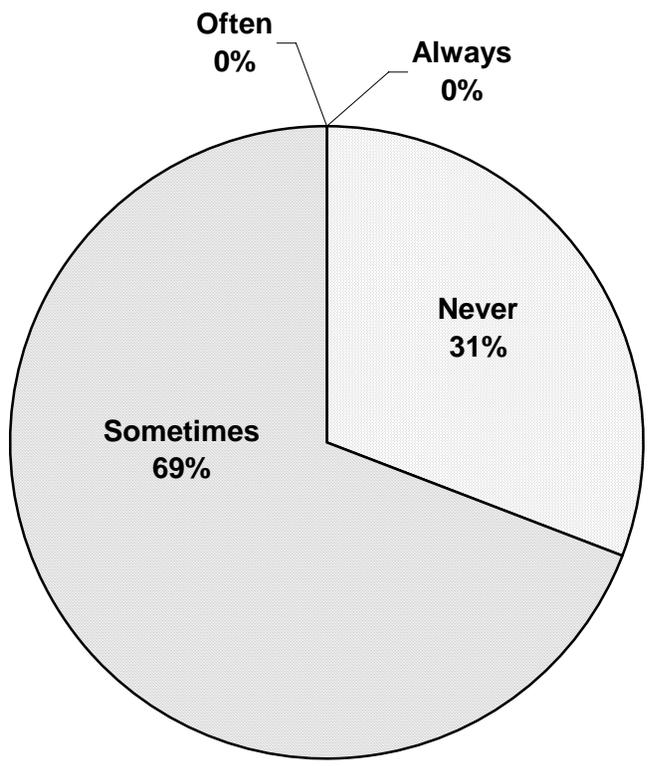


Figure 22: *Don't Understand Homework* (n=26)

Figure 23 shows that according to the student surveys (n=26), a noteworthy percentage (65%, n=17) of students responded that their parents either never or sometimes helped with homework. However, 35% (n=9) of the students said their parents often or always helped with homework.

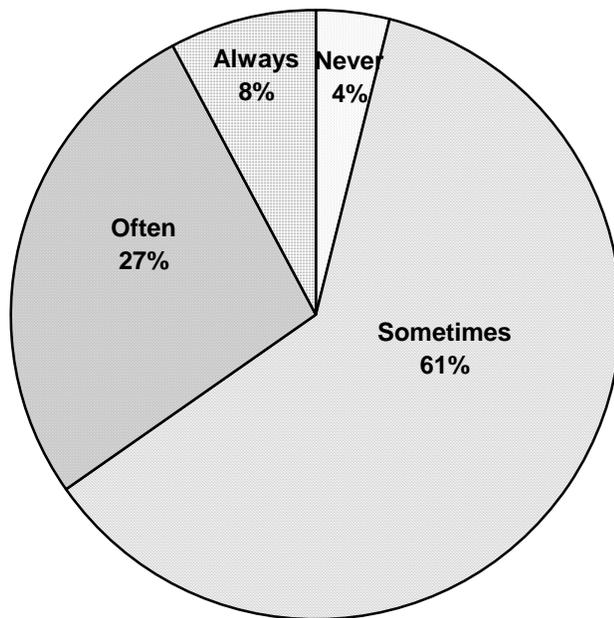


Figure 23: *Parent Help* (n=26)

According to the student responses (n=26), Figure 24 indicates that 81% (n=21) of the students either always or often completed their homework in class when the teacher provided time. Only 19% (n=5) responded that they sometimes completed it and 0% (n=0) responded that they never completed homework in class when time was given.

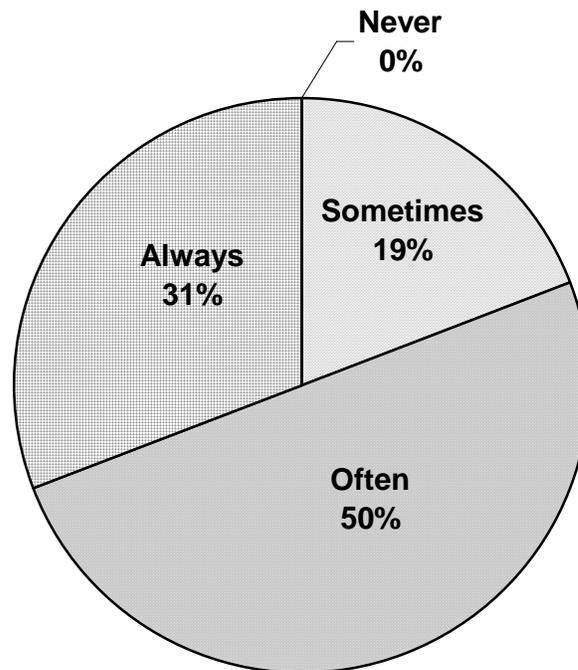


Figure 24: *Complete When Time is Given* (n=26)

According to the student responses (n=25), as shown in Figure 25, 92% (n=24) of the students stated that they always or often come to class prepared with all their supplies. There were 4% (n=1) of the respondents that stated they never bring supplies.

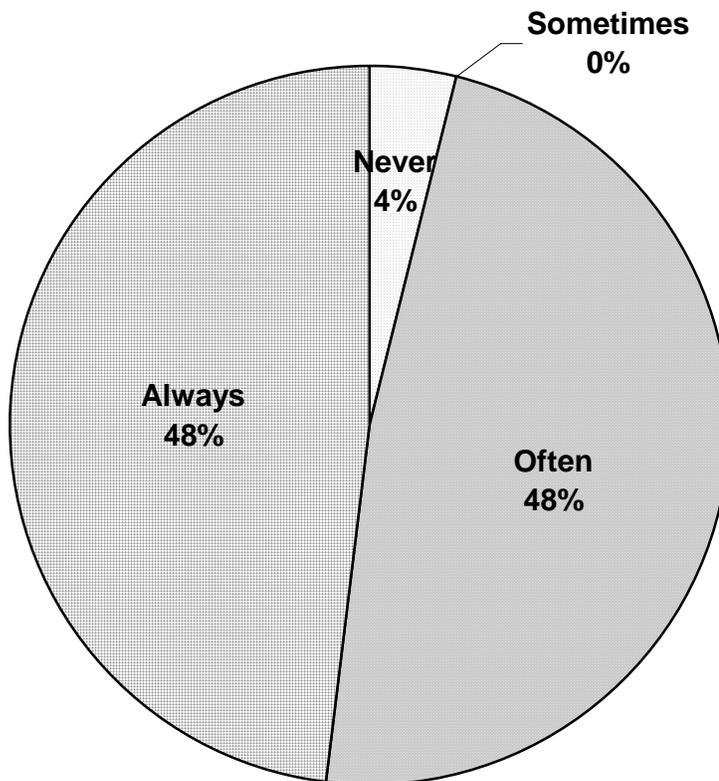


Figure 25: *Supplies* (n=25)

According to the student responses (n=26) shown in Figure 26, the majority of students (67%, n=17) either always or often write down assignments in their assignment notebook. However, 19% (n=5) of the students never write their assignments in their assignment notebook.

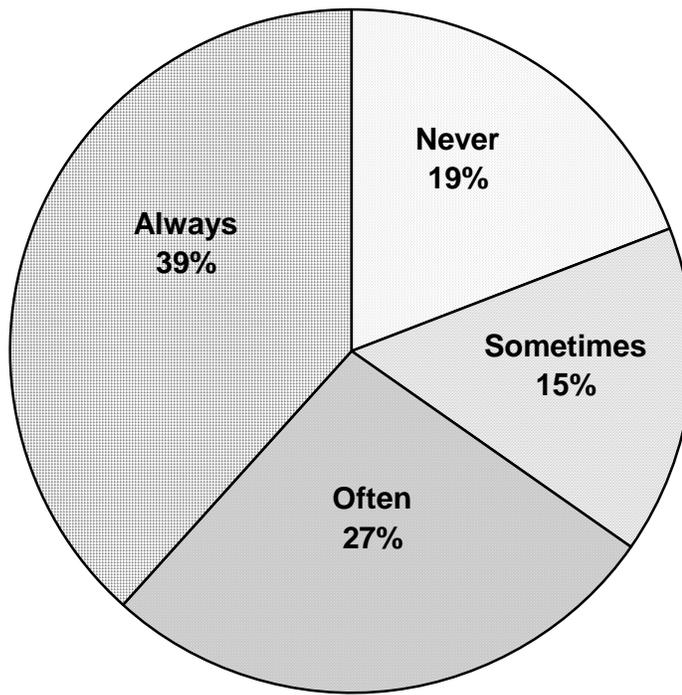


Figure 26: *Assignment Notebook* (n=26)

According to the student responses (n=26), Figure 27 shows a noteworthy percentage (34%, n=11) of the students strongly disagree or disagree that homework helps with tests and quizzes. On the other hand, 39% (n=10) agree that homework helps. There was 27% (n=7) that have a neutral feeling towards whether or not homework helps with tests and quizzes.

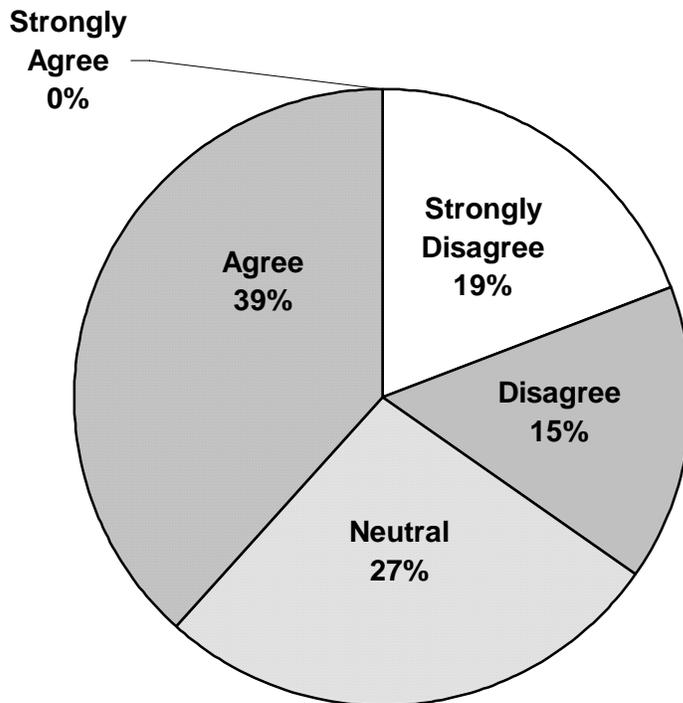


Figure 27: *Prepare for Quizzes and Tests* (n=26)

According to student responses (n=26) in Figure 28, 56% (n=14) of the students feel the teacher has a fair homework and late policy. There were 40% (n=10) of the students who felt neutral about the policy and 4% (n=1) who disagreed with the teacher's homework and late work policy.

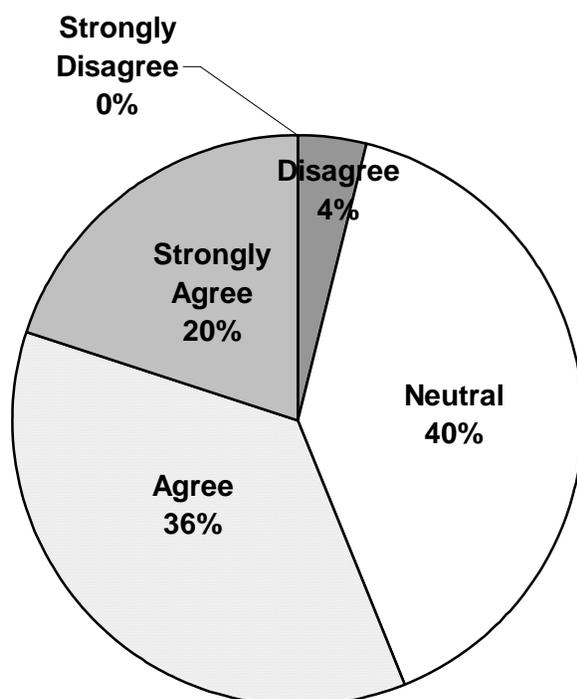


Figure 28: *Fair Homework and Late Work Policy?* (n=26)

Summary

We, as teacher researchers, found the data collected to be insightful and useful for implementation of the interventions we are using for our action research project. Regarding the teacher responses in the teacher surveys, we find their responses to be in line with our experiences as teachers within the same school. We did find it a bit suspicious that 100% of the teachers felt they had a fair late work policy (Figure 9). Many teachers in the building do not accept late work. These teachers believe that a no late work policy is a fair late work policy. It is alarming that more than half of the students do not keep track of daily assignments in an

assignment book (Figure 26). It is obvious that teachers and administration need to find a way to encourage the use of assignment notebooks and increase this percentage.

From our experience, we feel that the parents on a whole were honest and realistic as they responded to the parent survey. We were a little surprised that a high percentage responded that they only sometimes help their child with homework (Figure 15), and almost half of the parents surveyed responded that they sometimes or never check the teacher website or homework hotline (Figure 16). We were also a bit surprised to see that 79% of the parents surveyed felt that homework increases their child's achievement on assessments (Figure 17).

On the other hand, we do not feel that the students were as honest and forthright when answering questions on the survey. The students responded differently than parents and teachers regarding doing homework on a regular basis (Figure 21), and being prepared for class (Figure 25). By reading the graphs/data, it is obvious that the students see themselves in a more positive manner when it comes to these areas of concern.

It will be interesting for us, as teacher researchers, to see how our strategies/interventions change the outcome of our post documentation data. We feel our interventions will strengthen the attitudes of students concerning homework completion and motivation.

Probable Causes

The literature on homework and motivation reveals numerous influences as to why students have difficulties in completing homework and are lacking motivation. These influences include poor student habits and study skills, lack of parental support and understanding, poor environment, parent complaints of schools and teachers, teacher concerns and lack of communication between home, school, and community, and finally the special education

community of learners. All of these factors have a significant influence on students and their ability to succeed both academically and socially.

Poor student habits and motivation is a significant cause for not completing homework assignments. Many causes have been suggested to explain difficulties with homework completion, from poor attitudes and lack of motivation to cultural differences in homework style and attitudes (Bryan & Burstein, 2004). Most students often have a negative attitude toward homework and don't complete homework because of this attitude (Gajria & Salend, 1995). Not doing homework is likely to have an adverse effect on academic achievement, along with doing work that is below standards (Bryan, Burstein, & Bryan, 2001). There are several reasons students have a negative attitude toward homework: Sometimes there are just so many assignments that even good students have difficulty handling them all at once (Corno, 2000); Students view homework as boring and dull (Couts, 2004); Many students do not understand the homework, they do not have time, and don't know how to plan/organize (Darling-Hammond & Ifill-Lynch, 2006); Daily routines are so busy and overcrowded that students don't complete assignments or rush through them (Xu, 2005); there are many distractions for homework completion, television and telephone being the two largest distractions (Xu & Corno, 2003). The evening schedule is so tight in some homes that when homework sessions last too long, tension and negative emotions erupt (Corno, 2000).

No matter what the attitudes are, the responsibility for completing the homework falls on the students (Xu & Corno, 2003). Students are not spending an adequate amount of time doing homework. For average to above average achieving students, 20% of students' academic time is spent doing homework (Bryan & Sullivan-Burstein, 1998). For many students this is not happening due to behaviors such as: believing homework is not important, not taking home

books/work, not writing down assignments, and believing friends and extracurricular activities are more important than homework (Gajria & Salend, 1995). Common problems among low achieving students involved the areas of work habits, assignment completion, and working independently (Polloway, Epstein, Bursuck, Jayanthi, & Cumblad, 1994). For many students, exhibiting an “I don’t care” attitude protects their self-esteem as not to show incompetence by failing due to lack of knowledge (Darling-Hammond & Ifill-Lynch, 2006). This is especially true of middle and high school age students. Middle and secondary school students see homework as a negative interference with extracurricular activities and social involvement. When deciding, they will usually choose the latter (Couts, 2004).

The home environment and family support are major factors influencing the middle school student. Without community and parental support, teachers by themselves cannot press homework very far (Walberg, Paschal, & Weinstein, 1985). Factors influencing parental involvement in homework are: personal beliefs about the causes of school achievement, their ability to help their child, concerns that parental help may make the child more dependent and needy, and tension between parents and children causes frustration and anger and may be counter productive to the child’s ability to function well in school, both academically and socially (Bryan, Burstein, & Bryan, 2001). Researchers have studied the non-establishment of expectations for homework and what the roles of families are in the homework process (Otis, Grouzet, & Pelletier, 2005). It is important for the child to have a positive, encouraging and supportive environment in order to be successful when it comes to homework and motivation. When parents don’t understand a personal benefit of homework, they don’t convey a positive message to the child about the importance of homework (Couts, 2004). If parents are not positive about homework, it is not likely that the child will view homework positively. In many homes,

beliefs and attitudes don't even come into play because no one is at home to encourage and support the student regarding homework. Students, especially middle and high school, are spending more time alone than in the past, especially students of middle and high school age (Corno, 2000). Because homework is done outside of school without teacher supervision and home settings vary in support (Corno, 2000), it is almost impossible to regulate homework.

It is important for teachers to understand the varying home environments that affect their students on a daily basis. Non-understanding on the teacher's part of homework-related concerns such as: frustration and distention in family-child relationships and interactions, denying leisure time for students and their families, and conflicting with the economic needs and cultural perspectives of families (Otis, Grouzet, & Pelletier, 2005), can lead to negative effects on the students in lacking environments. Motivation and homework completion seem to be more of a problem for children from disadvantaged backgrounds/environments. General despair of students (homelessness, nutrition, live with adults that are under severe stress) can cause motivational difficulties (Darling-Hammond & Ifill-Lynch, 2006). If internal motivation is lacking it becomes difficult to insure that the child will do their homework (Fink & Nalven, 1972).

Parents are extremely important in the homework controversy. The parents' affect in the homework context can be positive and negative depending on parents. The nature of mothers' interactions with children in the homework context and the implications of mothers' affects in the homework context for children's motivational and emotional needs definitely make a difference (Pomerantz, Wang & Ng, 2005). Students average 4-5 hours of homework and about 28 hours of television per week (Walberg, Paschal & Weinstein, 1985). This is definitely a home/environment issue that can greatly affect a child's academic progress and growth.

Parent complaints of schools and teachers affect everyone involved in homework and motivation. The first question parents ask teachers and administrators are why parents are involved in homework at all (Hoover-Dempsey, Battiato, Walker, Reed, DeJong, & Jones, 2001). They feel they are not the teachers and do not have the knowledge to help their students. The other issue that parents have is from a parent's point of view, the costs of homework is too high. This cost includes time taken to supervise children, the conflict, and disputes between family members and the students over homework and its completion (Couts, 2004; Kohn, 2006). Research also suggests that that homework intrudes on family life (Kohn, 2006). Parents also complain that their children's moods tend to be negative, regardless of age gender or academic performance levels (Xu & Corno, 2003). Parents also face the problem of when tasks are too demanding for students, children tend to disengage and ruminate about personal weaknesses rather than strengths (Corno, 2000). Parents then do not know what strategies to use with their children and to what extent should they be involved in the whole issue of homework. With the Internet and technology available and teachers relying on this for homework. Parents complain that some student and their families may not have access to the technology and training to employ the Web-based homework system (Otis, Grouzet, & Pelletier, 2005). The final issue about homework is that parents don't understand how what their child's academic outcome is related to their involvement as parents (Hoover-Dempsey, Battiato, Walker, Reed, DeJong, & Jones, 2001).

Teacher concerns about student homework and motivation are influential factors in this ongoing concern. Teachers feel that homework problems are likely to increase as students reach middle and secondary schools cover more content and assign more homework (Bryan, Burstein, & Bryan, 2004). Another issue that teachers complain about is that many adolescents enter high

school unprepared to act like students. They do not know how to sit still and listen, take notes, study on their own, engage in class work, and finish homework (Darling-Hammond & Ifill-Lynch, 2006). The question that researchers have studied is the complaint from teachers that many students do not know how to do homework (Darling-Hammond & Ifill-Lynch, 2006), (Wright, 2006). Studies have also shown an increasing proportion of secondary students complete no assigned homework (Couts, 2004). On the other side teachers are now feeling that with the Internet and online grading systems that some students and families misuse the system and inundate the teacher with e-mail (Otis, Grouzet, & Pelletier, 2005). So not only does that take up huge amounts of time for the teacher to respond to all the requests, teachers also feel that grading homework assignments are extremely time consuming (Gunter, Miller, Venn, Thomas, & House, 2002). Teachers also find great difficulty in attempting to collect, record, and analyze data and still find time to teach (Gunter, Miller, Venn, Thomas, & House, 2002) There are many studies that have been completed that show that teachers can use a variety of methods to improve homework completion. "Schools can use strategies that have been developed for the past 2 decades to help close the gap for struggling students" (Wright, 2006). "Unfortunately, few studies have been done focusing on helping teachers adopt and utilize these strategies in their classroom" (Bryan & Sullivan-Burstein, 1998). The cost to change the teachers' work schedules or change the parameters of the teachers' responsibility so that they could assign meaningful homework is not something the legislature or school boards would want to pay. The cost would be estimated in the millions of dollars (Walberg & Weinstein, 1985). Besides, teachers are less likely to implement adaptations when they involve structural changes (Polloway, Epstein, Bursuck, Jayanthi, & Cumblad, 1994). Some of the examples of this would be classroom

arrangement, major adaptations of curricular materials, and specific behavioral interventions.

“Treatment that is not used is no treatment at all” (Witt and Elliot, 1985).

Teacher and school failures are also another factor affecting homework and motivation in students. To begin with, teacher motivation can be an issue, over-reliance on one type of assignment restricts students’ perspectives on learning, but inventive assignments can be narrowing if overdone (Corno, 2000). Also, both parents and educators have publicly addressed ambivalence about homework (Walberg, Paschal, Weinstein, 1985). This will reflect how students feel about homework. Therefore, the students cannot alone be blamed. Many researchers talk about the fact that motivational problems are due in part to teacher failure in giving feedback on homework, checking for understanding, incorporating homework into grading policies, and involving parents in the homework process (Gajria, & Salend, 1995), (Walberg, Paschal, Weinstein, 1985), (Polloway, Epstein, Bursuck, Jayanthi, & Cumblad, 1994), (Salend & Schliff, 1989). There is also an issue with consistency from teacher to teacher and school year to school year, some teachers’ give very little or no homework while others pile it on, based on their own individual belief rather than agreed practices (Simplificio, 2005), (Bryan & Burstein, 2004). This issue is in part due to the fact that many school districts do not have an established homework policy (Bryan & Burstein, 2004). The other issue that teachers have to overcome is they must learn to assign appropriate academic tasks. However, many teachers do not plan appropriate tasks. Teachers may be giving “bad” homework, which can lead to poor attitudes and can be counterproductive (Hughes, Ruhl, Schumaker, & Deshler, 2002). When good homework is given teachers may not have the extra time to help students who may need it (Polloway, et al.). Researchers do feel that there are some good reasons for homework. These reasons would include independent practice of a new skill, tasks requiring extra time, and

increase home-school partnerships (Truscott, 1998). On the other hand no studies have focused on teaching students strategies that would be required for independent completion of a homework assignment (Hughes, Ruhl, Schumaker, & Deshler, 2002). Teachers also fail students and families due to the fact that some teachers include a punitive element for incomplete homework. These might include lowering grades, putting names on boards, and keeping students after school or in for recess (Polloway, Epstein, Bursuck, Jayanthi, & Cumblad, C. 1994). Teachers do not always understand the family dynamics of the student. This may include “frustration and distention in family-child relationships, denying leisure time and conflicting with the economic needs and cultural perspectives of families” (Otis, Grouzet, & Pelletier, 2005).

The lack of communication between everyone involved is also an issue that many researchers have studied. If a teacher is not clear in their homework policy and frequently addresses it families understanding of what is expected can be limited (Otis, Grouzet, & Pelletier, 2005). Sometimes due to the lack of communication of policies, “parents and teacher can sabotage their own best efforts with children by plying them with expectations that every completed assignment must be perfect” (Corno, 2000). When emotions get involved, communication breaks down and excuses, complaints, and struggles occur. Then if parents’ start talking among themselves and teachers do the same “Misery loves company,” and the bond and sides are drawn (Corno, 2000).

When discussing homework completion and motivation, it would be irresponsible not to discuss the role of the learning disabled student in the classroom. Students with learning disabilities are less likely to complete homework due to lack of motivation and problems with distractibility (Gajria & Salend, 1995). As students with disabilities are increasingly included in

general education classrooms and held accountable to the same high standards as their non disabled peers, they are especially at risk for failure (Bursack, Harniss, Epstein, Polloway, Jayanthi & Wissinger, 1999). With new learning standards being adopted, students with disabilities continually face many challenges in the general education setting. One challenge is the expectation to complete significant amounts of increasingly difficult homework assignments and to do so successfully (Salend, Duhaney, Anderson, & Gottschalk, 2004). The increasing number of students in the classroom has a definite effect on the classroom as a whole, including the effectiveness of the teacher. Teachers found that preparing for future class work was not as helpful for students with disabilities as for those students without disabilities (Polloway, Epstein, Bursuck, Jayanthi & Cumblad, 1994). Teachers must assign appropriate academic tasks, and students must complete those tasks. If neither is present, the performance, grades and self-esteem, of students with disabilities may be negatively affected, and a major achievement gap may result between them and their non-disabled peers who complete the work (Hughes, Ruhl, Schumaker & Deshler, 2002). Extension activities requiring students to integrate new concepts may be more difficult for students with learning disabilities (Polloway, Epstein, Bursuck, Jayanthi & Cumblad, 1994). All of these issues can have negative effects on the progress of all students.

For learning disabled students, difficulties can be attributed to personal deficits. These deficits become more problematic as the students get older. As children mature, homework assignments become more difficult and students are expected to become more independent (Bryan & Burstein, 2004). For students with learning disabilities, the reasons for not completing homework are tied directly to their disability. (Hughes, Ruhl, Schumaker & Deshler, 2002). Unfortunately, students with disabilities lack the necessary skills to help them succeed and do

homework independently. Special education teachers spend a majority of their time monitoring homework completion rather than teaching the skills that would help students become capable of doing the homework independently (Bryan & Burstein, 2004). Parents and teachers have described how the traits of students with learning disabilities interfere with homework on a consistent basis (Bryan, Burstein, & Bryan, 2001). A study was conducted to compare homework practices of learning disabled students and their non-disabled peers. The results suggested that, in fact, LD students did exhibit deficits that may hinder their ability to complete homework. These deficits include: being easily distracted, giving and maintaining focus/attention to their homework assignments, needing someone to help them do their homework, taking longer than their peers to complete homework (Gajria & Salend, 1995).

Students with learning disabilities do not want to be viewed as different and want to be treated the same as their peers. Opportunities for peer interactions are reduced when students with disabilities do not have the same assignments as classmates (Bryan, Burstein, & Bryan, 2001). Because of this, self esteem and social skills can be adversely affected. Student with disabilities want to read the same books and be involved in the same groups and activities as their non-disabled classmates (Vaughn, Schumm, & Kouzekanani, 1993). It is important to include all students in classroom activities and give LD students a chance to learn what their classmates are learning (Klinger & Vaughn, 1999). Students tend to be more motivated when they have a sense of belonging and feel they “fit in.”

Many factors that contribute to students’ lack of motivation are not controllable by the student alone. Schools, teachers, parents, and the community must work together to ensure that students receive all the support and tools necessary to be successful. Changes must be made on all sides for this to occur. Teachers and schools need to realize that many of the home and

environment issues will not change. These uncontrollable issues ultimately places the majority of the burden on the teachers to find different ways to productively motivate students and help them achieve academic success.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Review of the Literature

Homework completion has been a problem for many years, especially among middle school age students. Much of the research concludes that homework positively affects academic success and achievement. This is especially true in middle school and secondary school levels (Trammer, Schloss, & Alper, 1994; Elksnin & Elksnin, 2000; Bempechat, 2004). Teachers and parents complain that students lack motivation in this age group. After reviewing the literature, the teacher researchers found the following areas need to be addressed when discussing this issue of homework completion and motivation: Family environment and involvement, parent/teacher communication and school policies, student views and attitudes, and special education and teacher strategies.

The ultimate goal for teachers has been the independent academic pursuit of all students. In much of the research we reviewed, there was agreement as to homework's connection to students' achievement. Homework has been shown to have a positive effect on academic performance of students, especially lower achieving students (Elksnin & Elksnin, 2000; Bempechat, 2004). In order for students to receive benefits in their academic achievement they must receive greater amounts and higher standards for homework. Students must also understand the perceived purposes of the homework assigned and develop positive homework behaviors (Walberg, Paschal, & Weinstein, 1985; Xu, 2005). It also has been shown that children who do additional academic work outside school are likely to become acclimated to academic rigor (Corno, 2000). However, the largest discovery in educational research showed that in order for

there to be an increase in students' achievement homework must include comments or immediate grading of the assignments (Walberg, 1984).

Student achievement outcomes are greatly influenced by parental attitudes, and perception of their child's competence (Hoover-Dempsey, Battiato, Walker, Reed, DeJong, & Jones, 2001). The students must not only deal with these parental attitudes, they need to deal with internal factors, such as self-regulation, which directly influences their behavior and achievement. Many students already have a poor attitude about homework. They feel that they receive too much and if they had less they state they would read more for enjoyment, have more family time, play sports, hang out with friends, and listen to music. However, homework in most classes is not going away. Therefore, students need to deal with distractions, ability to emotionally cope, and focus on the tasks at hand (Xu & Corno, 2003). One way to help students is to train them to assess their mistakes. They must be able to differentiate their mistakes between non-comprehension of materials and their own lack of effort. After achieving this, students will pick up more positive ways to deal with academic difficulty (Bempechat, 2004). When students have made these changes they become enthusiastic and can re-engage or even prompt a teacher to change the nature of assignments or even the frequency (Corno, 2000). Middle and high-school students do homework for more intrinsic than external reasons (Xu, 2005). Many students can establish the ability to self-regulate and intrinsically motivate themselves. Unfortunately, from the end of middle school until the second year of high school, intrinsic motivation does decline. If students are able to stay intrinsically motivated by the end of junior-high, they are more likely to avoid the negative effects of this transition period.

When discussing solutions for the homework completion and motivation dilemma in middle school students, the special education population plays a significant role. There are many

factors that contribute to academic success for the learning disabled student. LD students can productively engage in academic activities through quality homework assignments (Trammel, Schloss, & Alper, 1994). Though the learning disabled student exhibits characteristics that make it more difficult for him/her in the academic setting, most general education students can benefit from the same interventions and accommodations.

Family involvement is the most important factor that affects students with disabilities. A strong positive relationship exists between academic achievement and family involvement. Students with disabilities require more frequent and direct contact from teachers regarding home practices (Polloway, Epstein, Bursuck, Jayanthi, & Cumblad, 1994). Another important factor is communication between teachers. If communication between special education teachers and regular education teachers were improved, homework completion would be more effective (Bryan, Burstein, & Bryan, 2001). It is important for the regular education teacher to understand the limitations of the LD student and what accommodations need to be made. On the other hand, it is just as important for the special education teacher to know what and how the LD student is doing in the regular education classroom.

Homework can be used effectively in special education as well as general education settings, but different interventions may be more effective at different ages (Bryan, Burstein, & Bryan, 2001). There are many adaptations that teachers feel are effective for all age groups: giving extra assistance, providing a peer tutor for assistance, and checking more frequently with students about assignments and expectations (Polloway, Epstein, Bursuck, Jayanthi, & Cumblad, 1994). Teachers also highly rate reinforcement, encouragement, and involving the LD student in whole class activities as successful interventions (Polloway, et al., 1994). Students with disabilities function best on maintenance-type tasks. Communicating clear expectations and

consequences is rated highly by teachers, along with beginning assignments in class to check for understanding (Polloway, et al., 1994). Teachers are willing to consider adaptations and modifications in their classes if they perceive them to be reasonable and effective. Homework more than likely works best when the content is not complex or terribly novel (Polloway, et al., 1994). If the work is too complex, the student will avoid it out of frustration. If the work is too novel or mundane, the student will avoid it due to lack of challenge.

Intervention studies demonstrate that students with learning disabilities can improve their homework completion, accuracy and overall academic performance using a variety of approaches to structure homework assignments (Bryan, Burstein, & Bryan, 2001). To overcome difficulties, students with LD need to learn skills related to listening for and accurately recording an assignment, planning how much time should be scheduled to complete it and when to complete it, identifying materials needed, etc. (Hughes, Ruhl, Schumaker, & Deshler, 2002). Much of a teacher's time is spent getting the student caught up with assignments and homework. Teaching the actual skills and providing students with the necessary tools, to work independently, is neglected. It is important to teach study skills and self-regulations skills (Margolis, 2005). Students with LD need to learn to manage homework activities largely on their own to assist them in their independence and promote feelings of self-control and self-efficacy. This is especially important since there are many activities that compete for their time and attention (Hughes, et al., 2002). Struggling learners will experience more success when they are assigned challenging but familiar work that they can finish without extensive effort (Margolis, 2005).

After reviewing the literature, we found graphing to be highly rated by teachers, both general and special education. Graphing tends to facilitate more consistent and frequent

performance feedback to students (Gunter, Miller, Venn, Thomas, & House, 2002). Students with disabilities feel empowered to take responsibilities for their own academic performances by graphing academic data (Gunter, et al, 2002). Graphs provide more frequent feedback to students. Effectiveness is increased when homework is graphed (Gunter, et al., 2002; Bryan & Burstein, 2004; Margolis, 2005). An important attribute in graphing is empowering the students to collect and self-graph their own data reducing teacher time and responsibilities in evaluating student work (Gunter, et al., 2002). This can provide more time for teachers to assist students in the classroom that require assistance. For graphing to be successful it is important for teachers to specifically identify the behavior to be graphed, the graphing procedure and the extent to which the student can contribute (Gunter, et al., 2002). Students with LD can learn, apply, and maintain a comprehensive strategy for independently recording and completing assignments in such a way that their rate of assignment completion increases in general education classes (Hughes, et al., 2002).

Most researchers do agree that the teacher's attitude, competence and strategies can make a significant difference, positive or negative in a students' academic attitude and progress. Homework has positive effects on the academic success of all students, especially lower achieving and LD students (Walberg et al., 1985). It is important for teachers to help students be part of the solution rather than the problem (Darling-Hammond & Ifill-Lynch, 2006). It is important to find out whether the student isn't completing work because he or she lacks the skills or lacks the motivation (Wright, Paschal, & Weinstein, 1985). There are many strategies researchers have found to be effective in motivating students and increasing the rate of homework completion. Teachers should always consider the type of homework activity when assigning work to be done outside of school. Students will be more likely to complete the

assignment if the work/activity is relevant, interesting, engaging and worthy of effort (Couts, 2004; Margolis, 2005; Darling-Hammond & Ifill-Lynch, 2006; Margolis, 2005).

Project based work has been found to be more motivating and interesting for students (Darling-Hammond & Ifill-Lynch, 2006). Teachers can make assignments that will increase the likelihood of a positive response and encourage engagement and participation in class (Corno, 2000). Teachers can make homework more meaningful and can vary the amount and type of assignments. It is important to provide feedback, verbal or written, on all assignments (Gajria & Salend, 1995; Margolis, 2005). It is beneficial for teachers to plan and assign homework tasks that involve appropriate content at appropriate instructional levels that match students' skills (Hughes, Ruhl, Schumaker, & Deshler, 2002; Wright, Paschal, & Weinstein, 1985).

Teachers should be alerted to students who experience a decrease in motivation as well as those who always have had a difficulty with motivation (Otis, Grouzet & Pelletier). Teachers need to be proficient in listening and communicating expectations and requirements for students (Margolis, 2005). There needs to be consistency between the planned purposes of homework and the type of homework assigned (Couts, 2004). Teachers find it helpful to provide positive reinforcement for homework completion (Hughes, Ruhl, Schumaker & Deshler, 2002; Bryan & Burstein, 2004). Academic interests are increased when children are offered material rewards (Fink & Nalven, 1972). On the other hand, policies with more severe consequences for incomplete homework are more effective in improving homework completion rates (Bryan & Burstein, 2004). Student progress is increased when their progress is monitored frequently (Wright, Paschal, & Weinstein, 1985).

Teachers should list content being covered and where they are in that content for all students to see and prepare for what is coming next (Margolis, 2005). Though school schedules

are tight, it is important for teachers to allow time at beginning or end of day, or during their lunch or prep for students to come in and work (Darling-Hammond & Ifill-Lynch, 2006). It would also be beneficial to set aside time at the end of the school day to coordinate and supervise homework activities in school. This would provide a peer friendly environment as well as a teacher friendly, helping environment (Simplificio, 2005). It is important for students to maintain a healthy and reasonable outlook toward homework. Assigning homework in early grades is beneficial for motivational reasons (Bempechat, 2004). In early years, assigning small but regular amounts of homework helps to establish a routine and increase motivation (Couts, 2004). The following strategies will help support students in this effort: Make the work non-stressful and doable –students won't do the work if they find it frustrating, start homework at school, make sure it is a clear continuation of what was done in class instead of a new skill, make it motivating, help them be organized to complete it, create space and time for homework. Providing success classes and making student' work public is also helpful in these efforts (Darling-Hammond & Ifill-Lynch, 2006). When students are trained to view mistakes as the result of lack of effort, and not intelligence, students will be able to deal with academic difficulty in a more positive manner (Bempechat, 2004). You can adapt homework by varying the length, content, and purpose of the assignment to meet students' individual educational needs (Salend, Duhaney, Anderson, & Gottschalk, 2004).

Issues for homework completion and motivation have been carefully studied for years, but only a minute number of studies have tested biological links. One study in particular researched what biological factor influences boys in homework completion. What was discovered is that once boys have shown that they know the materials they quickly turn their attention to new material. Therefore, teachers must keep that in mind if they were still working

on the concept and the boys know it, boys turn off their attention and may show behavioral issues and distract other students in class. Then to add to the issue they do not do the homework that has been assigned (District Administration, 2006).

A family's ability to help students with their work can strengthen or tear down the ability for a child to establish good homework habits (Corno, 2000). Mothers appear to have the most difficult job of helping their children. It seems no matter how they try to help it can have a negative affect on children. On days when students had homework there was an increase in negative affect when mothers interacted and that affect was further intensified when they provided heightened assistance. There is a fine line that mothers must establish between assisting some and assisting too much. However, it is noted that if the mother has a positive affect on their child that impact is greater than any negative affect that may occur (Pomerantz, Wang, & Ng, 2005).

When parents actively participate in their child's learning there are many strategies that can be utilized. These strategies when used properly can positively affect their students' academic outcome. Judicious assistance with homework in the early years can teach a child strategies for self-regulated learning, thus promoting self-regulatory skills and tendencies that evolve into persistent thinking and behaving (Corno, 2000). Parents can assist preadolescent children by helping them learn to manage and cope (Xu & Corno, 2003). It is important to establish a routine that the child associates with doing homework (Corno, 2000). Setting aside time at the end of the school day to coordinate and supervise homework activities in school. According to the study parents can assist by helping to secure a good study area, making sure it was quiet and siblings did not intrude and parents would help students control unwanted emotions (Xu & Corno, 2003). It is important for parents to establish this physical and

psychological structure in order to complete their homework (Hoover-Dempsey, et. al, 2001). The only difficulty with this is that students need to realize that they really are more attentive when working on their homework with a parent in this structure setting than when they are with their peers, regardless of their age, gender, or socioeconomic group (Xu & Corno, 2003).

Parental influences are an integral part of students' achievement. To begin with, parents involve themselves in their child's homework for three reasons; they believe they should be involved, they believe it will make a positive difference, and they perceive they are invited to become involved. Positive parent involvement correlated with higher academic achievement. If parents have a positive attitude about school and homework it also improved their child's school attendance, increased cooperative behavior, and produced lower dropout rates (Bryan, & Burstein, 2004). Parents and teachers need to communicate with each other to provide a home-school connection. This crucial part of communication is key to starting a good home-school communication. When parents are informed and understand what teachers require and participate in a strong home-school collaboration, then parents can provide social skill instruction as well as positively influence the way in which students judge the difficulty of work, complete the assignment, and understand materials covered (Pomerantz, Wang, & Ng, 2005; Elksnin, & Elksnin, 2000; Hoover-Dempsey, et. al, 2001). When all these components are present parents feel more comfortable and prepared to engage in these homework processes and tasks. They are then able to use strategies designed to help bridge any gaps between the task demands and their child's skill level for success and achievement. All of these parental involvements can influence their child's outcome by modeling, providing reinforcement, and providing appropriate parental instruction (Hoover-Dempsey, et al., 2001). The only drawback to parental support and influence

is that the kind of direction parents or family members gives matters more if they have a higher education (Xu & Corno, 2003).

Whether students are general education or special education, communication between parent and teachers is one of the most important factors when discussing academic success.

Since developments of social skills begin in the home and occur mostly in home and school, parents and teachers need to partner in the children's learning. This partnership plays a significant role in developing children's' belief about homework (Bempechat, 2004).

Technology plays a significant role in a successful communicative relationship between parents and teachers. It is important for teachers to keep in mind that not all families have technological access. It is important to find out which students and families have internet/computer access and which ones don't. It is equally important to provide families with the information they need to access information through the Internet and print hard copies for those who cannot access technology (Salend, Duhaney, Anderson, & Gottschalk, 2004). Parents consider assignments books a highly regarded and successful communication tool (Margolis, 2005). Homework planners had a positive, school wide effect regarding homework and parent communication (Bryan & Sullivan-Burstein, 1998). It is important that teachers work with parents by initiating and maintaining contact on a consistent basis, help parents develop a homework support plan and invite parents to participate in a reinforcement system between home and school (Margolis, 2005). Teachers also stress the importance of parent attendance at school meetings and conferences students (Bryan, Burstein, & Bryan, 2001). To improve home-school communication, teachers prefer communication strategies that require less time and effort. They find direct contact with parents more helpful (Bryan, Burstein, & Bryan, 2001). It is beneficial for teachers to ask parents to limit homework if frustration is obvious and communicates to the

teacher the reason for the frustration (Margolis, 2005). Parents suggest that teachers should talk to each other concerning homework in their classes. They also suggest that teachers communicate from one grade to the other to avoid 'homework shock' (Bryan & Burstein, 2004).

There are many solutions for the homework dilemma that start with the government and the district policies. To begin with collaboration of all these entities are key (Corno, 2004). State legislatures and the district school boards would spend more on educational reform if the increases in productivity and effectiveness could be clear or at least forecasted and shown (Walberg, Paschal, & Weinstein, 1985). However, if the government is not willing to step in, many of the issues can be resolved at the district level or even more specifically the school level. It has been shown that policies for created with more severe consequences were more effective in improving the homework completion rates of students (Bryan, & Burstein, 2004). These severe consequences were not the only way of approaching success however. It also has been shown that schools can be organized as supportive learning communities. If these communities provide opportunities for problem solving, then the school can better support their students in developing routines, practices, and habits for doing their schoolwork (Corno, 2000). No matter which strategy schools use, they must choose something. If they leave students with no support or consequences in place, then students and teachers will not change.

After reviewing the literature, there were three intervention/strategies the teacher researchers' felt comfortable using for an Action Research Project. Homework charting/graphing will be used for each class. The students will graph their homework completion with teacher supervision on a daily basis, thus encouraging students to take responsibility for their own behavior. A ticket/reward system will be implemented in conjunction with the graphing. This system will give the students opportunity to earn prizes/rewards for homework completion. The

parents will be apprised weekly of their child's progress by receiving a weekly home note, increasing parent/teacher communication. The teacher researchers' goal is to increase homework motivation and completion using these strategies on a consistent basis.

Projective Objective and Processing Statements

As a result of behavior modification, graphing and parent communication, during the period of January 22 through May 25, 2007, the students of the teacher researchers will increase their motivation and ability to turn assignments in by the designated due date as a response to the teachers through weekly parent communication, daily charting of students' progress, and weekly rewards.

In order to accomplish the project objective, we had to accomplish the tasks prior to our intervention:

1. Set up graphing charts for students to record homework results on a daily basis (Appendix G).
2. Establish and purchase rewards for weekly and final prize drawings.
3. Purchase and pass out tickets according to individual homework progress.
4. Schedule time within each day for these interventions.
5. Review student progress and send parent letter home communicating progress and/or missing assignments (Appendix H).

Project Action Plan

The following project action plan outlines the steps of data collection and intervention implemented to complete the action research project. It lists the tasks that were accomplished each week from one week before the study began through the completion of the study.

Pre-Week: January 22-26, 2007

1. Copied and distributed Consent to Participate in a Research Study forms
2. Copied teacher surveys, student surveys and parent surveys
3. Copied consent cover letters
4. Prepared large envelopes for collection of surveys
5. Collected Consent to Participate in a Research Study forms

Week 1: January 29-February 2, 2007

1. Completed the Teacher Observation Log (daily)
2. Sent home parent surveys with students
3. Put teacher surveys in teacher mailboxes
4. Collected teacher surveys in Dawn Hein's mailbox
5. Collected parent surveys in collection box in classroom
6. Send reminder to teachers to complete survey via e-mail

Week 2: February 5-9, 2007

1. Completed the Teacher Observation Log (daily)
2. Continued to collect teacher surveys in Dawn Hein's mailbox
3. Continued to collect parent surveys in collection box in classroom
4. Sent reminder home to parents to return surveys. Sent with students

Week 3: February 12-16, 2007

1. Completed the Teacher Observation Log (daily)
2. Administered and collected student surveys during the first 10 minutes of class
3. Continued to collect teacher surveys in Dawn Hein's mailbox
4. Continued to collect parent surveys in collection box in classroom
5. Put up homework graphing chart in classroom
6. Explained homework graphing chart and reward/ticket system to students

Week 4: February 19-23, 2007

1. Reviewed homework graphing chart with students
2. Reviewed reward/ticket system with students
3. Checked homework and instructed students to fill in appropriate box, with appropriate color, on graphing chart (daily)
4. Handed out tickets to each child with completed homework; green square (daily)
5. Instructed students to put their name on the ticket and drop in prize/raffle box (daily)
6. Entered homework status in teacher record book (daily)

7. Friday homework check and drawings. Handed out three tickets to each student that has all green squares for the week. Handed out 1 ticket to each student that has green and yellow squares.
8. Drew three names for three prizes.
9. After drawing, “dumped” all weekly tickets into large prize box for drawing at end of research session.

Week 5-Week 14: February 26-May 11, 2007 (skip March 26-30 due to Spring Break)

1. Checked homework and instructed students to fill in appropriate box, with appropriate color, on graphing chart (daily)
2. Handed out tickets to each child with completed homework; green square (daily)
3. Instructed students to put their name on the ticket and drop in prize/raffle box (daily)
4. Entered homework status in teacher record book (daily)
5. Friday homework check and drawings. Handed out three tickets to each student that has all green squares for the week. Handed out 1 ticket to each student that has green and yellow squares.
6. Drew three names for three prizes.
7. After drawing, “dumped” all weekly tickets into large prize box for drawing to be held

Week 15: May 14-18, 2007

1. Drew 5 tickets for “mini” prizes; dumped all tickets back in
2. Drew one ticket for each class (two winners) for “Final” Large prize (\$10 Gift Certificate to Wal-Mart)
3. Administered and collected student surveys during the first 10 minutes of class
4. Recorded assignments in student record book

Week 16: May 21-25, 2007

1. Record assignments in student record book

Methods of Assessment

In order to assess the effects of these interventions, the teacher researchers' chose to use two tools: the student survey and the student record book. The student survey was distributed to 30 students on May 18, 2007 to analyze and assess the student's attitudes and feelings concerning homework. The post documentation surveys were compared to the surveys that were distributed to the students during pre-documentation in order to note any changes and/or

consistencies concerning their attitudes toward homework. The record book was used daily to keep track of student's assignments and whether or not they completed the assignments by the designated due date.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of this action research project was to increase student motivation and homework completion in the middle school setting. The project involved 30 sixth grade students over four class periods, and parents of the 30 students, for a total of 120 students, at a middle school in Lake County, Illinois, during the time frame of February 19, 2007, to May 18, 2007. The steps of intervention for this project included: student, parent and teacher surveys to analyze the attitudes and views of these group; a classroom graph/chart to monitor and keep track of student progress on a daily basis and a behavior modification plan using tickets and prizes to encourage and reward homework completion and a weekly home note sent to parents outlining their child's progress and any missing/incomplete work for the week.

The teacher researchers' used a classroom graph/chart (Appendix G) daily, at the beginning of each class period, to monitor and keep track of each students progress, or lack of progress, when turning in homework. Students were given star stickers to place on the chart in the appropriate place according to individual results concerning homework completion (Appendix H); a green star for work completed on time or a red star for incomplete work. If a student turned the work in late, the red star was covered with a yellow star. The students received tickets according to their progress; daily, for completing work on time and weekly, for having green stars the entire week. The tickets were put into a jar and weekly drawings were held for various prizes. This process took approximately ten minutes at the beginning of each class period. At the end of the 10-week intervention, a final drawing was held and two students' names were drawn for \$10.00 gift certificates.

The teacher researchers sent a home note home with each student every Thursday (Appendix H) to inform the parents of their child's weekly progress. The home note listed any missing assignments for the week and required the note to be returned the next day with the parents' signature. A space was also provided for the parents to include comments if desired. The home note was presented to the students as a homework assignment that was rewarded or consequence as such. Students received green stars and tickets if the home note was signed and returned. The writing of the home notes was done during the teacher researchers' free time and took approximately 45 minutes.

Week one of pre-documentation began on January 29, 2007. We organized and distributed surveys and letters for teachers and parents. The daily observation log also began on that date as well. The distribution process went smoothly this week. Teachers seemed to respond positively to helping us out. The only drawback that we noticed was that many teachers brought completed surveys directly to us instead of turning it in to the designated area listed on the letter.

Week two of pre-documentation began on February 5, 2007. We ran into a minor glitch this week. We noticed that the parent surveys we sent home were not the correct surveys. We sent them home again with a note explaining our mishap. The correct surveys were returned without any negative feedback expressed by parents. The parents were quite understanding and accommodating. Several parents included comments on the survey wishing us luck with our project. We continued the daily observation logs were humored that students were making sure to remind the teachers to do the log. They would proactively state whether or not they had their supplies. The first drawback we have seen in this process, is that it takes time away from teaching by trying to collect surveys, complete the daily log, and get students back on task.

Week three of pre-documentation began on February 12, 2007. We felt that we needed to extend our pre-documentation week due to scheduled days off, and snow days that occurred during week two. This was the final week that we collected and used the observation log, parent surveys, and teacher surveys. During the first 10 minutes of class, students were given the student survey to complete. All students received a survey. Students that did not turn in permission forms to participate were given a survey with a small yellow dot on them. During the last day of this week, the homework chart was placed on the wall, and an explanation of how students could earn incentive tickets was given. Students seemed very eager to earn tickets and it seemed that this would be a positive change for students. The main drawback was the initial investment for charts, tickets, containers to hold tickets, and prizes. These items cost more than we anticipated.

Week four began on February 19, 2007. Students began using the homework chart this week. We explained the process again and answered questions to make sure all students understood. I checked off homework and gave students appropriate colored stars to put on chart, and then gave them a ticket if their homework was complete. On Thursday of this week, home notes were sent home for the first time indicating missing, incomplete, or absent work. Students were required to return them in order to receive a green star for homework for reading class. On Friday, students received additional tickets, depending on whether everything for the week was turned in on time, or if all work was turned in, but late. After stickers and tickets were distributed, three winners were drawn from each class, and students were given small prizes, such as candy, food, or drinks. Students seemed eager to obtain green stars, for work being turned in on time. If work was turned in late, students were impatient to have me change the color of the star, from red to yellow. Students enjoyed putting stickers on the chart and

frequently asked if they could hand out tickets and stickers. I was very encouraged by that response. I did find it worrisome that obtaining incentives did not motivate some students and I wondered if this would have an affect on these types of students. I was also concerned about the amount of teaching time stickers and tickets took away from a 40-minute class period. I would have to wait and see if we could speed up the process as we went along.

Weeks five, six, seven, and eight began on February 26, March 5, March 12, and March 19, 2007, respectively. The same students again seemed engaged and eager to earn stickers. The same two to three students again asked to do sticker charts and hand out tickets. During these weeks and continuing through the remainder of the interventions, we began the Accelerated Reader program. In this program, students earn points according to the books they read. The Accelerated Reader points the students needed for fourth quarter were now listed on the home note. Based on the parents' comments, this was a positive addition to the information they received. However, not all home notes were being returned. We also noted that the students that were consistently missing work were the same students that did not return signed home notes. We also were still concerned with the originally unmotivated students that had homework issues, and whether or not these interventions were making any difference in them turning in work. Other negatives that were noted included: too much time away from teaching, too much down time for many students while tickets and stickers were being handed out, and some students were not honest in indicating homework completion.

Weeks 9, 10, 11, and 12 began March 26, April 2, and April 9, April 16, and April 23, 2007, respectively. The week of April 16, 2007 was ISAT testing, and there was not any homework assigned that week. However, we did notice that a repetitive behavior was certainly evolving. Students that always had homework turned in on time continued to do so, and were

eager for stickers and tickets. The students that did not have homework ready to turn in began making excuses and comments about how they no longer cared, and just wanted to make sure they had a few tickets, so they had a chance to win. The cost of the interventions was also increasing for us. We had to buy more prizes, stickers, and charts to maintain the interventions until the end date. We found it interesting that students were continuously asking about what the big prize would be, and how much it would be worth. The process certainly seemed to lose its appeal with many students, as they were only interested in the final result and what was in it for them.

Weeks 13 and 14 began April 30, and May 7, 2007, respectively. These were the final two weeks of the intervention and the last month of school. There was very little homework given to students during this time period. Students were working on class projects and writing assignments that were done in class. However, it was good to note that students were still asking for assignments to do, so that they could earn additional tickets for the final drawing. Again, the prevalent question from many students was concentrated on how much the final prize would be worth, and how many additional tickets would be drawn.

Week 15 began on May 14, 2007. This week began post-documentation and the final drawings were completed. Five tickets were drawn for each class, and then the final drawing for a \$10 gift certificate to Wal-Mart was awarded. Both students that won the gift certificates were not the best performing students, nor the worst. This was a positive for the students in the middle of the pack. These students did not always turn their homework in on time but improved in the area of work completion during the intervention. This showed them that extra effort does pay off. However, it was a negative for the students that always turned their work in on time. It was

difficult for the stellar students to see the students they perceive as “slackers” were being rewarded when they had many red and yellow stars.

The post-documentation surveys were given to students after the drawings were held. The students were cooperative and engaging. All of the students completed the survey in a timely manner and turned them in. The entire process went smoothly and quickly.

Week 16 began on May 21, 2007. This was the final week of post-documentation, and it progressed very smoothly. The only recording completed was the student record book. Many parents emailed asking about the home note, since their child had not brought one home within the last two weeks. We found this to be the most interesting response of the entire intervention.

During the 10 weeks of intervention, we noted several interesting factors: the same students wanted to participate on a consistent basis, several of the unmotivated students continued to be unmotivated, many students maintained a “what’s in it for me” attitude when they realized not everyone received rewards, and parents responded positively to the weekly home note and was disappointed when it was discontinued. These factors remained fairly consistent throughout the intervention.

I, Teacher Researcher A, was somewhat disappointed with some aspects regarding the results of our intervention. The intervention was implemented in Teacher Researcher B’s classroom, as I am a behavior specialist and see students on an individual and small group basis and do not teach in a traditional classroom setting. The interventions were extremely time consuming and tedious. In the beginning the students were excited about the charting, tickets, and rewards. After a few weeks the novelty seemed to wear off and the students began lacking motivation. After analyzing the data, the intervention did not have as much of an impact as expected or even hoped for. I, being a behavior specialist and not a classroom teacher, am always

promoting positive reinforcement in order to change undesirable behavior. This action research project actually helped me to see things from a classroom teacher's point of view. It is a somewhat unreasonable to expect teachers to put out so much time, money, and effort without assurance of better results. I continue to strongly advocate positive reinforcement, but it can be done on a smaller, less time consuming and expensive, scale.

The parent home note was one aspect of our intervention with which I was impressed. I think that alone, helped with communication and the relationship between home and school. Many parents commented that they liked the weekly communication. Unfortunately, when children reach adolescence parents become less informed about happenings at school. I think constant communication between teachers and parents can make an enormous difference in attitudes toward school and homework. This, also, can be time consuming but I personally feel that it is time well spent. There are other time consuming tasks that can be eliminated in order to make time for something as important as parent communication.

I, Teacher Researcher B, feel it is important to try out new things in your classroom. During our intervention, I learned many valuable lessons about my students and myself. To begin with, I was very eager to try something new in my classroom. I felt that this intervention would help students become more independent and proactive in their learning. Even though I do not feel that this was a major success, I will continue to have this attitude throughout my career. However, I learned that I am not always on top of things the way I should be and need someone to urge me on at times. I felt very weary of the intervention near the end, and my students are the ones who had to remind me and keep me on task. I learned a lot from my students about how they think and feel about homework, and the adjustments I may need to make for future classes. The one constant that I will continue to incorporate is that I will continue to give students class

time to get started on the homework. That was the one request that the students asked for each day.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

The following evidence was collected in order to substantiate the teacher researchers' view that a homework completion and motivation is an ongoing issue for middle school students. The student participants are in the Teacher Researcher B's 6th grade reading and language arts classes. Post documentation was collected using Teacher Researcher B's record book and post intervention student surveys.

The following post-documentation evidence was collected in order to substantiate any changes in students. These views are based on the teacher researchers' view that homework completion and motivation is an ongoing issue for middle school students, and can be changed by the interventions. The 30 student participants were in the teacher researchers' 6th grade reading and language arts. Evidence was collected using two data collection tools: student record book and student survey, during the time period of May 14, 2007, until May 25, 2007.

The same survey given during pre-documentation week was given to students during the 15th week of the action research project, after the intervention was completed. Students were given 10-15 minutes to complete during class time (Appendix F). Out of 34 students in the teacher researchers class, 82% (n=28) of students were able to participate in the action research and responded to the survey. All surveys returned were anonymous.

The first part of the survey contained five questions concerning homework habits of students. The students responded to the questions using never, sometimes, often and always. The second part of the survey consisted of two questions regarding the affect of homework on quizzes and tests and the second question asked about homework and late work policy. They

responded to these questions with strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, strongly agree, and agree.

The following graphs illustrate the percentage of the student responses, and the comparison from pre-documentation and post-documentation.

In Figure 28, the post-documentation pie chart shows that 86% (n=24) of students responded that they always or often turn in homework. This was a decrease of 6% from pre-documentation (92%, n=24). Please note that this question did not ask whether the homework was turned in on time.

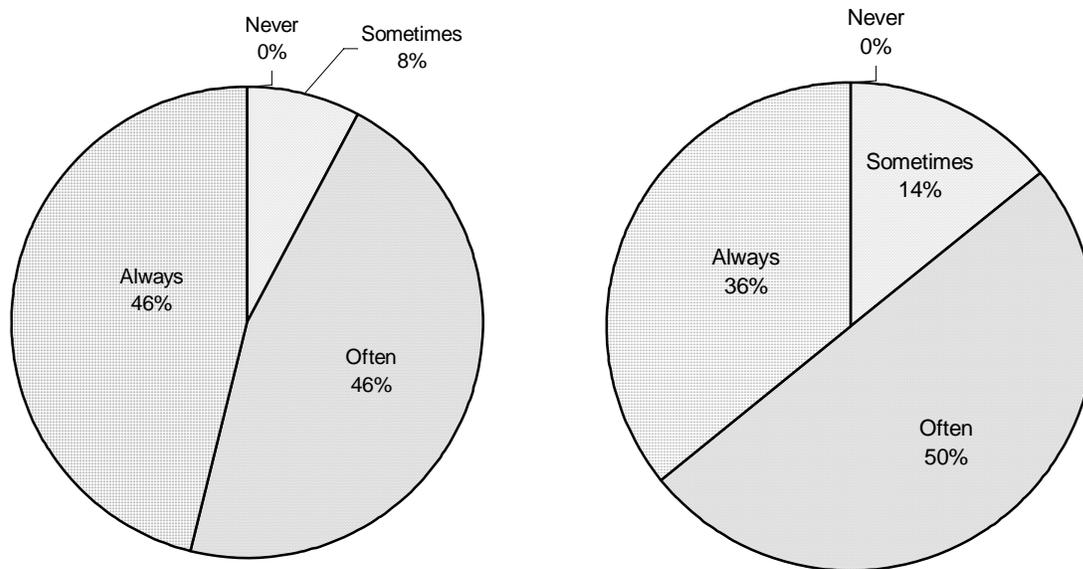


Figure 28: *Pre-documentation (n=26) and Post-documentation (n=28) of complete and turn in homework*

According to the student surveys (n=28) in post-documentation, Figure 29 shows that 68% (n=19) of students answered that they do not complete homework sometimes due to lack of understanding. Students that often did not complete homework, because they did not understand it, increased by 7% (n=2) from pre-documentation (n=0) to post-documentation (n=2). However, the number of students that never failed to complete homework decreased by 6% (n=1). It is also noted, that the reason for non-completion was not indicated on the survey.

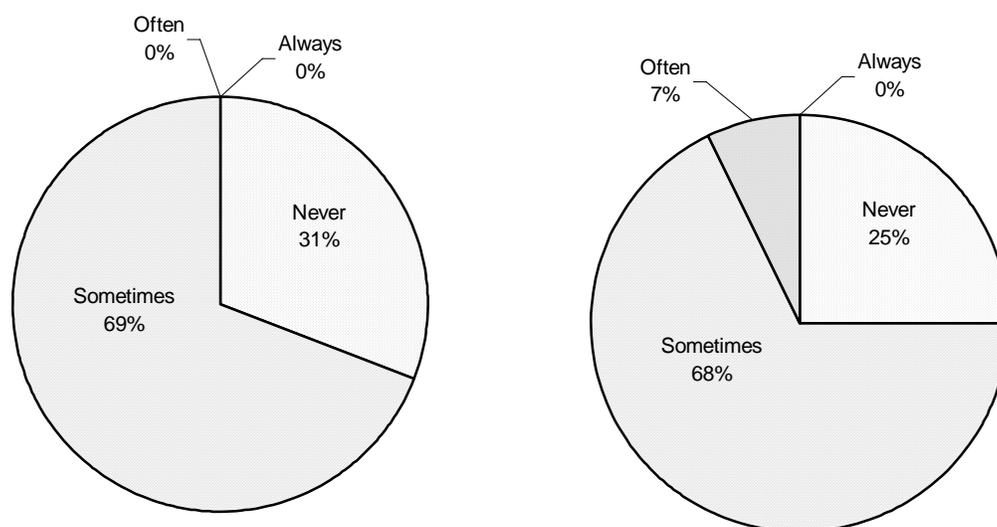


Figure 29: *Pre-documentation (n=25) and Post-documentation (n=28) of Fail to Understand*

According to the post-documentation student responses (n=28), Figure 30 indicates that 75% (n=21) of the students either always or often completed their homework in class when the teacher provided time. Only 25% (n=7) responded that they sometimes completed it. According to both pre-documentation and post-documentation 81% and 75% of the students always or often completed homework in class when time was provided. It was also noted that there was a 6% increase of students that sometimes completed homework in class. During both Pre-documentation and post-documentation there were no students that never completed homework in class.

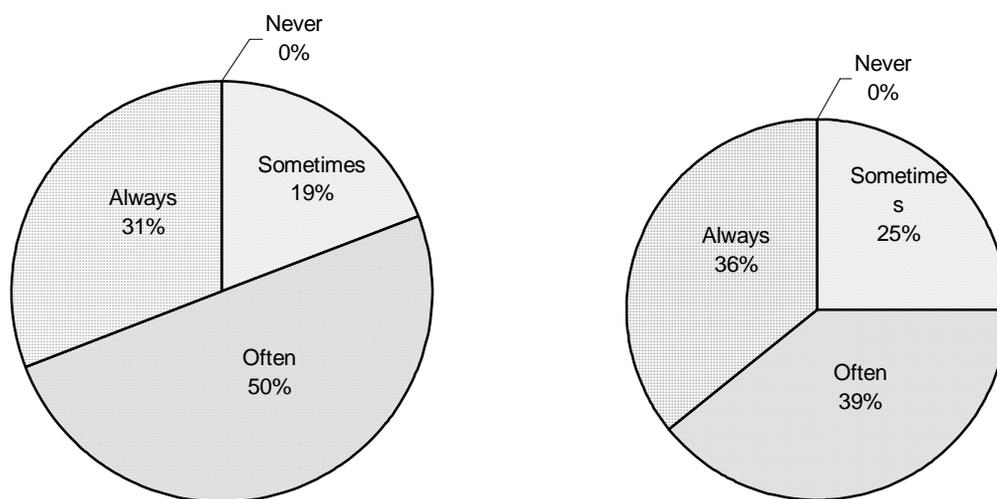


Figure 30: *Pre-documentation (n=26) and Post-documentation (n=28) of Complete When Time Provided*

According to the student responses ($n=28$) for post-documentation, as shown in Figure 31, 79% ($n=22$) of the students stated that they always or often come to class prepared with all their supplies. There were 7% ($n=2$) of the respondents for post-documentation that stated they never bring supplies. There is a noted decrease of 17% of students that were either always or often prepared with supplies from pre-documentation to post-documentation. The number of students that were only sometimes prepared rose 14%.

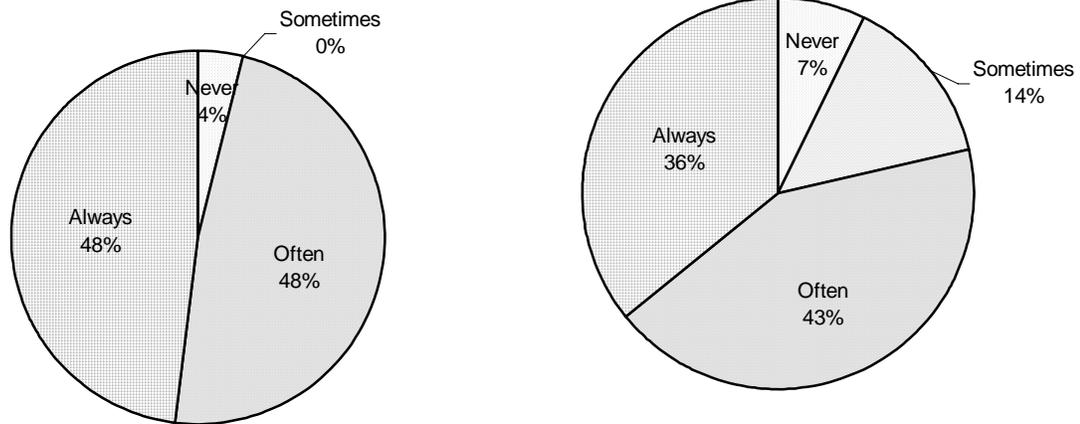


Figure 31: *Pre-documentation* ($n=26$) and *Post-documentation* ($n=28$) of Prepared with Supplies

According to the student responses (n=28) shown in Figure 32, only 37% (n=12) of students during post-documentation either always or often write down assignments in their assignment notebook. However, 32% (n=10), of the students responded that they never write their assignments in their assignment notebook. There was a noted decrease of 30% (n=5) from pre-documentation to post-documentation of students that did not always or often update assignment notebooks. There were also a noteworthy percentage (13%, n=5) of students from pre-documentation to post-documentation that never updated their assignment notebook.

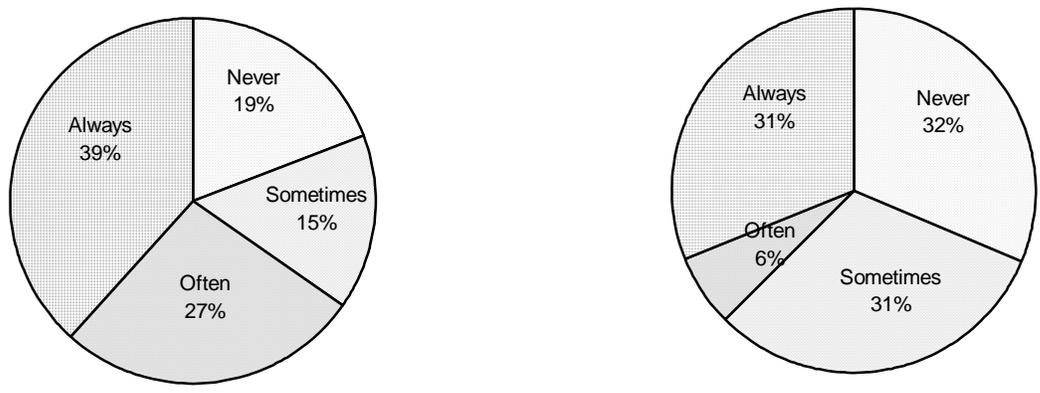


Figure 32: Pre-documentation (n=26) and Post-documentation (n=28) Assignment Notebook

According to the student responses (n=28) during post-documentation, Figure 33 shows that only 18% (n=5) of the students strongly disagree or disagree that homework helps with tests and quizzes. On the other hand, 53% (n=15) agree that homework helps. There was 29% (n=8) increase from pre-documentation to post-documentation that has a neutral feeling towards whether or not homework helps with tests and quizzes. There was a noted shift of 39% (n=10) in pre-documentation to 53% (n=15) in post-documentation in regards to the number of students that agreed with or strongly agreed with homework helping with quizzes and tests. It is also worth noting that the percentage of students that strongly disagreed (19%, n=5) decreased to 7% (n=2) from pre-documentation to post-documentation. The number of students that remained neutral was very similar in pre-documentation (27%, n=7) and post-documentation (29%, n=8).

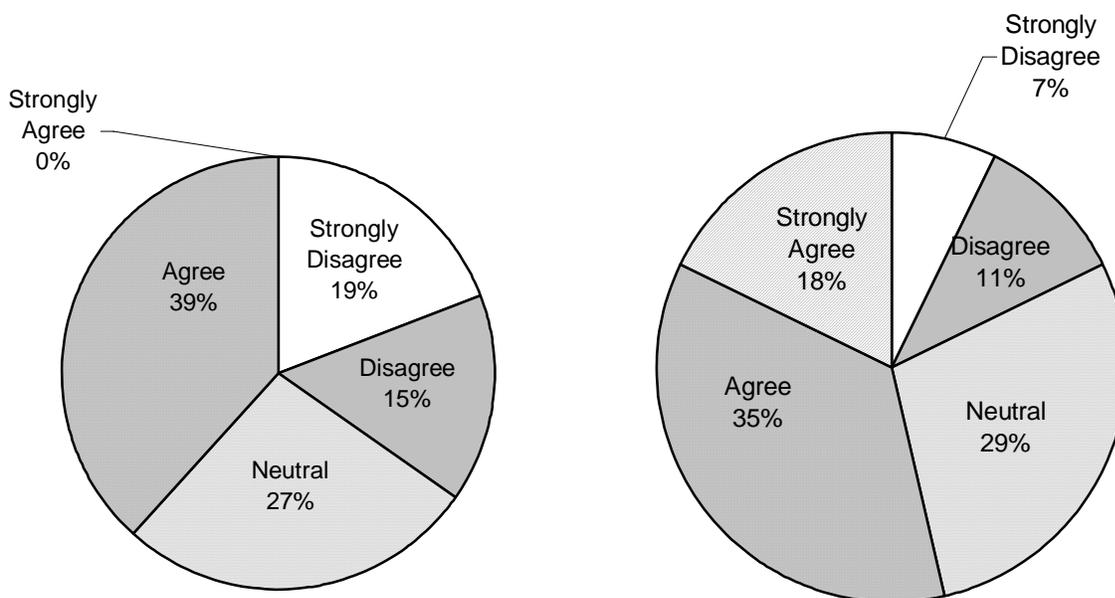


Figure 33: *Pre-documentation (n=26) and Post-documentation (n=28) Quizzes and Tests*

According to post-documentation student responses (n=28) in Figure 34, 65% (n=18) of the students feel the teacher has a fair homework and late policy. There were 21% (n=6) of the students who felt neutral about the policy and 14% (n=4) who disagreed with the teacher's homework and late work policy. The pre-documentation shows that 0% of students strongly agreed that the homework policy was fair, and post-documentation shows that 29% (n=5) of students strongly agree on the fairness of the policy. It should also be noted that the student responses of disagree and strongly disagree rose by 20% (n=9).

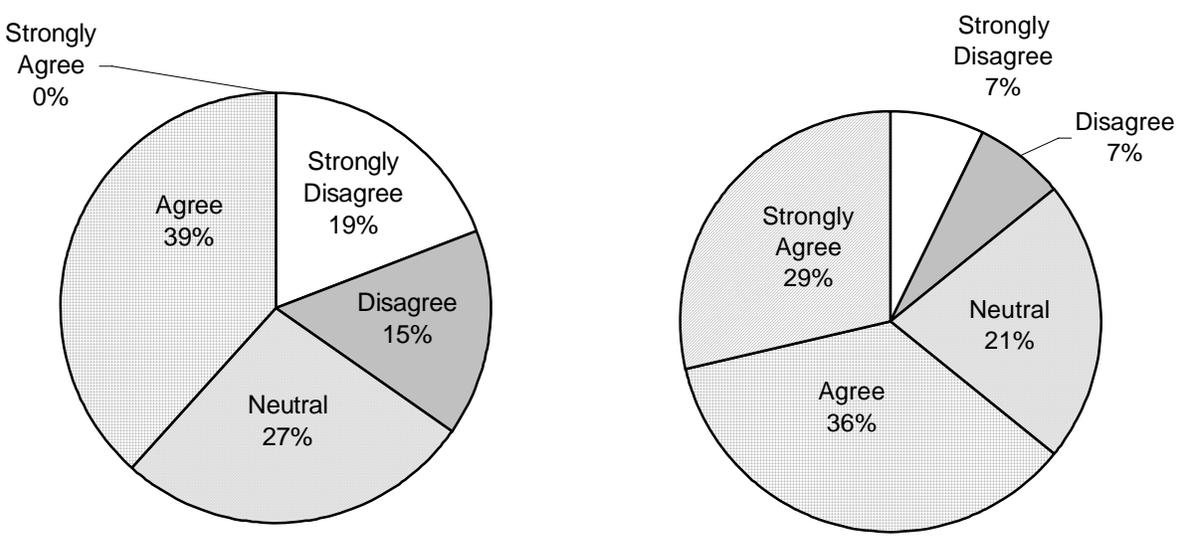


Figure 34: *Pre-documentation (n=26) and Post-documentation (n=28) Fair Homework and Late work Policy*

Student Record Book

The student record book is the grade book that the teacher researcher uses to record grades on assignments and assessments and homework turned in on time or late (Appendix G). There were 442 entries written in the record book over a 2-week period, from May 14, 2007 until May 25, 2007. The following graphs illustrate the percentage of the homework completed and turned in on time or late.

Figure 35 shows that according to the post-documentation Student Record Book (n=442), 87% (n=387) of the assignments due were turned in on time. However, 12% (n=50) of the assignments were turned in late or not at all. There was an increase from pre-documentation to post-documentation of 2% noted in the assignments that were completed by students. The percentage of assignments turned in late, decreased by 3%, and the percentage of assignments not handed in, stayed constant at 8%. It should be noted that there were 142 more assignments given in the post-documentation period than in the pre-documentation period.

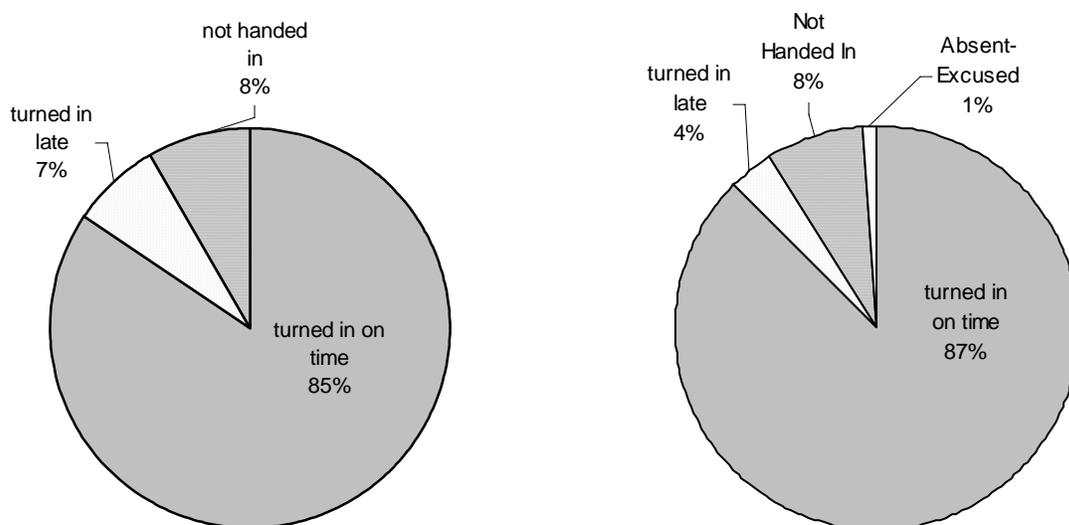


Figure 35: *Pre-documentation (n=300) and Post-documentation (n=442) Student Record Book*

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the post documentation of our interventions, it is the findings of these teacher researchers that the action research project had both positive and negative results. While at the beginning of the intervention students exhibited increased motivation, the novelty of the program seemed to wear off after a couple of weeks. According to the teacher observations and record book, not much change occurred in regards to homework completion and motivation. There are several reasons we believe there was a lack of increase in this area. One of the reasons for the lack of change is that the second half of the intervention took place during the last quarter of the school year. During this time, students in general become less productive and motivated. Also, we noted a decline in organization and students being prepared for class with necessary books, materials and supplies. This again can be contributed to the time in which the intervention took place. In regards to the student survey, we feel that the surveys may skew data collected due to the students not being completely honest when answering the questions. Much of the verbal responses we observed were much different than the answers on the surveys. More students disagreed that the teacher had a fair homework policy during post documentation than during pre documentation. This may be due to the new homework policy implemented during second semester. The new policy did not allow for much late work.

We also believe that a lack of change in behavior and motivation was due to several other factors: a lack of teacher consistency and enthusiasm toward the end of the intervention, lack of parent consistency when responding to home notes, and students realizing the possibility that they can perform in a stellar manner and not receive any reward due to “luck of the draw”. Because the intervention was quite time consuming, there were several occasions when the

teacher was unenthusiastic and rushed through the behavior modification routine. The students would notice and remind the teacher of the routine. The parents that were uninvolved before our action research project, continued to be uninvolved during the project. These are the students that rarely brought their home note back signed and did not seem to care about consequences or rewards when it came to completing homework. If we did not realize it completely before, we are now completely convinced how important parent involvement is in the academic success of students. There were several students that had experienced difficulty in completing work on time that actually became motivated and began turning their work in consistently. After the first few weeks, several of these student's names were not drawn for prizes and they reverted back to their previous behavior. There were many students that were academically sound before the project, that found the chance to win prizes for behavior they already exhibited a positive influence. These students looked forward to the drawings and rewards. Unfortunately, these were not the students that needed the intervention, though it is a positive for these students to be rewarded for good performance.

It is our recommendation that teachers communicate with parents on a weekly or bi-weekly basis, whether it is via email, home note, or phone call. This seemed to have the most positive feedback during our action research project. Parents commented on how much more influence they had when they were continually informed of their child's progress, or lack thereof. Though there are some students that will not progress no matter how much communication there is between parents and school, it cannot do any harm. In fact, more positives occur when parents are informed and treated as a team member in their child's education. Parent home notes is an intervention we plan to continue.

We would not recommend using such a detailed behavior modification plan, nor will we continue to use it. It is much too time consuming, expensive and students who deserve to be rewarded were not always rewarded. We do recommend using a reinforcement system on a much smaller level. For instance, we may use a reward system that involves a chart but allowing students to choose from a candy jar at the end of the week if they have green stars for the entire week. This would be less time consuming, more affordable and all students who deserve to be rewarded are rewarded. At the end of the quarter, certificates can be rewarded to those students who had green stars all quarter. Students can also be recognized on a school wide level, at the end of the year assembly, if they received certificates all four quarters.

Homework completion and motivation has been an ongoing debate for many years, and will continue to be so. As teachers we can only do everything within our power, and realm of expertise, to help students to succeed academically. Though this action research project proved to be tedious and did not have the results we were hoping for, we benefited greatly from this experience. As teachers it is our job to research and experiment with new theories, ideas, and implementations. Sometimes the results will be positive and sometimes they will prove to be a waste of time. We cannot excel as educators unless we are willing to step outside of the box and maybe find that one thing that will motivate students. This too may change from year to year, student to student. We know that we will keep looking for that pot of gold...that is our job.

REFERENCES

- Bempechat, J. (2004). The motivational benefits of homework: A social-cognitive perspective. *Theory into Practice, 43*(3), 189-196.
- Boys get worse grades. (2006). *District Administration, 42*(6), 18.
- Bryan, T., & Burstein, K. (2004). Improving homework completion and academic performance: Lessons from special education. *Theory into Practice, 43*(3), 213-219.
- Bryan, T., & Sullivan-Burstein, K. (1998). Teacher-selected strategies for improving homework completion. *Remedial and Special Education, 19*(5), 263-275.
- Bryan, T., Burstein, K., & Bryan, J. (2001). Students with learning disabilities: Homework problems and promising practices. *Educational Psychologist, 36*(3), 167-180.
- Bursuck, W., Harniss, M., Epstein, M., Polloway, E., Jayanthi, M., & Wissinger, L. (1999). Solving communication problems about homework: Recommendations of special education teachers. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice, 14*(3), 149-158.
- Cooper, H. (1989). Synthesis of research on homework. *Educational Leadership, 85*-91.
- Cooper, H., & Nye, B. (1994). Homework for students with learning disabilities: The implications of research for policy and practice. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 27*, 465-536.
- Corno, L., (2000). Looking at homework differently. *Elementary School Journal, 100* (5), 529-549.
- Couts, P. E. (2004). Meanings of homework and implications for practice. *Theory Into Practice, 43*(3), 182-187.
- Darling-Hammond, L., & Ifill-Lynch, O. (2006). If they'd only do their homework. *Educational Leadership, 63*(5), 8-13.
- Drummond, K., & Stipek, D. (2004). Low-income parents' beliefs about their role in children's academic learning. *Elementary School Journal, 104*(3), 197-213.
- Elksnin, L. & Elksnin, N. (2000). Teaching parents to teach their children to be prosocial. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 36*(1), 27-34.
- Fink, Susan. (1972). Increasing homework motivation. *Education, 92*(3), 31-33.

- Gunter P., Miller K., Venn M., Thomas K., & House, S. (2002). Self-graphing to success. *Teaching Exceptional Children* 35(2), 30-34.
- Hong, E., Milgram, R., & Rowell, L. (2004). Homework motivation and preference: a learner-centered homework approach. *Theory into Practice* 43(3), 197-204.
- Hoover-Dempsey, K., & Bassler, O. (1995). Parents' reported involvement in students' homework: strategies and practices. *Elementary School Journal*, 95(5), 435-451.
- Hoover-Dempsey, K., Battiato, A., Walker, J., Reed, R., DeJong, J., & Jones, K. (2001). Parental involvement in homework. [Electronic version]. *Educational Psychology*, 36(3), 195-209.
- Hughes, C., Ruhl, K., Schumaker, J., & Deshler, D. (2002). effects of instruction in an assignment completion strategy on the homework performance of students with learning disabilities in general education classes. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, 17(1), 1-18.
- Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, (2003). *Site 1*. Retrieved on June 28, 2006, from <http://www2.illinoisbiz.biz/communityprofiles/profiles/site1.htm>
- Illinois School Report Card. (2005). Site 1. Retrieved August 23, 2006 from <http://www.site1.com/supermain/rcard/2005/site1-2005.pdf>
- Klingner, J., & Vaughn, S. (1999). Students' perceptions of instruction in inclusion classrooms: Implications for students with learning disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, 66(1), 23-37.
- Kohn, A. (2006). Down with homework. *Instructor*, 116(2), 43-68. Corno, L. (2000, May). Looking at homework differently. *Elementary School Journal*, 100(5), 529-549.
- Margolis, H. (2005). Resolving struggling learners' homework difficulties: working with elementary school learners and parents. *Preventing School Failure*, 50(1), 5-12.
- McReynolds, K. (2005). Homework. *Encounter*, 18(2), 9-13.
- Murray, L., Woolgar, M., Martins, C., Christaki, A., Hipwell, A., & Cooper, P. (2006, March). Conversations around homework: Links to parental mental health, family characteristics and child psychological functioning. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 24(1), 125-149.
- Otis, N., Grouzet, F., & Pelletier, L. (2005). Latent motivational change in an academic setting: a 3-year longitudinal study. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 97(2), 170-183.
- Polloway, E., Epstein, M., Bursuck, W., Jayanthi, M., & Cumblad, C. (1994). Homework practices of general education teachers. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 27(8), 500-509.

- Pomerantz, E., Wang, Q., & Ng, F. (2005). Mothers' affect in the homework context: the importance of staying positive. [Electronic version]. *Developing Psychology, 41*(2), 414-427.
- Rose, M., (1999). 6 surefire incentives for your student...that won't rot their teeth or break your bank account. [Electronic version]. *Instructor, 109*(4).
- Salend, S., Duhaney, D., Anderson, D., & Gottschalk, C. (2004). Using the internet to improve homework communication and completion. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 36*(3), 64-73.
- Site 1 website, (n.d.). *Site 1*. Retrieved June 28, 2006, from <http://www.site1.com>
- Simplificio, J. (2005). Homework in the 21st century: the antiquated and ineffectual implementation of a time honored educational strategy. *Education, 126*(1), 138-142.
- Sperling's Best Places, (n.d.). *Site 1, II Neighborhood Profiles*. Retrieved June 28, 2006, from <http://www.bestplaces.net>
- Truscott, D. (1998). Can we make homework motivating? [Electronic version]. *The New England Reading Association Journal, 34*(3), 13-16.
- Vaughn, S., Schumm, J., & Kouzekanani, K. (1993). What do students think when their general education teachers make adaptations? *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 26*, 545-555.
- Walberg, H., Paschal, R., & Weinstein, T. (1985). Homework's powerful effects on learning. *Educational Leadership, 42*, 76-79.
- Witt, J. C., & Elliott, S. N. (1985). Acceptability of classroom management strategies. In T. R. Kratochwill (Ed.), *Advances in School Psychology, 4*, 251-288, Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Wright, J. (2006). Learning interventions for struggling students. *Educational Digest, 71*(5), 35-39.
- Xu, J. (2005). Purposes for doing homework reported by middle and high school students. *Journal of Educational Research, 99*(1), 46-55.
- Xu, J., & Corno, L. (2003). Family help and homework management reported by middle school students. *Elementary School Journal, 103*(5), 503-518.

APPENDICES

Dear Teachers,

This survey will provide me with information about your student's homework assignments. Please complete the following survey **thoroughly** and **honestly**. Please do not write your name on this survey. All surveys will remain anonymous.

	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
How often do your students complete homework?	1	2	3	4
How often do you record a grade for homework assignments	1	2	3	4
How often do you provides time in class for students to begin homework?	1	2	3	4
How often do you go over homework in class?	1	2	3	4
How often do your students come to class prepared with all supplies?	1	2	3	4
How often do your students write down their assignments in their assignment notebook	1	2	3	4
How often do you update your teacher website and/or homework hotline	1	2	3	4

Rate the following questions as to whether you agree or disagree with the statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
You feel that homework increases your students achievements on assessments	1	2	3	4	5
Homework I assign is a review or extension of already learned concepts	1	2	3	4	5
You feel you have a fair homework and late work policy	1	2	3	4	5

SAINT·XAVIER·UNIVERSITY

Institutional Review Board

Consent to Participate in a Research Study Increasing Homework and Motivation of Middle School Students through Behavior Modification, Graphing, and Parent Communication

Dear Parent or Guardian,

We are currently enrolled in a Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership program at Saint Xavier University. This program requires us to design and implement a project on an issue that directly affects our instruction. We have chosen to examine student homework completion and motivation concerning class work and homework.

The purpose of this project is to increase the number of students successfully completing and turning in assignments by the designated due date. It may help your child increase their homework completion and motivation concerning class work and homework. We will be conducting our project from January 29, 2007-May 11, 2007. The activities related to the project will take place during regular classroom instruction. These activities will include the daily use of a homework graphing chart, a ticket/reward system incorporating weekly and grand prizes, and a home note your child will bring home every Thursday informing you of his/her weekly progress. The gathering of information for our project during these activities offers no foreseeable risks of any kind to your child.

Your permission allows us to include your child in the reporting of information for our project. All information gathered will be kept completely confidential, and information included in the project report will be grouped so that no individual can be identified. The report will be used to share what we have learned as a result of this project with other professionals in the field of education.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose to withdraw your child from the study at any time. If you choose for your child not to participate, information gathered about your child will not be included in the report, however, your child will still receive the benefits of the intervention activities, i.e. increased homework completion and motivation of class work and homework.

SAINT·XAVIER·UNIVERSITY

Institutional Review Board

If you have any questions or would like further information about our project, please contact us at swimer@antioch34.com (847-838-8316) or dhein@antioch34.com (847- 838-8362)

If you agree to have your child participate in the project, please sign the attached statement and return it to Mrs. Wimer. We will be happy to provide you with a copy of the statement if you wish.

Sincerely,

Sandra Wimer & Dawn Hein

PLEASE RETURN THE ATTACHED STATEMENT TO US BY: February 9, 2007

SAINT·XAVIER·UNIVERSITY

Institutional Review Board

Consent to Participate in a Research Study Increasing Homework and Motivation of Middle School Students through Behavior Modification, Graphing, and Parent Communication

I, _____, the parent/legal guardian of the minor named below, acknowledge that the researcher has explained to me the purpose of this research, identified any risks involved, and offered to answer any questions I may have about the nature of our child's participation. I freely and voluntarily consent to our child's participation in this project. I understand all information gathered during this project will be completely confidential. I also understand that I may keep a copy of this consent form for our own information.

NAME OF MINOR: _____

Signature of Parent/Legal Guardian

Date

Child's Assent: I understand why this research is being done. I understand how it may help me or other children and any discomforts it may cause me. I have been told that I don't have to give an answer if I do not want to and that I can stop the interview at any time for any reason. All the questions I had about this study have been answered. I would like to take part in this study.

Name of Minor Participant

Date

Witness (Signature)

3700 West 103rd Street • Chicago, Illinois • (773) 298-3000 • FAX (773) 779-9061

Dear Parent,

This survey will provide me with information about your homework assignments. Please complete the following survey **thoroughly** and **honestly**. Please do not write your name on this survey. All surveys will remain anonymous.

	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
How often does your child complete homework at home?	1	2	3	4
How often do your child fail to complete homework because they don't understand it?	1	2	3	4
How often do you help your child with their homework?	1	2	3	4
How often are you available to help your child with homework?	1	2	3	4
How often do you check Powerschool, Teacher Website, or homework hotline?	1	2	3	4

Rate the following questions as to whether you agree or disagree with the statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
You feel that homework increases your child's achievements on assessments	1	2	3	4	5
You feel your child's teacher has a fair homework and late work policy	1	2	3	4	5
My child has a quiet area to do homework without distractions	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix E: Teacher Researcher Weekly Log

Week of: _____
 Teacher _____
 Researcher's _____
 Weekly _____
 Log _____
 Class _____
 Hour _____

	Number of Students	Number of Students with Supplies	Number of Students with Assignment Notebook	Number of Students with Completed Homework	Number of Students without Completed Homework	No Assignments Due Today
Monday						
Tuesday						
Wednesday						
Thursday						
Friday						

Dear Students,

This survey will provide me with information about your homework assignments. Please complete the following survey **thoroughly** and **honestly**. Please do not write your name on this survey. All surveys will remain anonymous.

	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
How often do you complete and turn in homework?	1	2	3	4
How often do you fail to complete homework because you don't understand it?	1	2	3	4
How often does a parent help you with your homework?	1	2	3	4
How often do you complete the assignments in class when the teacher provides time?	1	2	3	4
How often do you come to class prepared with all supplies?	1	2	3	4
How often do you write down your assignments in your assignment notebook	1	2	3	4

Rate the following questions as to whether you agree or disagree with the statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
You feel that homework helps you prepare for quizzes and tests	1	2	3	4	5
You feel your teacher has a fair homework and late work policy	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix G: Behavior Modification Chart

	2/26	2/27	2/28	3/1	3/8	3/5	3/6	3/7	3/8	3/9	3/10	3/11	3/12
Student 1	X	★	★	X	★	★	★	★	X	★	★	★	★
Student 2	X	★	★	X	★	★	★	★	X	★	★	★	★
Student 3	X	★	★	X	★	★	★	★	X	★	★	★	★
Student 4	X	★	★	X	★	★	★	★	X	★	★	★	★
Student 5	X	★	★	X	★	★	★	★	X	★	★	★	★
Student 6	X	★	★	X	★	★	★	★	X	★	★	★	★
Student 7	X	★	★	X	★	★	★	★	X	★	★	★	★
Student 8	X	★	★	X	★	★	★	★	X	★	★	★	★
Student 9	X	★	★	X	★	★	★	★	X	★	★	★	★
Student 10	X	★	★	X	★	★	★	★	X	★	★	★	★
Student 11	X	★	★	X	★	★	★	★	X	★	★	★	★
Student 12	X	★	★	X	★	★	★	★	X	★	★	★	★
Student 13	X	★	★	X	★	★	★	★	X	★	★	★	★
Student 14	X	★	★	X	★	★	★	★	X	★	★	★	★
Student 15	X	★	★	X	★	★	★	★	X	★	★	★	★
Student 16	X	★	★	X	★	★	★	★	X	★	★	★	★

Weekly Home Note

Student Sarah

Week of Feb 26 - Mar 2

Class _____

Missing/Incomplete Work:

late absent

~~Affixionary pg 513-514 SW~~

~~Spelling pg 45-49 SW~~

2 pattern poems

~~Practice Book pg 123~~

Comments:

Thanks for the weekly updates,
 we will help out.

Figurative Lang
 wksht

Parent