

MOTIVATING INTERVENTION STRATEGIES TO
INCREASE HOMEWORK COMPLETION

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this action research project was to increase homework completion through the use of motivating strategies. There were approximately 75 students, 100 parents, and three teacher researchers involved in this study. The three intervention strategies used were 15 minutes of class time, extrinsic rewards, and assignment notebook checks. This study was conducted from August 2008 through May 2009. The intended outcome of this research project was to increase students' motivation to complete homework.

The teacher researchers have noticed a change within the family structure. The changes that have occurred include an increase in single-parent homes, a rise in non-English speaking homes, and pressure on students to excel outside of school. These changes have forced many students to choose between homework, family, and society.

The targeted students exhibited a lack of homework completion, which negatively affected the students in the classroom. There were many causes for this issue. The teacher researchers focused on the lack of motivation among students to complete their homework.

After the three teacher researchers completed the intervention strategies in their classrooms, they compared their results to the baseline data. The data showed that intervention two, Extrinsic Rewards, resulted in the highest increase in student homework completion. Intervention one, 15 Minutes of Class Time, and intervention three, Assignment Notebooks, did not yield as large of an increase in homework completion.

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

The three teacher researchers involved in this project teach at the same middle school. Two of the sites are regular seventh grade classrooms. The other site is a regular eighth grade classroom. From this point on, each classroom will be referred to as Site A, Site B, and Site C. The students targeted in these classrooms exhibited a lack of homework completion in and outside of the classroom. Teacher observations, class documentations, and overall student performance indicate this problem existed in these classrooms.

Immediate Problem Context

Figure 1. School/State Student Profile

	% of Ethnic Students	% of ELL Students	% of Low-Income Students	% of Student Body that is Female	% of Student Body that is Male	% of Attendance Rate
School	36.8	2.6	17.0	47.1	53.8	95.7
State	45.1	7.2	40.9	46.4	51.0	93.7

*** Percents are rounded to the nearest tenth of a percent.

Source: State School Report, 2007

The research site is a middle school consisting of students in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. The student body ranges from ages 11 to 14 years old. The school is part of a consolidated school district located in the northeastern portion of the state. The population total of the school is 2,445. Within the 2,445 students, 47.1% are female and 53.8% are male. The school's racially diverse student body consists of 63.2% Caucasian students, 7.5% African American students, 16.2% Hispanic students, 9.6% Asian or Pacific Islander students, .2% are Native Americans, and 3.3% Multiracial. Within the school, a total of 2.6% of students are labeled English Language Learners (ELL). Within the school population, a total of 17% of

students fall below the average socioeconomic status (SES) of the state. The average attendance rate of students from the research site is 95.7% (State Board of Education, 2007).

Figure 2. Faculty Profile

	% of Teacher Body that is Male	% of Teacher Body that is Female	% of Ethnic Teachers	% of Teachers who hold a Master's Degree or above	% of Teachers who hold a Bachelor's Degree
School	19.8	80.2	5.1	71.8	29.9
State	23	77	14.8	52.3	47.6

*** Percents are rounded to the nearest tenth of a percent.

Source: State School Report, 2007

The following data is information about the 177 teachers who work in this school building. One hundred and forty-two teachers out of the 177 are female and the remaining 35 teachers are male. In terms of ethnicity, there are 168 teachers that are Caucasian, four Hispanic, three Pacific Islander, and two African American. Of these 177 teachers, 127 of them have received an education of a master's degree or above. The remaining 53 teachers have a bachelor's degree. The average number of years that a teacher has been employed at this school is seven years. From a financial earning standpoint, the average teacher's income in this school is \$51,218.51. The total amount of all the teachers' combined earnings within one school year is \$9,065,675.51. The ratio of teachers to students is 177 teachers in the building to 2,486 students. The average class size for a teacher is 21 students (K. Burke, personal communication, December 12, 2007).

Academic Program

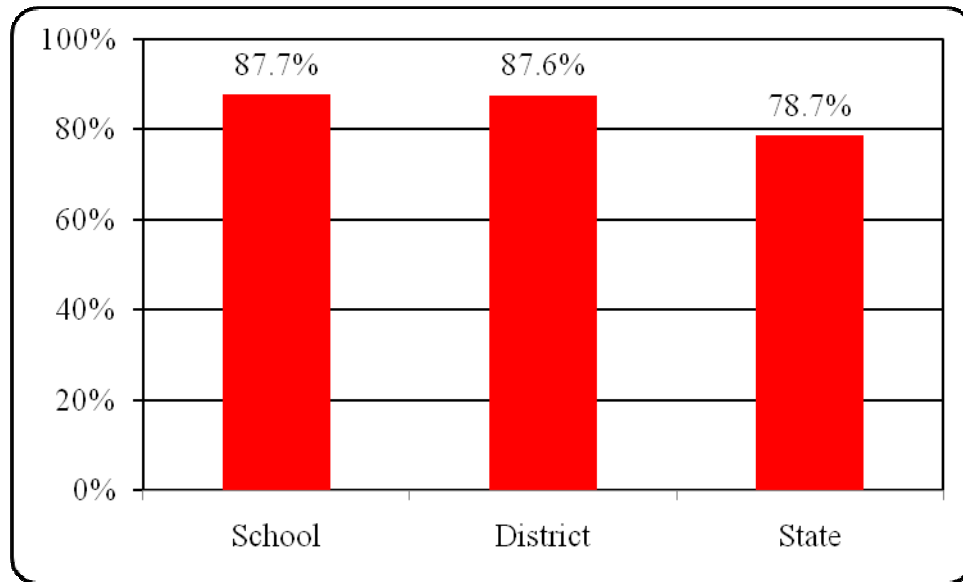
The curriculum at the research site varies between the three classroom sites; Site A, Site B, and Site C. At Site A, the math curriculum covers nine units throughout the year. The students start off the year with a unit on Geometry. As the year progresses, students cover units on Data Analysis and Probability, Investigations of Algebra, Modeling Integers, and Rational Numbers

and Percents. The remainder of the year focuses on Algebra. Throughout the year, mini-units on using graphing calculators are included (District Website, 2007).

In Site B, the students are placed in a seventh grade United States History class. Within the class, students learn about events that took place in early American history. The events discussed cover Colonization to Westward Expansion. The teacher concentrates on three main units throughout the year. The first unit discusses immigration to the colonies from Europe to American development. The second unit covers the United States Constitution. Lastly, the third unit includes events that lead up to the Civil War, the Civil War itself, and the events after the Civil War (District Website, 2007).

Site C is a general science classroom where students learn a variety of curricular topics that are split up into five units. The curriculum covers Matter, Electricity, Magnetism, Geology, and Evolution. In the matter unit, students study the four states of matter, as well as atomic structure and the periodic table. The Electricity and Magnetism units discuss the connection between these two concepts called electromagnetism. The Geology unit looks into the study of the earth, specifically the components that make up the earth's structure. Finally, the Evolution unit discusses in theory where humans evolved from and concludes with a frog dissection lab (District Website, 2007).

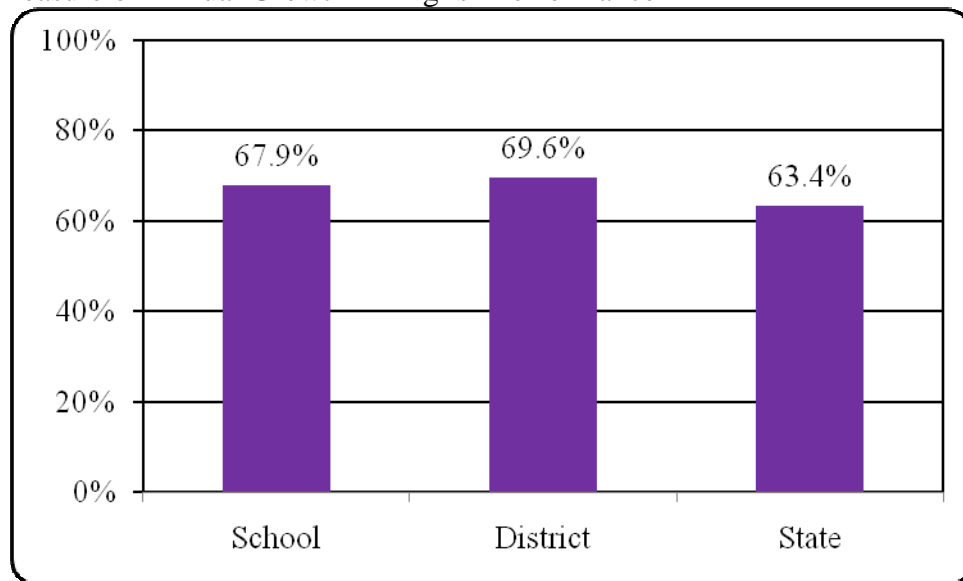
Figure 3. Standards Achievement Test Performance



Source: State School Report, 2007

Figure 3 shows the Standards Achievement Test Performance for the students at the school, the school district, and at the state levels. The test performance at the school level was 87.7%, followed closely by the district level at 87.6%. The state test performance was 78.7%.

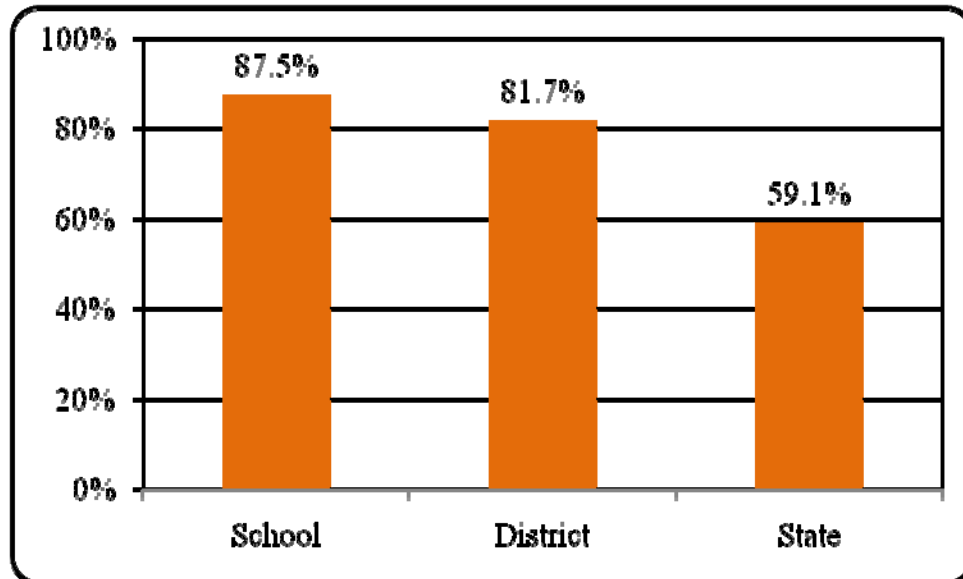
Figure 4. Measure of Annual Growth in English Performance



Source: State School Report, 2007

Figure 4 shows how the students improved in English within the school level, district level, and state levels. At the district level the students grew 69.6%, closely followed by the school level at 67.9%. The state level grew 63.4%.

Figure 5. Alternate Assessment Performance



Source: State School Report, 2007

Figure 5 shows how the students who took the Alternate Assessment Performance test scored at the school, district, and state levels. As a school, the students scored 87.5%. The score for the district was slightly lower at 81.7%. As a state, the students scored 59.1%.

The graduation rate of the students at the research site is 100%. The students at the research test site performed higher than state scores on the State Standards Achievement Test at an 87.7% success rate for 2006 – 2007 school year. On the state's Measure of Annual Growth in English Performance test, the students who completed the test performed higher than the state scores at a 67.9% success rate for 2006 – 2007 school year. Lastly, the students who completed the Alternate Assessment Performance test performed higher than state scores at an 87.5% success rate for 2006 – 2007 school year (State Board of Education, 2007).

Administrative Structure

There are eight total administrators at the school. There is one principal, one associate principal, four assistant principals, and two special education administrators. Of the eight, seven are Caucasian and one is African-American. Each assistant principal is in charge of two teams per grade level (School Website, 2007). The average salary of the administrators at the school is \$81,911(The Champion Foundation, 2007).

School's Personality

There are numerous characteristics that make the school unique. The middle school itself is very diverse and contains multiple ethnic students from different countries. Within the school itself, the middle school is one of the larger middle schools in the nation. In order to provide its students with learning opportunities both within school hours and outside school hours, the school offers students numerous clubs, sports, and extracurricular activities. These can range from Fencing to International Cooking Club, Technology Club, which provides a morning announcement, and sports activities including basketball and cheerleading (School Website, 2007).

The students, administrators, teachers, and parents recognize students on a monthly basis for doing a great job in class. Every student on each team has an opportunity to become the "Student of the Month" and be recognized for a job well done from one of their four core teachers (Social Studies, Math, Science, and Language Arts). Along with the Student of the Month award, many teams offer smaller incentive rewards to those students who go above and beyond the typical student expectations (School Website, 2007).

In addition to student recognition on individual teams, the school recognizes students who excel beyond school expectations in academics. Students from the school have earned

awards such as the Infinitec North Technology Achievement Award, gold medal winners at the State Science Fair, Division Champions in Music, Conference Champions in girls' volleyball, Semi-finalist in the National Geographic Society, and many more. The school's teachers have also been recognized for excellence in their field of education (School Website, 2007).

Buildings and Ground

The school for Sites A, B, and C is a three-story structure that is 318,000 square feet and is designed to hold approximately 2,000 students. The school contains eighty regular classrooms equipped with at least one computer with speakers, a TV monitor, and a telephone. Along with the classrooms in the building, there are also core facilities that include administrative offices, health services, support services, two cafeterias, and a learning center. There are four gymnasiums that are located on the first-floor and two additional gymnasiums on the second-floor. Another structure in the school building is the Tech Lab 2000, which is considered to be a "state-of-the-art-laboratory" that features hands-on engaged learning opportunities. The school also provides IBook carts that are available to classrooms for additional computer use (Village Website, 2007).

Teacher Researchers' Perspectives

Teacher Researcher A felt that the two main factors that affect homework completion were the teacher to student ratio and the amount of English Language Learners (ELL) that the school has. The teacher to student ratio, as stated before, is 17 to 1. It is hard to make sure to check in with each student in the class because usually three to four students need a lot of extra help. The students that need just a little reassurance in their homework will not receive it because class will be over by the time they might receive help. The factor of ELL students can affect homework too because those students might not understand what is being taught or how to solve

the math problems. On average, there are two to three students in the class that are ELL. It is extra difficult for those students because if they have questions about the homework, their parents may not understand the material as well.

Teacher Researcher B believed the factors that play a role in the lack of homework completion would be the number of English Language Learners the school has, the socioeconomic status of some of the students, the class size, and the ratio of teachers to students. Homework completion would be affected by the number of ELL students because those students may not fully understand their homework assignment or may not be able to read their homework assignment. If students do not understand their work or cannot read their work, they will most likely not complete their work. The socioeconomic status of a student can impact a student's need to complete their work. In lower income families, the student is often left alone to their own device because their parent(s) are working and are not home to check on them. Lastly, the class size and the ratio of teachers to students played a role in homework completion because the larger the class, the less time spent on individual students by the teacher. For those students who need a lot of help, the teacher may not be able to provide them with the services or give them the help they need.

Teacher Researcher C felt that there are not enough programs in the school to accommodate the large population of ELL students. Those students are put into a regular education classroom and are expected to succeed when there is a serious language barrier between the students and teachers. Teachers cannot provide proper instruction to those students when they cannot understand what the teacher is trying to teach them. Therefore, Teacher Researcher C thought that those students suffer significantly and tend not to do homework

because the directions are not clear to them. The majority of Teacher Researcher C's students who did not turn in their homework were the ELL students.

Teacher Researcher C also felt that there was an inconsistency on how teachers view homework in the school. There are many teachers in the school who give homework as an extension to a lesson that was taught because they view homework as a helpful tool for students to apply what they have learned. Then there are other teachers, who view homework as being useless, and therefore either do not assign it or they give homework and grade it solely on completion. When there is a team of teachers that cannot see eye to eye on how homework should be implemented into instruction, it carries over into the classrooms. Students seem to think that if they don't have to do homework in one core class then they don't have to do homework in any classes. Teachers who work in teams need to have the same beliefs as to why homework is vital to education and they need to express these ideas to their students. With consistency, students will be more likely to do their homework.

Local Context

Location

The school is located in a suburb of a major Midwestern metropolis city of the United States. The school is surrounded by residential homes, small businesses, and is located down the street from a high school. The school is also located next to a teen center where the students go after school for homework help, skate at the skate park, or play games. Overall, the school is located in a relatively peaceful neighborhood (Village Website, 2007).

Population Demographics

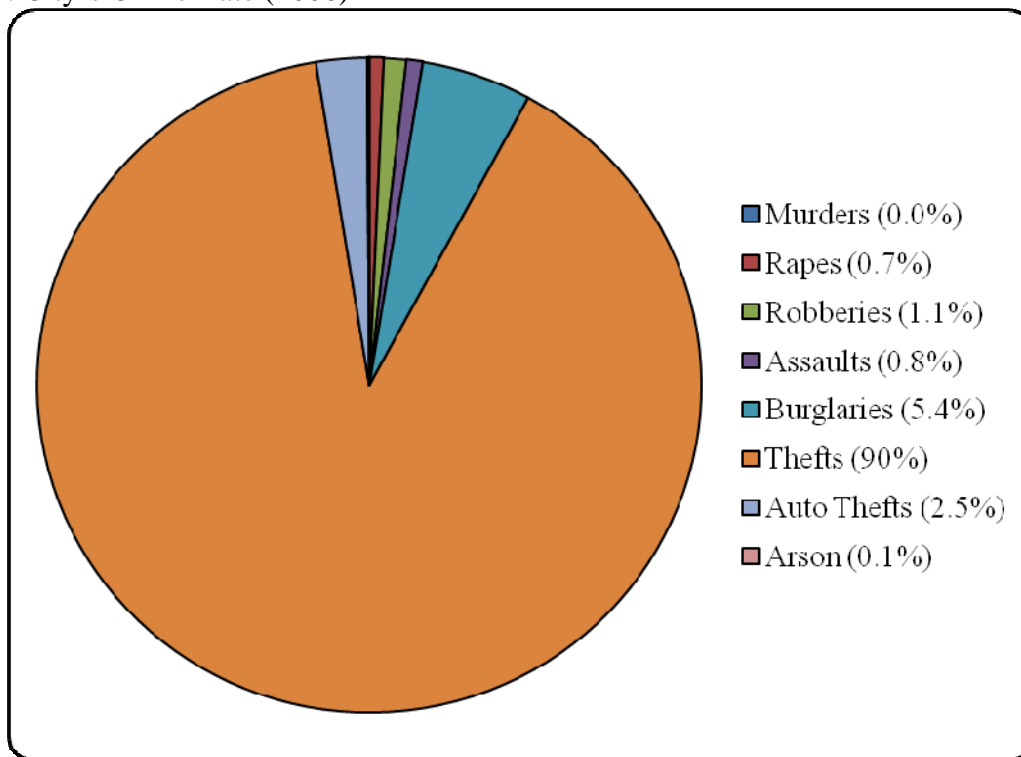
The student population in the school comes from 11 different towns that feed into the school district. The information that is presented here comes from the town where the school is

located. This location also contains the majority of the students who attend the school. The population of this town contains 31,170 people and continues to grow at a steady pace. The median family income is about \$75,742. The average age of individuals in the city is 35.7 years old. Of the 31,170 people in the city, 32% are from ages 0 to 19 years old, 16.8% are from 20 to 34 years old, 35.1% are from 35 to 54 years old, and 16.1% are 55 years and over. The ethnic demographics show that the majority of the individuals that live in the town are Caucasian, with these being 76.5% of the total population. The other ethnicities that make up the remaining 23.5% of the population are Asian, Hispanic, African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, and Pacific Islander (Village Website, 2007).

Home and Occupation

There are a total of 11,351 households in the town where the school is located. 77.8% of those houses are owner-occupied and 22.2% are renter-occupied. The average household size is 2.96 people. The median home value for this town is \$199,000. There are a lot of employers in this area. The top ten employers are Six Flags Great America, Nosco Printing Group, Domino Amjet, Inc., The Vasquez Group, Inc., the school district, Vision Tek, Inc., Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., Plasco, Inc., and Mills Corporation. With all of these jobs available, the unemployment rate is 4.1. There is one police station, one sub-station, 58 police officers, and 29 civilians (Village Website, 2007).

Figure 6. City's Crime Rate (2006)



Source: City Data, 2007

Figure 6 shows how the town's crime rate is broken down. The total number of crimes for 2006 was 1,602. The percentages for the crimes are broken down as follows: murders (0%), rapes (0.7%), robberies (1.1%), assaults (0.8%), burglaries (5.4%), thefts (90%), auto thefts (2.5%), and arson (0.1%). The crime index rate is 266.5 and the U.S. average is 317.7 (City-data.com, 2007).

Community

The area in which the school is located was settled in the 1830's near a major river. The town began to develop around the 1840's when the first post office, inn, and school were built. The town's population boomed after the nearest town's railroad system began to run through the town. In the 1920s, the town was incorporated. As the town's population grew, the town became a major hub within the surrounding communities (Village Website, 2007).

The town has continued to grow and improve itself to meet the needs of its residents over the years. The town offers a wide range of activities for children to adults. The town offers a variety of campsites, outdoor parks, hotels, water parks, plenty of shopping, sport-centered arenas, theme parks, libraries, as well as numerous organizations to belong to. The town also has a park district where people can participate in multiple activities for people of all ages and needs (Village Website, 2007).

Overall, the town in which the school is located in is a great place for both adults and children. The town has many facets that meet the needs of people. The town continuously grows as the population expands (Village Website, 2007).

District

The middle school services a large area. It services a total of 11 surrounding towns, villages, and neighborhoods. The feeder schools from the surrounding areas are formatted in a similar manner and parallel the views and needs of the research site (School Website, 2007).

The mission statement for the middle school is, "Learning...to find solutions." The school recently changed their mission statement to better meet the needs of the community, teachers, and students. The school is constantly evolving and trying new methods in order to help the students succeed to the best of their abilities (School Website, 2007).

The district serves the community with a total of four schools; primary, elementary, intermediate, and the middle school. The four schools are led by one superintendent with the help of multiple administrators. For each school, a principal and at least one vice principal can be found (School Website, 2007).

The district, overall, has been well-funded. They have not had a tax-based referendum since the early 1990s. The district is well-maintained and supported by the surrounding community.

Teacher Researchers' Perspective

Teacher Researcher A felt that the city in which the school is located is very diverse. This has a major impact on the homework completion in Teacher Researcher A's classroom. Some ethnic backgrounds do not value education the same as others. Some families have a major emphasis on education and homework. For the families that do not have an emphasis on education, it trickles down to the student. They feel that homework and education are not important. This becomes a battle for the teacher to try and fight.

The teacher for Site B felt that the students' homework completion is affected by a variety of reasons within the home environment. First of all, the school has a large population of students who fall below the average socioeconomic status of the community the school is located in. This can affect the student in a number of ways. First, the student may not have all the necessary materials or resources he or she may need in order to successfully complete all homework assignments. Second, a parent figure or authority figure may not be home to make sure his child is doing his work on a daily basis. Third, families who fall below the SES of the community tend to be non-English speaking families. For those students, the work can be difficult for them because they do not have a good knowledge of the English language, like their parents. Another major reason why some students do not complete their work is because of extracurricular activities. After speaking with multiple families during Parent-Teacher-Student conferences, Teacher Researcher B found out that many of the students are constantly involved in extracurricular activities. Some students simply do not have enough hours in the day to do

their homework, go to other activities, sleep, eat dinner, and etc. Some families, on the other hand, have very high expectations.

Teacher Researcher C felt that a major concern of why students consistently do not turn in homework comes from where the student lives. The towns that feed into the school are very diverse from one another in terms of ethnicity and socioeconomic status. Teacher Researcher C thought that how a household is run in a particular town affects how a student lives and views different things. If there is a household where the parents make school a focus for their children, then homework will be completed on a daily basis. Likewise, if parents do not make school a priority because of other things that are influencing their lives, like financial difficulties or high crime rate, homework is probably not a big concern in that household. Teacher Researcher C thought that many of the students that come from a household or town where there is a high crime rate and low socioeconomic status tend not to value their education, and therefore do not turn in their homework.

National Context

Arlene M. Hall, researcher from Murray State University, addresses the belief that self-control is considered to be a factor in the decrease of homework completion because students tend to focus their attention on the outside environment rather than the self. Boredom is another factor that leads to a decline in homework completion because when homework is boring, students tend to find more interesting activities to do. Hall incorporates the work of Berlyne stating that “the optimal stimulation theory states all living organisms have a physiological need for stimulation, which they can achieve through changing their activity level” (Hall, p. 1). By adding stimulation, students are more invested to complete their work. The article concludes

with a suggestion on how learning stations can be used to increase the self-control of students in completing homework.

Pat Hinchey provides his readers with a different insight as to why students do not do their work. Instead of concentrating on the student or the student's environment, he puts the responsibility of homework incompleteness on the teacher. Hinchey says student refusal to do homework is due to the teacher's failure to provide relevant work that forces students to use their new skill, not just repeat it. The lack of a connection between homework and real world skills, students' lives, and parent concerns on the teacher's part results in rebellion on both the student and parents who are involved. Hinchey relates the lack of homework completion to outside stimuli such as television programs like MTV. MTV is a national program that many students choose to engage in rather than their homework. Hinchey believes it is the job of the teacher to incorporate "young society" within their curriculum in order to increase the level of homework completion (Hinchey, 2).

Julia Thompson lists thirteen causes of homework not coming back to school completed. The article not only gives causes, but also gives solutions for each of the causes. Among the causes she suggests are that students claim they did the homework, but left it at home and students say they don't know how to do the assignment. Thompson states that "Although there can be many reasons why students don't always complete their homework, some seem to be universal (Thompson, p. 1)."

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

The purpose of this research project was to increase the amount of homework completion in the classrooms of the three teacher researchers. “Homework is important because it is at the intersection between home and school. It serves as a window through which you can observe your children’s education and express positive attitudes towards your children and their education (Goldstein, 2001, p. 3).” Homework completion is a constant struggle for teachers in all grade levels. Teachers face this struggle on a yearly basis. How do we end this cycle? How do we, as teachers, motivate students to complete their work? The teacher researchers’ goal is to increase homework completion which would create numerous positive results for both students and teacher researchers.

*Pre-intervention Grade book Data**Figure 7. Baseline Data*

	Site A	Site B	Site C
Homework Completed	56%	65%	61%
Homework Not Completed	44%	35%	39%
Students (n)	n = 16	n = 17	n = 18

Starting the week of September 15, 2008 through the week of October 6, 2008, the teacher researchers from sites A, B, and C gathered their baseline data. The teacher researchers used their grade books to determine the percentage of students who completed their homework each day for that period of time. Figure 1 indicates that fewer than 75% of students had their homework completed during that time. This information supported the fact that homework completion was a problem for all three sites.

Pre-Homework Student and Parent Surveys

Two preliminary surveys were distributed, one to parents and one to students by the teacher researchers to identify the initial feelings regarding their personal struggles with homework, amount, and time spent on homework. These preliminary surveys were completed prior to the intervention activities. The information collected from the surveys is illustrated in Figures 8 through 16.

To determine the students' opinions on homework, the student pre-survey (see Appendix A) was completed by the students at Sites A, B, and C during regular class hours on October 1, 2008. The surveys consisted of questions that focused on the students' individual perception on their motivation to complete homework, time spent on homework, and any personal struggles regarding homework. Figures 8 through Figure 12 illustrates the results of the Pre-Homework Student Survey.

Figure 8. Question 1 of the Student Pre-Survey

	Site A	Site B	Site C
Yes	81%	83%	100%
No	19%	17%	0%
Students Surveyed (n)	n = 16	n = 17	n = 18

Figure 8 indicates the students' feelings about homework. The question that students answered was, "Do you feel homework is important to your education?" The majority of the students at all three sites felt that homework was important to their education.

Figure 9. Question 2 of the Student Pre-Survey

	Site A	Site B	Site C
Too Easy	19%	5%	5%
Neither Easy Nor Hard	81%	90%	95%
Too Hard	0%	5%	0%
Students Surveyed (n)	n = 16	n = 17	n = 18

Figure 9 indicates the students' feeling about the homework they are given. The students had to rate their homework into one of three categories; too easy, neither easy nor hard, or too hard. The majority of the students, 81%, 90%, and 95%, felt that the homework they are given fit into the category of neither being easy nor hard. It was nice to see that the homework the teacher researchers are giving falls into that category for an overwhelming percentage of students.

Figure 10. Question 3 of the Student Pre-Survey

	Site A	Site B	Site C
0 to 30 min.	44%	23%	34%
30 min. to 1 hr.	38%	23%	44%
1 hr. to 1.5 hrs.	19%	50%	11%
Above 1.5 hrs.	0%	12%	11%
Students Surveyed (n)	n = 16	n = 17	n = 18

Figure 10 indicates the amount of time students spend on their homework in an average night. The students had to choose one of four categories that ranged from 0 to 30 minutes to over 1.5 hours. The results varied between all three sites. The majority of the students from Site A felt that they spent between 0 to 30 minutes of time on homework in an average night. As for Site B, the majority of the students felt that 1 hour to 1.5 hours best fit that question. Teacher Researcher C's students felt that in an average night they spent about 30 minutes to 1 hour of their time on homework.

Figure 11. Question 4 of the Student Pre-Survey

	Site A	Site B	Site C
Always	38%	58%	33%
Sometimes	31%	41%	50%
Never	31%	0%	17%
Students Surveyed (n)	n = 16	n = 17	n = 18

In Question 4, the students were asked, “How often do you write your assignments in your assignment notebook?” The results shown in Figure 11 were different for all three sites. For Sites A and B, the majority, 38% and 58% of the students stated that they write their assignments in their assignment notebooks all of the time. At Site C however, 50%, of the students said they sometimes write their assignments in their assignment notebooks.

Figure 12. Question 5 of the Student Pre-Survey

	Site A	Site B	Site C
Class Time	56%	76%	89%
Assignment Notebook Check	0%	5%	0%
Rewards	44%	17%	11%
Students Surveyed (n)	n = 16	n = 17	n = 18

Question 5 asked students, “Which of the following strategies do you feel would benefit you the most for completing?” Figure 12 indicates which students felt would benefit them the most in completing their homework. Site A had 56% of the students who felt having more class time to complete the homework would benefit them the most followed by a close second with 44% of the students that felt rewards would be the greatest incentive to complete their homework. Site B had 76% of students saying that they felt more class time would give them more incentive, while 17%, of these students felt rewards would be more of an incentive. Site C had 89% of the students who felt that more class time would help them the most. Site B had a distant 11% of the students that felt rewards would benefit them the most.

For Sites A, B, and C, the student responses for Questions 1, 2, 4, and 5 were very similar. The general consensus was that homework was important to their education. Most students felt that the homework they receive is neither easy nor hard for them to complete. Also, the majority of students indicated that they write their assignments in their assignment notebook. Finally, students felt that if they were allotted class time to begin their homework at the end of class, they would benefit more from the allotted time versus assignment notebook checks or rewards.

The initial Pre-Homework Parent Survey (see Appendix B) completed by the parents for Sites A, B, and C, the information collected from the pre-survey helped the teacher researchers categorize the feelings the parents had about their child's work ethic, personal struggles, and the amount of time spent completing homework.

Figure 13. Question 1 of the Parent Pre-Survey

	Site A	Site B	Site C
Agree	50%	27%	79%
Mostly Agree	13%	45%	21%
Slightly Agree	13%	9%	0%
Disagree	25%	18%	0%
Parents Surveyed (n)	n = 16	n = 17	n = 18

Figure 13 indicates how the parents viewed their son or daughter's motivation to complete his or her homework on his or her own. The parents had to choose one of four options ranging from agree to disagree. The popular choice for Site A was to agree with the above statement with 50% of the total parents polled and the same goes for Site C with 79%. On the other hand, Site B had the majority of the parents polled, 45%, who mostly agreed with that statement.

Figure 14. Question 2 of the Parent Pre-Survey

	Site A	Site B	Site C
Agree	38%	36%	7%
Mostly Agree	0%	18%	29%
Slightly Agree	50%	36%	7%
Disagree	13%	9%	57%
Parents Surveyed (n)	n = 16	n = 17	n = 18

When asked if their son or daughter was easily distracted when completing his or her homework, parents were asked to choose one of four options ranging from agree to disagree. In Figure 14, the results were different for all three sites. Site A had 50% of the parents that slightly agreed with the statement, whereas 79% of the parents at Site C disagreed with the statement. Site B parents who agreed with the statement and another 36% of the parents who slightly agreed with the statement.

Figure 15. Question 3 of the Parent Pre-Survey

	Site A	Site B	Site C
0-30 min.	13%	18%	36%
30 min. to 1 hr.	75%	27%	29%
1 hr. to 1.5 hrs.	13%	27%	14%
Above 1.5 hrs.	0%	18%	21%
Parents Surveyed (n)	n = 16	n = 17	n = 18

Figure 15 exhibits the information regarding how long the parents felt it takes their son or daughter to complete his or her homework in an average night. They were asked to choose one of four options ranging from 0 to 30 minutes to over 1.5 hours. At Site A, 75% of the parents felt it would take 30 minutes to 1 hour to complete the homework in an average night which is contrary to what the students stated in Figure 10. Site B had a tie between 30 minutes to 1 hour and 1 hour to 1.5 hours. Both of those choices had 27%. From Figure 10, Site B's students agreed with one of those choices. Thirty-six percent of the parents polled from Site C stated that it took their son

or daughter 0 to 30 minutes to complete the homework in an average night. Figure 10 shows that the students from Site C felt it took them longer to complete their homework in an average night.

Figure 16. Question 4 of the Parent Pre-Survey

	Site A	Site B	Site C
Agree	0%	9%	0%
Mostly Agree	13%	18%	0%
Slightly Agree	25%	18%	29%
Disagree	63%	54%	71%
Parents Surveyed (n)	n = 16	n = 17	n = 18

The last question asked parents whether they think their son or daughter struggles with homework. They were asked to choose one of four options ranging from agree to disagree. Figure 16 indicates that the majority of the parents for all three sites disagreed with the statement. A total of 63% of parents polled for Site A, 54% of parents polled for Site B, and 71% of parents polled for Site C, circled this as their choice for question four on the parent pre-survey.

After the results were tabulated, the parent responses from Sites A, B, and C for question one (Figure 13) were similar. Most parents fell into the agree and mostly agree category that their child is self-motivated to complete their work. Question 4 (Figure 16) also had similar results. Most parents felt that their child does not struggle with their homework. However, for Questions 2 (Figure 14) and 3 (Figure 15), parent responses varied. For Question 2, parent responses in all three sites differed from agreeing that their child is easily distracted to disagreeing that their child is easily distracted. Finally, for Question 3, parent responses varied.

Weekly Teacher Checklists

During each week of the action research project, the teacher researchers used one of three weekly checklists to keep track of the number of students that completed their homework. The three checklists were; Teacher Researchers' Check-Off Log (see Appendix C), Teacher

Researchers' Homework Ticket Reward Log (see Appendix D), and Teacher Researchers' Homework/Assignment Notebook Log (see Appendix E). For all three checklists, the teacher researchers tallied those students who had their homework complete. For example, a student who did not complete two of the ten assigned problems would not earn a check mark for having their homework completed. On the other hand, if a student completed all ten problems but two were incorrect, he would still receive a check mark for having their homework completed.

Probable Causes

According to the Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary, the definition of homework is an assignment given to a student to be completed outside of the regular class period (Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary, 2008). Based on this definition, what does the literature say about the benefits to homework? Why is it considered a national problem? Lastly, what does past research say about the probable causes as to why students do not complete their work?

The literature revealed there are both positive and negative benefits to homework. One of the most obvious reasons teachers use homework is because it improves students' understanding and their retention rate of the material covered in class (McPherson, 2005). Students need homework in order to review and practice the concepts that are taught in class. Homework allows students to become responsible for their own work. According to Coutts (2004), "Homework's potential benefit as achievement-related leads to increased success on class work and fosters attitudes and habits that leads to successful future learning (p. 1)." Research has consistently shown that there is a positive relationship between the amount of time spent on homework and high achievement for students. Not only is there a positive relationship between homework and high achievement, but homework can increase the students' ability to be self-responsible, self-regulate, and manage time well (Coutts, 2004). Also, according to the Center

for Public Education (2007), homework also helps students develop life skills that they will need further on in life. Homework encourages students to become responsible for their work and promotes self-growth. Both of these qualities will benefit students outside of school as well. Homework also provides the students additional opportunities for independent practice in a newly learned skill. Truscott (1998) says homework also requires students to participate in an extended concentration time, exploration, and creativity. Additionally, if the homework is personally relevant to the student, the student is more likely to complete his work (Vatterott, 2008). There are three basic good reasons why a teacher might assign students to work on school tasks at home: for independent practice of new skills, for tasks that require extended time, and to increase home-school partnerships (Truscott, 1998). Some less direct benefits of homework include, but are not limited to improvement of study skills by teaching students how to work individually and how they learn best, it teaches students that learning can occur outside of the classroom, and it positively involves parents by encouraging parents to become active in their child's education (McPherson, 2005). According to a 2000 poll conducted by the Public Agenda Foundation, only one out of ten parents believed that their child was given too much homework (A New Report, 2003). Lastly, research suggests that there is a direct correlation between homework completion and high achievement after fifth grade (Truscott, 1998).

Even though there are many positive benefits to homework, previous research literature indicates that there are negative aspects as well. The most obvious negative effect homework can cause is the amount of stress homework can cause a student and their parent (McPherson, 2005). If a student struggles inside the classroom, the likelihood that the student will struggle on the outside work is high as well. If the parent does not understand the work their child is completing, the parent can also experience stress because they are not able to effectively help their child.

“When the perceived purposes accrue no personal benefit to the child, it is difficult for the parent to remain positive (Coutts, 2004, p. 1).” The failure to provide relevant work creates rebellious students and angry parents (Hinchey, 1996). There are other potential negative effects of homework as well. First, homework can limit the time the child has to be involved in other activities such as sports, extracurricular activities, and spending time with their family. Too much homework can also lead to a lack of interest in the subject being covered. When some students are overwhelmed with the amount of work they receive, they can shut down and not complete any of the work. In some cases, parent involvement can be a negative as well. Parents may confuse their child by teaching them how to complete an assignment in a different manner than what the teacher might have taught. Lastly, homework can widen the social inequalities between advantaged and disadvantaged students, which may encourage cheating among the disadvantaged. Depending on the type of homework a teacher may hand out, some students may not be able to complete it because they do not have the resources at home to do so. This can result in the student not completing their work or cheating in order to complete it (McPherson, 2005).

Homework completion is a complex topic to research. “Because homework has been a difficult variable to study directly, uncontaminated by other variables, research has produced mixed and inclusive results. However, it does seem that the weight of the evidence is in favor of homework (McPherson, 2).” Since 1962, only twenty studies have been completed that compare the achievement of students who receive homework against students who do not. Fourteen of those studies have shown that there is a positive correlation between achievement and students who complete their homework (McPherson, 2005).

Homework completion is a national problem that all teachers face. The lack of homework completion is an issue that challenges and frustrates many teachers. No matter the location, the school resources, or the economic status of the community, homework completion is a constant variable.

According to Hinchey, he relates the lack of homework completion to outside stimuli such as television programs like MTV. MTV is a national program that many students choose to engage in rather than their homework. Hinchey believes it is the job of the teacher to incorporate “young society” within their curriculum in order to increase the level of homework completion (Hinchey, 1996). Society needs to work together, along with teachers, in order to promote an environment that supports learning and excellence among students. Thompson states that “Although there can be many reasons why students don’t always complete their homework, some seem to be universal (Thompson, 2007). Researcher Thompson states that the lack of homework completion is not only a national problem, but also a universal problem.

Researches offer many theories as to why students do not complete their homework. However, there are two probable causes that stand out in the literature, home life and motivation.

Home life

The first probable cause is home life. Home life includes the socioeconomic status of the child’s family, the structure of the family household, and parental education. Even though home life is not a factor that can be controlled by the teacher or school, it is still an important factor that affects the student’s ability to complete their work.

Students from lower-income homes may have more difficulty completing their assignments (Yeow, 2002). This may be due to a lack of resources the student has to access in order to complete their work. Some students from lower-income homes may have to work

outside of school due to the lack of money being generated by other family members. The child's first role may not be of a student; rather it may be the role of a provider (Hinchey, 1996). Due to the lack of funding for their family, many parents are forced to work multiple jobs. This causes a break down in the family structure. Students go home to an empty house or to a home where they assume the parental role to younger siblings. In either situation, homework is not the priority of the student because there are cultural differences between what is emphasized at home versus what is emphasized at school. Lastly, parents who are part of a lower socioeconomic status often grew up in a lower socioeconomic bracket. This cycle encourages the constant battle of education versus work. Because of the parent lack of a formal education, parents often do not feel equipped to help their children succeed in school based on their linguistic abilities and their perceived lack of welcome by teachers, administrators, and other parents (Cotton & Wikelund, 2001). One of the most important findings is that parents of disadvantaged and minority children can make a positive contribution to their child's education if they receive adequate training and encouragement from the school (Cotton, et al., 2001).

Increased parental involvement during the completion of homework positively affects the student, especially for those who are labeled "at-risk." "Meaningful parent-child interaction during the completion of homework has emerged as a significant variable for improving learning for low-performing students (Bailey, p. 2)." Providing homework assignments that encourage interaction between parents and children increases the child's performance on standardized testing (Bailey, Brabham, & Ross, 2004). No matter the family background, any parental involvement can benefit a child.

Motivation

The cause that can be potentially influenced within the classroom is motivation. Motivation includes the amount and type of homework, the time given for homework, and intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. Motivation is defined as the initiative to undertake or continue a task or activity (dictionary.com, 2008). Teachers struggle with student lack of motivation in class.

When given homework, some students choose not to complete it because they simply do not understand the material. If they do not understand the material in class, they cannot complete the work outside of class (Hinchey, 1996). For those students who have an understanding of the assignment, if those students did not receive immediate feedback from their teacher about their work, some students then lose interest in their work. Lack of immediate feedback on homework can result in a lack of motivation because students are not receiving positive feedback or suggestions from their teacher (Hinchey, 1996).

The amount and type of homework plays a large role in the completion of work. Students who receive too much work or think work is too hard, feel overwhelmed and may choose not to complete their work. However, if the homework is too easy, students then feel that the assignment is not worth completing. If there is nothing to learn in an assignment, students see no point in completing it (Hinchey, 1996). The teacher needs to adapt homework to meet the educational needs of each, individual student (Salend, Duhaney, Anderson, & Gottshalk, 2004). Overall, if the homework assignments are too boring or too routine, students are likely not to complete it (Coutts, 2004).

Even though students feel that many teachers give too much work, research shows that “the great majority of students at all grade levels now spend less than one hour studying on a typical day – an amount that has not substantially changed in at least 20 years (A New Report, p.

1).” Essentially, students in grades four through six should spend twenty to forty minutes on homework per day, and grades seven through nine should spend about two hours on homework per day (McEntire, 2006). If students are forced to choose between school work and other activities, school work often comes in last.

Home life and motivation are believed to be the two biggest contributing factors on why students do not complete their work. Since administrators and teachers cannot control a student’s home life or motivation in the classroom, teachers and administrators need strategies that foster change in school. In order to positively change student motivation, strategies need to be implemented within the classroom to alter the behavior of the student.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

In order to increase the rate of homework completion, teachers must focus on how to increase student motivation. Student motivation refers to a “student’s willingness, need, desire, and compulsion to participate in, and be successful in, the learning process (Brewster & Fager, p. 3).” The older students become, the less likely they are willing to take risks and engage themselves in activities that they have not encountered before. Those students who are motivated in school activities put forth more effort in their own learning (Brewster, et al., 2000). The teacher researchers designed three different motivating intervention strategies: providing class time, extrinsic rewards, and checking the students’ assignment notebooks.

Class Time

The first intervention strategy was based on giving the students the last 15 minutes of class to start their homework. Class time can be defined as any amount of time spent in classrooms within the school that does not exclude lunch, recess, and time spent changing classrooms (Cotton, 1989). Since students will have the opportunity to ask questions of their teacher and peers, as well as having time to begin their homework in class, the rate of homework completion will increase (Wong & Wong, 2006). There are multiple reasons why students would utilize the 15 minutes of class time to complete their work. First, since students already understand that homework is mandatory, they are more likely to use the 15 minutes of class time to complete their homework rather than using that time to socialize (Cronovich, 2001). This establishes a psychological momentum, which helps them finish the rest of the work on their own. Lastly, giving class time will provide an incentive to students to come to class because time

is given to complete their work in class, not at home (Cronovich, 2001). Many schools and teachers already provide students with time at the end of class in order to begin their homework assignments (Chaika, 2000).

Extrinsic Rewards

The second intervention strategy, extrinsic rewards, was based around a ticket system. An extrinsic reward is defined as a reward, such as food, that is tangible and visible to others, and external (Wiktionary, 2007). Many students are extrinsically motivated when they know a prize or reward will reward their effort. Schools can also extrinsically motivate students by publically recognizing students for academic achievements by giving out stickers, candy, and other rewards or by taking away privileges (Brewster, et al., 2000). Extrinsic rewards are not only meant for low-achieving students, as high-achieving students can also benefit from extrinsic rewards.

If extrinsic rewards are used, they must be used sparingly and are most effective when the reward is closely related to the accomplished task (Brewster, et al, 2000). Extrinsically motivated behaviors can lead to intrinsic motivation. Even though the reward may be extrinsically motivated, the child internalizes the value of the reward and behavior and eventually moves to achieving intrinsic rewards (Jalongo, 2007). If a student has been successful in homework completion and is working hard, then celebrate with a special event or reward (Homework Tips, 2003). “Rewarding students for handing in homework can increase completion rates (Cooper, p. 2).” The teacher researchers choose to implement extrinsic rewards as part of their intervention strategies to improve homework completion within the classroom due to the positive literature review on the topic.

Assignment Notebooks

Lastly, assignment notebooks can be defined as a written system for documenting academic assignments that the students are responsible for (Assignment notebook, 2008). The third strategy, checking students' assignment notebooks, is intended to increase student homework completion. The purpose of homework is to help students develop study skills, time management skills, and responsibility. Most schools support student learning through the use of assignment notebooks because they are a resource that help students achieve academic goals, including homework completion (Hopkins, 2008). When using the assignment notebook, teachers must make sure each assignment includes the date given and the date due. That way, students are able to prioritize their work and not become overwhelmed. Students should also write their assignments in ink, which prevents them from changing an assignment before going home (Hopkins, 2008). By checking the homework assignments written in the assignment notebook, parents are then aware of their child's homework assignment (Chaika, 2000). Parents are then able to help their child complete their work. Based on the literature review, this is why the teacher researchers chose assignment notebooks as a strategy to improve homework completion within the classroom.

“Research has shown that teachers can influence student motivation; that certain practices do work to increase time spent on task” (Brewster et al., p. 1). As a result of implementing the three intervention strategies: providing 15 minutes of class time at the end of the class period, extrinsic rewards, and checking the students' assignment notebooks during the class period, the students of research Sites A, B, and C will increase their rate of homework completion.

Project Objectives

As a result of using class time, extrinsic rewards, and assignment notebooks during the period of October 1, 2008 through February 20, 2009, the students of Site A, B, and C were exposed to different intervention strategies that would motivate them to increase the amount of homework they turn in on a daily basis. Although there were many viable intervention strategies to increase homework completion, the teacher researchers chose to focus on the use of giving class time to start and complete their work, extrinsic rewards, and assignment notebooks to organize students. Through the use of the three intervention strategies, the teacher researchers hoped that their students would become self-motivated and eventually non-reliant on the previously stated intervention strategies to complete their homework.

Processing Statements

In order to complete the previously stated intervention strategies, the teacher researchers needed to prepare in advance. First, the teacher researchers had to modify all lesson plans that occurred during the second, four-week period of research to ensure that their students received the 15 minutes at the end of each class to work on their homework. Second, the teacher researchers needed to create three different checklists to organize the data. Last, all three teacher researchers had to make sure that all students had an assignment notebook for the third intervention strategy.

Project Action Plan

- a. Prior to Documentation
 - i. August 18, 2008 – September 12, 2008
 - 1. Copy and assemble parent consent forms and child assent forms
 - 2. Copy and assemble letter of explanation
 - 3. Copy and assemble Parent and Student Surveys
- b. Pre-Documentation
 - i. September 15, 2008 - October 6, 2008
 - 1. Collect baseline data

2. Collect parent consent forms and child assent forms – September 26, 2008
- ii. September 29, 2008 – October 10, 2008
 1. Mail Parent Surveys to participating parents – October 1, 2008
 2. Teacher researchers will distribute and collect Student Surveys – October 1, 2008
 3. Collect Parent Surveys – October 10, 2008
- c. Pre-Intervention
 - i. October 6, 2008 – October 10, 2008
 1. Copy and gather documentation tools for intervention strategies being implemented
- d. Intervention
 - i. Week 1 – 4: October 13, 2008 – November 7, 2008
 1. Teacher researcher will implement the first intervention strategy, giving 15 minutes of class time to start homework
 2. Teacher researcher will complete Teacher Researchers' Homework Check-Off Log-Weekly on a daily basis
 - ii. Week 5: November 10, 2008 - November 14, 2008
 1. Teacher researcher will compile results
 2. Teacher researcher will analyze and graph results
 - iii. Week 6 – 9: November 17, 2008 – December 19, 2008
 1. Teacher will implement the second intervention strategy, homework tickets
 2. Teacher researcher will complete Teacher Researchers' Homework Ticket Reward Log- Weekly on a daily basis
 - iv. Week 10: December 29, 2008 – January 2, 2009
 1. Teacher researcher will compile results
 2. Teacher researcher will analyze and graph results
 - v. Week 11 – 14: January 5, 2009 – January 30, 2009
 1. Teacher researcher will implement the last intervention strategy, check assignment notebook.
 2. Teacher researcher will complete Teacher Researchers' Homework/Assignment Notebook Log- Weekly on a daily basis
 - vi. Week 15: February 2, 2009 – February 6, 2009
 1. Teacher researcher will compile results
 2. Teacher researcher will analyze and graph results
- e. Post-Documentation
 - i. February 9, 2008 – February 20, 2009
 1. Teacher researcher will mail post Parent Surveys – February 9, 2009
 2. Teacher researcher will have students complete their post surveys and the teacher researcher collect the finished surveys – February 9, 2009
 3. Teacher researcher will collect post Parent Survey – February 18, 2009

4. Teacher researcher will compare and graph all three intervention strategies per site
 5. Teacher researchers will complete Chapter Four of research paper together
- f. Completion of Project
- i. May 1, 2009
 1. Shred all information gathered from the research project

Methods of Assessment

The teacher researchers used three different tools to gather information and data throughout this research study. The three tools consisted of the pre-and post- Student Surveys, pre- and post-Parent Surveys, and the Teacher Researchers' logs.

The first and second tools were the pre and post Student and Parent Surveys. The pre-survey was administered to both parents and students during the weeks of September 22 and September 29, 2008. The purpose of the pre-survey was to determine preliminary opinions on homework completion from both parents and students. The post-survey was administered to both parents and students during the week of February 9, 2009. The purpose of the post-survey was to determine how their views on homework completion have changed since the implementation of the intervention strategies.

The third tool was the Teacher Researchers' logs. The logs were used by all three teacher researchers to gather data throughout the intervention period. The purpose of the Teacher Researchers' logs was to compile data based on the completion of homework from students. All three teacher researchers observed and recorded on the logs whether or not their students turned in their completed homework. There were three different logs that were used during the research study. The logs consisted of the Teacher Researchers' Homework Check-Off Log, the Teacher Researchers' Homework Ticket Reward Log, and the Teacher Researchers' Homework/Assignment Notebook Log, which were used during the intervention period.

These intervention strategies were implemented September 26, 2008 through February 9, 2009. The students of Sites A, B, and C espoused the interactive homework intervention strategies to increase their homework productivity. Their productivity was measured by the pre and post Parent and Student Surveys and the teacher-constructed logs; Teacher Researchers' Homework Check-Off Log, the Teacher Researchers' Homework Ticket Reward Log, and the Teacher Researchers' Homework/Assignment Notebook Log.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of this study was to improve homework completion by increasing student motivation. The teacher researchers used three interventions; Class Time, Extrinsic Rewards, and Assignment Notebooks. Through the use of the three interventions, the teacher researchers anticipated that their students would become motivated without relying on the interventions used.

The Action Plan was implemented as indicated in Chapter 3, teacher researchers A, B, and C implemented the plan as described in the Action Plan with no deviations. The teacher researchers conducted the study from August 2008 to May 2009. At the beginning of the study, consent forms were given to students and parents to sign for all three sites. Before implementing the three interventions, teacher researchers A, B, and C, gathered pre-intervention data using their grade books. The teacher researchers also gathered information, during the month of October, in regards to the students' and parents' views on homework using pre-surveys.

For the first intervention, Class Time, the students were given the last 15 minutes of class time to begin working on their homework. This intervention was implemented for four weeks beginning in October. The second intervention, Extrinsic Rewards, was implemented for four weeks starting in the middle of November. For this intervention the students were given a ticket everyday their homework was completed. At the end of the week, the students deposited their tickets earned to win a reward in a weekly drawing. For the final intervention, Assignment Notebooks, the teacher researchers checked to make sure the students had the correct assignment

written down for that particular day. This intervention was implemented during the month of January.

After implementing the three strategies, teacher researchers A, B, and C, gathered post-intervention data using student and parent post-surveys. These surveys were distributed during the month of February. The teacher researchers compared pre-survey results to post-survey results to see if the views on homework changed.

Presentation and Analysis of the Results

Figure 17. Question 1 of the Student Pre- and Post- Surveys

	Site A		Site B		Site C	
	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-
Yes	81%	92%	83%	88%	100%	100%
No	19%	8%	17%	12%	0%	0%
Students Surveyed (n)	n = 16		n = 17		n = 18	

Figure 17 indicates the information in regards to the students' feelings about homework. The students answered the question, "Do you feel homework is important to your education?" Their answers were placed into one of two categories: yes or no. An overwhelming percentage of students felt that homework was important to their education. One hundred percent of the students surveyed from Site C felt homework was important to their education. After reviewing the post data, the teacher researchers noticed an increase in how important the students viewed homework compared to their education for Site A and B. However, in Site C, students' views on homework remained the same.

Figure 18. Question 2 of Student Pre- and Post- Surveys

	Site A		Site B		Site C	
	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-
Too Easy	19%	15%	5%	6%	5%	17%
Neither Easy Nor Hard	81%	85%	90%	88%	95%	78%
Too Hard	0%	0%	5%	6%	0%	5%
Students Surveyed (n)	n = 16		n = 17		n = 18	

Figure 18 indicates how the students rated the homework; they were given one of three categories. The majority of the students from Sites A, B, and C felt that the homework they are given fit into the category of being neither easy nor hard. After the students completed their post-surveys, the percentage of students from Site B and C decreased. Fewer students believed their homework was neither easy nor hard. Lastly, in Site A, the percentage of students who believed their homework was neither easy nor hard increased from 81% to 85%.

Figure 19. Question 3 of the Student Pre- and Post- Surveys

	Site A		Site B		Site C	
	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-
0 to 30 min.	44%	69%	23%	53%	34%	22%
30 min. to 1 hr.	38%	23%	23%	18%	44%	39%
1 hr. to 1.5 hrs.	19%	8%	50%	24%	11%	22%
Above 1.5 hrs.	0%	0%	12%	6%	11%	17%
Students Surveyed (n)	n = 16		n = 17		n = 18	

Figure 19 indicates the amount of time students spend on their homework. The students had three options for their answer; 0 to 30 minutes, 30 minutes to 1 hour, 1 hour to 1.5 hours, or above 1.5 hours. The results vary between all three sites. The majority of the students from Site A felt that they spent between 0 to 30 minutes of time on homework in an average night. As for

Site B, the majority of the students felt that 1 hour to 1.5 hours was the best option. Site C's students felt that in an average night they spent about 30 minutes to 1 hour of their time on homework. After gathering the post data, the majority of students from Site A still believed the amount of time they spent on homework were 0 to 30 minutes.

Figure 20. Question 4 of the Student Pre- and Post- Surveys

	Site A		Site B		Site C	
	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-
Always	38%	38%	58%	35%	33%	39%
Sometimes	31%	38%	41%	59%	50%	22%
Never	31%	23%	0%	6%	17%	39%
Students Surveyed (n)	n = 16		n = 17		n = 18	

Students were asked, "How often do you write your assignments in your assignment notebook?" They had three options for their answer; always, sometimes, or never. Figure 20 indicates that the majority of students, 38% at Site A and 58% at Site B, stated that they write their assignments in their assignment notebooks all of the time. Site C, however, had the majority, 50%, of the students who sometimes write their assignments in their assignment notebooks. After gathering the post data, the majority of students at Site A still always write in their assignment notebooks. However, for Site B, the majority of believed they only sometimes write in their assignment notebook, not always. Lastly, students at Site C also changed their opinion from sometimes writing in their assignment notebook. Students were divided at Site C. 39% stated they always wrote in their assignment notebook while 39% also said they never wrote in their assignment notebook.

Figure 21. Question 5 of the Student Pre- and Post- Surveys

	Site A		Site B		Site C	
	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-
Class Time	56%	69%	76%	71%	89%	83%
Assignment Notebook Check	0%	0%	5%	0%	0%	0%
Rewards	44%	31%	17%	29%	11%	17%
Students Surveyed (n)	n = 16		n = 17		n = 18	

Question 5 of the survey asked the students, “Which of the following strategies do you feel would benefit you the most for completing your homework?” They had three options to select from; class time, assignment notebook check, or rewards. Figure 21 indicates that the students felt they would benefit the most from prearranged class time in order to complete their homework. At Site A, 56% of the students that felt having more class time to complete the homework would benefit them the most. As a close second, 44% of the students that felt rewards would benefit them the most. At Site B, 76% of students felt more class time would benefit them. 17%, of students felt rewards would benefit them more. At Site C, 89% of the students felt more class time would benefit them. Lastly, 11% of the students felt rewards would benefit them the most. After gathering the post data, the majority of students at Sites A, B, and C still believed the fifteen minutes of class time would be most beneficial towards completing their homework.

Figure 22. Question 1 of the Parent Pre- and Post- Surveys

	Site A		Site B		Site C	
	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-
Agree	50%	36%	27%	30%	79%	75%
Mostly Agree	13%	27%	45%	50%	21%	17%
Slightly Agree	13%	27%	9%	10%	0%	8%
Disagree	25%	9%	18%	10%	0%	0%
Parents Surveyed (n)	n = 16		n = 17		n = 18	

Figure 22 indicates how parents viewed their son or daughter's motivation to complete their homework on their own. In Site A, 50% of parents agreed that their child is self-motivated to complete his or her homework on his or her own. The parents of Site C also predominantly agreed with the above statement with a 79%. However, Site B had the lowest percentage of parents who agreed to the above state at a 45%. After gathering the post data, the majority parents of Site A and C still believed that their child was self-motivated to complete their homework. The majority of parents at Site B still mostly agreed that their child was self-motivated to complete their homework.

Figure 23. Question 2 of the Parent Pre- and Post- Survey

	Site A		Site B		Site C	
	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-
Agree	38%	0%	36%	0%	7%	0%
Mostly Agree	0%	18%	18%	30%	29%	8%
Slightly Agree	50%	45%	36%	60%	7%	50%
Disagree	13%	36%	9%	10%	57%	42%
Parents Surveyed (n)	n = 16		n = 17		n = 18	

When asked if their child was easily distracted when completing their homework, the parents were asked to choose one of the four options: agree, mostly agree, slightly agree, or disagree. Figure 23 indicates that the majority of parents from Site A, 50%, slightly agreed with the statement, whereas Site C had the majority of parents, 57%, who disagreed with the statement. Site B had a tie between parents who agreed and who slightly agreed with the above statement at a 36%. After gathering the post data, the majority of the parents for Site A still slightly agreed that their child was easily distracted when completing their homework. On the other hand, the majority of parents from Site B were split between those who agreed and those

who slightly agreed that their child was easily distracted. After the post data was collected, the majority changed to slightly agree with 60%. The majority of the parents from Site C changed their response from disagree to slightly agree.

Figure 24. Question 3 of the Parent Pre- and Post- Survey

	Site A		Site B		Site C	
	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-
0 to 30 min.	13%	45%	18%	20%	36%	33%
30 min. to 1 hr.	75%	45%	27%	60%	29%	42%
1 hr. to 1.5 hrs.	13%	9%	27%	20%	14%	17%
Above 1.5 hrs.	0%	0%	18%	0%	21%	8%
Students Surveyed (n)	n = 16		n = 17		n = 18	

Figure 24 indicates how long the parents feel it takes their son or daughter to complete their homework in an average night. For Site A, 75% of the parents felt it would take 30 minutes to 1 hour to complete the homework in an average night. Site B, had a tie between 30 minutes to 1 hour and 1 hour to 1.5 hours. Both of those choices had 27%. In Site C, 36% of parents stated that it took their son or daughter 0 to 30 minutes to complete the homework in an average night. Figure 19 shows that the students from Site C felt it took them longer to complete their homework in an average night. Prior to the post data, the majority of the parents from Site A said that it took their son or daughter 30 minutes to 1 hour to complete their homework. However, once the post data was collected, the majority of the parents from Site A were split between 0 to 30 minutes and 30 minutes to 1 hour. The majority of the parents from Site B, prior to the post data, were split between 30 minutes to 1 hour and 1 hour to 1.5 hours. After the post data was collected the majority of the parents felt it took their son or daughter 30 minutes to 1 hour to complete their homework in an average night. The majority of the parents surveyed from Site C

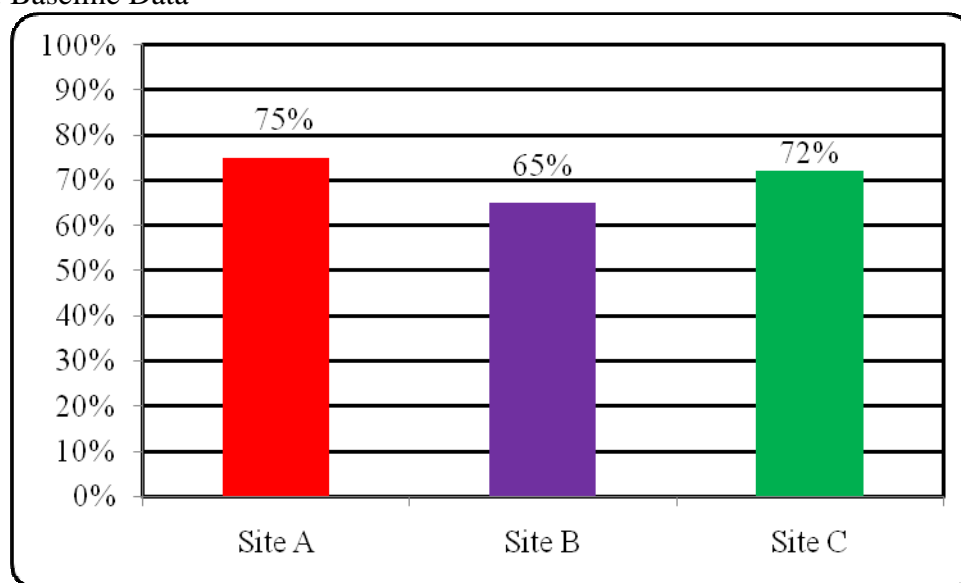
changed their response from 0 to 30 minutes to 30 minutes to 1 hour once the post data was collected.

Figure 25. Question 4 of the Parent Pre- and Post- Surveys

	Site A		Site B		Site C	
	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-
Agree	0%	9%	9%	0%	0%	0%
Mostly Agree	13%	9%	18%	30%	0%	0%
Slightly Agree	25%	36%	18%	10%	29%	17%
Disagree	63%	45%	54%	60%	71%	83%
Parents Surveyed (n)	n = 16		n = 17		n = 18	

The last question asked parents whether they think their son or daughter struggles with homework. Figure 10 indicates that the majority of the parents at all three sites disagreed with the statement. A total of 63% of parents polled for Site A, 54% of parents polled for Site B, and 71% of parents polled for Site C, circled this as their choice for question four on the parent pre-survey. After the post data was collected, the data showed that the majority of the parents still disagreed that their child struggles with homework at all three sites.

Figure 26. Baseline Data



Starting the week of September 15, 2008 through the week of October 6, 2008, the teacher researchers from Sites A, B, and C gathered their baseline data. The teacher researchers used their grade books to determine the percentage of students who completed their homework each day for that time period. Figure 26 indicates that 76% of the students did not complete their homework from September 15, 2008 to October 6, 2008.

Figure 27. Homework Check-off Log-Weekly: Fifteen minutes of class time



Figure 27 indicates the amount of students who completed their homework for the entire four-week period of the teacher researchers' first intervention. The first intervention gave students 15 minutes of class time to begin their homework. For Site A, the students rate of homework completion stayed the same at 56%. For Site B, the students' rate of homework completion decreased from the Baseline Data, as shown in Figure 26, from 65% to 59%. Finally, in Site C, students improved their homework completion after the conclusion of intervention one with a 78%.

Figure 28. Homework Ticket Reward-Weekly: Extrinsic Rewards



Figure 28 indicates the amount of students who completed their homework for the entire four-week period of the teacher researchers' second intervention. The second intervention gave students a ticket each day their homework was complete. These tickets were later used in a drawing at the end of the week to win a reward for having their homework complete. For Site A, the students rate of homework completion increased to 75% compared to the Baseline Data from Figure 26. For Site B, the students' rate of homework completion stayed the same from the Baseline Data, as shown in Figure 26, of 65%. Finally, in Site C, students improved their homework completion after the conclusion of intervention two from 61% to 72%.

Figure 29. Homework/Assignment Notebook Log-Weekly: Assignment Notebook Check.

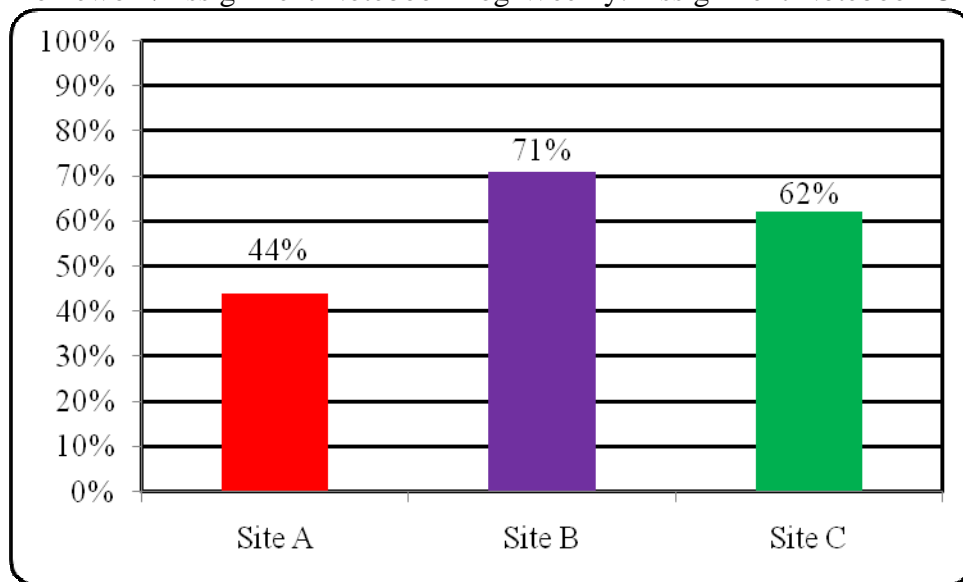


Figure 29 indicates the amount of students who completed their homework for the entire four-week period of the teacher researchers' third intervention. During the third intervention, the teacher researchers checked each of their students' assignment notebook for the correct, written assignment. Compared to the Baseline Data from Figure 26, Site A students decreased the amount of homework completion from 56% down to 44%. However, in Site B, students increased their homework completion from 65% to 71%. Lastly, students in Site C had a slight increase in homework completion. Students increased from 61% to 62%.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall, the teacher researchers feel that the intervention was a success despite not seeing a significant improvement in homework completion. While teacher researchers feel that the intervention strategies implemented were successful within their classroom, the issue of homework completion, or the lack thereof, needs to be addressed school-wide. Within the school environment, all teachers need to exhibit the same homework policies and practices in order to build consistency.

After the completion of the research project, the teacher researchers have concluded that all three interventions affected the original problem, how to improve homework completion by increasing student motivation. According to Figure 21, the students of Sites A, B, and C all felt that class time would foster homework completion the most. Student opinion remained the same for both the pre- and post-survey results. However, based on the data, student opinion did not align with student behavior. Based on the teacher researchers' data, Figure 28 indicates that students of Site A improved the most when given extrinsic rewards for their completed work. Figure 29 indicates that the students of Site B improved the most when the teacher researcher checked assignment notebooks. Lastly, Figure 27 indicates that the students of Site C improved the most when given class time to start their homework.

Before the teacher researchers began the intervention strategies, the teacher researchers hypothesized that class time would affect student homework completion the most. Based on the data from Figures 26 through 29, the teacher researchers' hypothesis was incorrect. According to the data from Figure 28, extrinsic rewards resulted in the largest gain in homework completion. The data results gathered after the interventions were implemented were then compared to the baseline data. There was an overwhelming growth in the students of all sites compared to class time and assignment notebook check. The teacher researchers are recommending the use of extrinsic rewards to motivate students to complete their homework.

In order to effectively implement an extrinsic reward system, the teacher needs to explain and model the process to the students. It would be helpful for the teacher to purchase or find extrinsic rewards that interest the students. Finally, the teacher needs to be consistent when giving out and keeping track of all homework tickets.

Reflections

When Teacher Researcher A first started working on this research project it was a little apprehensive as to how the classroom environment would change, how the students would react, and how the results would affect the students. Teacher Researcher A talked to the students prior to starting the research project and the students seemed to be very excited. The students also thought that it was “cool” that Teacher Research A was also considered a student and was going to have homework just like them. As Teacher Researcher A started implementing the first intervention strategy, Class Time, it was very interesting to see what the outcome might be. The percentage of students that completed the homework decreased. Once Teacher Researcher A began the second intervention strategy, Extrinsic Rewards, the students were very excited. The students were happy that they would be able to receive a ticket for each day their homework was complete and then be able to put them in to a weekly drawing. Once this intervention strategy was done the students kept asking, “When can we do this again?” As the third intervention strategy began, Assignment Notebook, the students did not seem too enthused about it. No matter how much Teacher Researcher A tried to be energized about it, they did not seem to follow. Once the strategies were complete, Teacher Researcher A’s feelings of excitement soon turned to feeling overwhelmed. This was now the time for Teacher Researchers A, B, and C to compile the data, continue updating the research paper, and still hold down the teaching positions that we had.

One of the students stated in the survey that they would love to have rewards for doing homework, but would not want to give up their class time to start working on the homework. This startled Teacher Researcher A because the teacher researcher had just imagined that all of the students would take the rewards over any other intervention strategy. Once the results of the

first strategy were put together, Teacher Researcher A was amazed that the percentage of students who completed their homework decreased from the baseline data. The students talked about how they enjoyed having the time to start the homework so Teacher Researcher A imagined that it would increase or stay the same.

In the beginning of the research project, Teacher Researcher A felt at ease with how things were progressing and then as time went on and the results were coming in, Teacher Researcher A started to feel overwhelmed. Being more open-minded to new ideas in regards to the project was also something Teacher Researcher A learned from completing this project. When working with Teacher Researcher B and Teacher Researcher C, we kept the same goal in mind, to complete the research project and give it our best effort.

The compassion from her research participants was what Teacher Researcher A learned the most about them. The students were excited to help Teacher Researcher A with this research project. The students were always wondering how they were doing overall with the strategies. Teacher Researcher A had a few parent phone calls once the parent consent forms were sent home. The parents wanted to find out more about the project and to say that they were eager to see the results once the project was complete. The parent support made the process run more smoothly.

Teacher Researcher A didn't feel that the climate of the research setting changed too much during the whole process. Trying to keep the climate the same so the students would feel comfortable was a main objective for Teacher Researcher A. Usually, by the second week of each strategy, the students forgot that Teacher Researcher A was keeping data on the students. Once the research concluded the students did ask if they could, for the fourth quarter, have the

class time to work and receive a ticket for each day their homework is complete. Maybe the change in climate was a positive one if the students want to continue some of the strategies.

Teacher Researcher A feels that every year is different in many ways. The students are different each year and what motivates them is different as well. What Teacher Researcher A found was that the students, during this current year, complete the homework more often when they are given rewards for completing the homework and that might be different for each year after. This is where the learning takes place for Teacher Researcher A. Teacher Researcher A has to be aware of the students and what might encourage them to complete the homework. Teacher Researcher A needs to “teach” the students that homework is important to their education and their learning process. In the years to come, if Teacher Researcher A notices a problem with the homework coming in that’s not complete, then one of the intervention strategies might have to be introduced or started.

As one can see, this entire process of conducting research, writing the research paper, and working collaboratively with fellow teachers, has allowed Teacher Researcher A has learned more about being a teacher and a researcher. This entire process has also allowed Teacher Researcher A to be more connected with the students, their parents, and Teacher Researchers B and C.

Teacher Researcher B was excited to see the final results. As a teacher, Teacher Researcher B has seen homework become more of a struggle than in previous years. Teacher Researcher B felt anxious for many reasons. Teacher Researcher B was excited to see the results so the teacher could better help the students. The Teacher Researcher was also anxious to start the intervention strategies. The teacher wanted to make sure they were properly executed. As the group further progressed in the project, Teacher Researcher B’s anxious feelings subsided. The

teacher began to feel more prepared and comfortable in her abilities to properly implement the intervention strategies. Once the group finished the first intervention, class time, the teacher was certain that it would be the most effective intervention in getting her students to complete their homework. However, after completing all three interventions, the teacher was surprised to see that extrinsic rewards encouraged the students the most to turn in their work. Now that the group is almost finished with the project, the teacher is back to feeling anxious. Teacher Researcher B feels apprehensive about our group's final paper. However, the teacher is hopeful that the group will complete our project to the best of our abilities.

There were not too many sudden changes that startled Teacher Researcher B throughout this process. The biggest change was the final result. As a teacher, Teacher Researcher B hypothesized that class time would be the most effective strategy. Teacher Researcher B was surprised to see how motivating extrinsic rewards are to middle school students. Logically, it would make sense that students would want the extra class time to complete their work at school rather than at home. However, the students would rather complete the work at home and have the possibility of receiving a small prize, such as candy.

After completing the project, Teacher Researcher B learned quite a bit. The teacher learned how to collaborate within working peer groups, how to properly employ the intervention strategies, and the improvement of writing skills. Throughout this entire process, the teacher was able to become a better person, teacher, and researcher.

As stated above, Teacher Researcher B was surprised by the research results. Due to the typical middle school ideology, "things" are more important than self-gratification. Most of the students are very active outside of school, whether it is an extra-curricular, friends, or family obligations. The teacher thought that the students would be eager for extra time during the school

day so they would not have to bring work home with them. However, many middle school students view school as a time to socialize, rather than to learn.

The climate of the research setting did not change throughout the process. The three teacher researchers tried their best to keep the climate of their own classrooms the same throughout the process so it wouldn't skew the data. By the middle of the first week of each intervention, most students did not realize data was taken.

Since teachers are consistently dealing with new groups of people, the results will consistently change each year with the arrival of a new team. Once the teacher researcher receives a new team of students and has the ability to get to know them that is when the teacher will be able to better predict which strategy will work best for them. Predictions for the upcoming years cannot be made due to the constant change of the student body.

With the completion of our research project, Teacher Researcher B views teaching and learning slightly differently when the teacher had started. Teacher Researcher B assumed that they had a better connection with the students due to the age of the teacher researcher. Due to that connection, the teacher felt that they had an idea of what the students wanted and how their needs needed to be met. However, after making the original prediction and having it proven wrong, the teacher has a new outlook on the students. No matter what age a teacher may be or what experience a teacher may have, a teacher persistently needs to adapt to teach new team every year. No two teams or no two students are alike. A teacher cannot have a "blanket theory" about all of his/her students and assume it's correct. By surveying the students, the teacher was able to receive more of an in-depth view of how the students' outlook on homework is. With their needs and opinions in mind, the teacher is now better able to meet their needs.

Teacher Researcher C's attitude has changed slightly throughout the course of the action research process. After viewing the data for the first intervention strategy, providing class time to work on homework, Teacher Researcher C became much more optimistic about the overall project. This was because in Site C, there was a big difference in the amount of homework turned in when providing class time compared to the baseline data. This difference made Teacher Researcher C realize that the intervention strategy was a success and was hopeful that the other two intervention strategies would be just as successful.

Throughout the action research project, there were no sudden changes that occurred. The timeline of events ran together very smoothly, which made the project come together nicely. Teacher Researcher C predicted that giving class time to the students to start their homework would improve homework completion. Based on Site C's results, the teacher's prediction was correct.

Teacher Researcher C learned that communication and cooperation between group members was extremely vital throughout the action research process. By listening and communicating with the other teachers, the teacher researcher has learned how to effectively work with other people.

The participants throughout this action research process were extremely vocal about which intervention strategy they liked the best. The majority of the students from Site C expressed in their surveys, as well as verbally to the teacher, that class time would benefit students most for improving homework completion. By looking at both their surveys and the data, providing class time did indeed prove to be the best intervention strategy in Site C.

Overall, the climate of the research setting in Site C did not change during the action research process. Each teacher researcher tried to stay consistent when implementing the intervention strategies and gathering data, so that results would not be altered.

After this research experience, Teacher Researcher C realizes that students need to be motivated to complete their homework. Through this action research project, Teacher Researcher C recognizes that by giving extrinsic rewards and allowing more class time to work on homework, students will be more likely to do their homework at home. When given extrinsic rewards, students are working towards something they want, so they will complete their homework to receive it. If students are given class time to start their homework, they have a chance to start their work, so it gives them more motivation to do it at home, since some of it is already completed. By looking at the results of this project, Teacher Researcher C will continue giving class time to work on homework, as well as providing extrinsic rewards.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

Parent Pre-Survey

As indicated in the earlier letter, a group of teachers are conducting a research study to see if their students' homework completion rate increases for students through three self-motivating strategies. Please fill out the following survey about your child's experience with homework. Return this by October 10th, 2008 to your child's participating teacher. All research is anonymous; please do not put your name on this survey. All data will be destroyed by May 1st, 2009.

Please circle your responses.

1. My child is motivated to complete his/her homework on his/her own.
 - a. Agree
 - b. Mostly Agree
 - c. Slightly Agree
 - d. Disagree
2. My child is easily distracted when completing his/her homework.
 - a. Agree
 - b. Mostly Agree
 - c. Slightly Agree
 - d. Disagree
3. It takes my child _____ to complete his/her homework in a average night.
 - a. 0 – 30 minutes
 - b. 30 minutes – 1 hour
 - c. 1 hour – 1 ½ hours
 - d. Above 1 ½ hours
4. My child struggles with his/her homework.
 - a. Agree
 - b. Mostly Agree
 - c. Slightly Agree
 - d. Disagree

Thank you for your time and cooperation. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

APPENDIX B

Student Pre-Survey

As you have been previously notified, your teacher is conducting a research study to see if there is a positive impact on homework completion using three self-motivating strategies. We would appreciate you filling out this survey. All research is anonymous. Please do not write your name on this survey.

Please circle your responses.

1. Do you feel that homework is important to your education?

- a. Yes b. No

2. Please rate your homework into one of the three categories.

- a. My homework is too easy for me.
b. My homework is neither easy nor hard.
c. My homework is too hard for me to complete.

3. How much time do you spend on homework in an average night?

- a. 0 – 30 minutes
b. 30 minutes – 1 hour
c. 1 hour – 1 ½ hours
d. Above 1 ½ hours

4. How often do you write your assignments in your assignment notebook?

- a. Always b. Sometimes c. Never

5. Which of the following strategies do you feel would benefit you the most for completing your homework?

- a. The teacher giving class time to work on your homework.
b. The teacher checking your assignment notebook after each class period on a daily basis.
c. The teacher providing rewards for completing homework.

Thank you for your time and cooperation. Your participation is greatly required.

APPENDIX F

Parent Post-Survey

As indicated in the earlier letter, a group of teachers are conducting a research study to see if their students' homework completion rate increases for students through three self-motivating strategies. Please fill out the following survey about your child's experience with homework. Return this by February 18, 2009 to your child's participating teacher. All research is anonymous; please do not put your name on this survey. All data will be destroyed by May 1st, 2009.

Please circle your responses.

1. My child is motivated to complete his/her homework on his/her own.
 - a. Agree
 - b. Mostly Agree
 - c. Slightly Agree
 - d. Disagree
2. My child is easily distracted when completing his/her homework.
 - a. Agree
 - b. Mostly Agree
 - c. Slightly Agree
 - d. Disagree
3. It takes my child _____ to complete his/her homework in an average night.
 - a. 0 – 30 minutes
 - b. 30 minutes – 1 hour
 - c. 1 hour – 1 ½ hours
 - d. Above 1 ½ hours
4. My child struggles with his/her homework.
 - a. Agree
 - b. Mostly Agree
 - c. Slightly Agree
 - d. Disagree

Thank you for your time and cooperation. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

APPENDIX G

Student Post-Survey

As you have been previously notified, your teacher is conducting a research study to see if there is a positive impact on homework completion using three self-motivating strategies. We would appreciate you filling out this survey. All research is anonymous. Please do not write your name on this survey.

Please circle your responses.

1. Do you feel that homework is important to your education?

- a. Yes b. No

2. Please rate your homework into one of the three categories.

- a. My homework is too easy for me.
b. My homework is neither easy nor hard.
c. My homework is too hard for me to complete.

3. How much time do you spend on homework in an average night?

- a. 0 – 30 minutes
b. 30 minutes – 1 hour
c. 1 hour – 1 ½ hours
d. Above 1 ½ hours

4. How often do you write your assignments in your assignment notebook?

- a. Always b. Sometimes c. Never

5. Which of the following strategies do you feel would benefit you the most for completing your homework?

- a. The teacher giving class time to work on your homework.
b. The teacher checking your assignment notebook after each class period on a daily basis.
c. The teacher providing rewards for completing homework.

Thank you for your time and cooperation. Your participation is greatly required.