Ideas for Helping Parents Support Their Child's School Success[1]

Staff in school-age programs play an important role in helping children make a smooth transition from home to school and from school to home. When school-age staff, parents, and schools work together as partners, children are more likely to experience success in school. It's important for school-age to recognize they are in a position to serve as important communication links between parents and school and vice versa.

It's also important for school-age staff to recognize that there are many ways to support children's school success during program hours. Before school, parents count on school-age staff to involve children in appropriate morning activities and help them get ready for a great school day. At the end of the school day parents count on school-age staff to give children a warm welcome, assess their well-being, find out how the day went, and help them get positively and productively involved in appropriate program activities. Here are some things school-age staff can do to strengthen partnerships among schools, parents, and school-age programs in order to help parents support their child's school success.

Ideas to Get You Started…..

1. **Talk with school personnel/classroom teachers to explore ways you can work together to create a smooth transition for children from home to the program to school and back again.**

☞ Identify challenges that can impact communication between the home, school, and the program and share ideas for addressing the challenges.

☞ Consult *Homework Assistance & Out-of-School Time: Filling the Need and Finding the Balance available at www.NIOST.org for* ideas on addressing challenging communication issues.

☞ Offer to set up Home/School Folders for each child. (See number 2 below.)

☞ Ask if there are ways you could support children's school success in the program (e.g. giving children homework reminders, reviewing homework assignments with children, building on themes introduced in the school day, checking homework assignments posted by teachers on a school Web site, and encouraging children to apply what they're learning in school during program activities).

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2. *Set up a Home/School Folder for each child.*

☞   Use the folder to keep homework assignment notebooks, completed homework, notes from the child's teacher to the parents, notes from the parents to the child's teacher, etc.

☞   Set up an area where children store their **Home/School Folders** during program hours.

☞   Develop a system where children deposit **Home/School Folders** on arrival and pick them up when they leave the program. If children do homework in the program, have them take the **Home/School Folder** to the homework area and return it to the central area when they are finished.

3. *In cases where children need special help and support, develop a system where school staff and program staff can share information about the child's needs and the best ways to help the child.* Be sure to secure parent permission in writing before information is shared.

4. *Survey parents to learn about their interests in having children do homework during the program.* Or discuss homework issues at a parent meeting. Consult *Homework Assistance & Out-of-School Time: Filling the Need and Finding the Balance* for ideas on creating a survey format. (See **Selected References** at the end of the book.) Keep in mind that different parents have different levels of interest in having programs provide homework support – ranging from wanting tutorial help for their children to preferring their children not do homework in the program.

5. *Once you know more about parents' interests, work with colleagues to develop a Homework Policy that allows you to address parents' needs in the best ways possible within your program guidelines.*

☞   Determine the extent to which your current staff is equipped to provide homework support.   Provide staff training on effective techniques for giving homework support. Explore the possibility of securing additional staff support, if needed.

☞   Try to create a **Homework Policy** that meets diverse needs, rather than taking a "one-size fits all" approach. For example, avoid creating a plan where all children must do homework in the same place at the same time for a specified period, regardless of how much homework a child has assigned for the day. Instead, create a plan that allows children to select when they will do homework and for how long, based on what they need

to accomplish. The use of a **Homework Agreement/Contract** between a child, parent, classroom teacher, and school-age staff can serve as a tool for individualizing the approach to homework support for each child and family. A contract can allow staff to accommodate differences among parents as well as differences related to children's ages and homework responsibilities. See **Homework Assistance & Out-of-School Time: Filling the Need and Finding the Balance** for ideas on different approaches to providing homework support.

6. ***Set up an attractive homework interest center stocked with lots of supplies and equipment to make it easy to do homework.*** Select an area that is a little removed from other interest areas, if possible. Give the area a catchy name like **Homework Haven.** Create an inviting atmosphere that makes children want to visit the center to work on learning activities, whether they have homework or not. Listed below are some things to incorporate when creating a **Homework Haven**. If your program operates in shared space, use plastic bins, rolled carts, and rolled shelving units to store and display items. Involve children in helping to set up the area each day.

☞ pencils with erasers, colored pencils, ball point pens, fine point markers, different types of paper, file folders, tape, glue, scissors, dictionaries, a variety of resource books, magazines, atlas, encyclopedia, an assortment of educational games, calculators, computer station(s) and computer software to assist with researching projects, printer, and other school-related supplies.

☞ small tables with chairs or benches, filing cabinet, shelving for books and educational games, bulletin board(s), floor or table lamps to soften lighting.

☞ room dividers to separate different areas of the **Homework Haven** if the area is large (e.g. you may want to separate an area for group work on projects from an area where children work alone without conversation).

☞ individual table top study carrels (mini dividers) to minimize distractions when children are seated together at a table, but need to work alone (can be home-made from re-cycled card board – tape three sections into a U shape for privacy and have each child decorate his/her own)

☞ comfortable chairs, large pillows, fire retardant rugs, and/or other cozy items where children can sit and relax while they read and think.

7. *Provide parents with information on current research related to homework, the purpose of homework, homework do's and don'ts, etc.*

☞   Post results of research on your **Parent Bulletin Board.**

☞   Prepare articles about homework for your **Parent Newsletter.**

8. *Provide staff with additional training related to staff roles in giving homework help.*

Other Ideas for Helping Parents Support Their Child's School Success…..