

## **FIVE HOMEWORK STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

Homework is one aspect of the general education curriculum that has been widely recognized as important to academic success. Teachers have long used homework to provide additional learning time, strengthen study and organizational skills, and in some respects, keep parents informed of their children's progress. Generally, when students with disabilities participate in the general education curriculum, they are expected to complete homework along with their peers. But, just as students with disabilities may need instructional accommodations in the classroom, they may also need homework accommodations.

Many students with disabilities find homework challenging, and teachers are frequently called upon to make accommodations for these students. What research supports this practice? The following describes five strategies that researchers have identified to improve homework results for students with disabilities.

### **STRATEGY 1. GIVE CLEAR AND APPROPRIATE ASSIGNMENTS**

Teachers need to take special care when assigning homework. If the homework assignment is too hard, is perceived as busy work, or takes too long to complete, students might resist doing it. Never send home any assignment that students cannot do; homework should be an extension of what students have learned in class. To ensure that homework is clear and appropriate, consider the following tips from teachers for assigning homework:

- Make sure students and parents have information regarding the policy on missed and late assignments, extra credit, and available adaptations. Establish a set routine at the beginning of the year.
- Assign homework in small units.
- Explain the assignment clearly.
- Write the assignment on the chalkboard and leave it there until the assignment is due.
- Remind students of due dates periodically.
- Coordinate with other teachers to prevent homework overload. Students concur with these tips.
- Assign homework toward the beginning of class.

- Relate homework to class work.
- Explain how to do the homework and provide examples.
- Have students begin the homework in class, check that they understand, and provide assistance as necessary.
- Allow students to work together on homework.

## **STRATEGY 2. MAKE HOMEWORK ACCOMMODATIONS**

Make any necessary modifications to the homework assignment before sending it home. Identify practices that will be most helpful to individual students and have the potential to increase their involvement, understanding, and motivation to learn. The most common homework accommodations are to

- Provide additional one-on-one assistance to students.
- Monitor students' homework more closely.
- Allow alternative response formats (e.g., allow the student to audiotape an assignment rather than handwriting it).
- Adjust the length of the assignment.
- Provide a peer tutor or assign the student to a study group.
- Adjust evaluation standards.
- Give fewer assignments.

It is important to check out all accommodations with other teachers, students, and their families. If students do not find homework accommodations useful, they may not use them.

## **STRATEGY 3. TEACH STUDY SKILLS**

Both general and special education teachers consistently report that homework problems seem to be exacerbated by deficient basic study skills. Many students, particularly students with disabilities, need instruction in study and organizational skills. Here is a list of organizational strategies basic to homework:

- Identify a location for doing homework that is free of distractions.
- Have all materials available and organized.
- Allocate enough time to complete activities and keep on schedule.
- Take good notes or have an assigned notetaker for the student.
- Develop a sequential plan for completing multi-task assignments.
- Check assignments for accuracy and completion before turning them in.

- Know how to get help when it is needed.
- Turn in completed homework on time.

Teachers can enhance homework completion and accuracy by providing classroom instruction in organizational skills. They should talk with parents about how to support the application of organizational skills at home.

#### **STRATEGY 4. USE A HOMEWORK CALENDAR**

Students with disabilities often need additional organizational support. Just as adults use calendars, schedulers, lists, and other devices to self-monitor activities, students can benefit from these tools as well. Students with disabilities can monitor their own homework using a planning calendar to keep track of homework assignments. Homework planners also can double as home-school communication tools if they include a space next to each assignment for messages from teachers and parents. In conjunction with the homework planner, students can also graph their homework return and completion rates—another strategy that is linked to homework completion and improved performance on classroom assessments.

#### **STRATEGY 5. ENSURE CLEAR HOME/SCHOOL COMMUNICATION**

Homework accounts for one-fifth of the time that successful students invest in academic tasks, yet students complete homework in environments over which teachers have no control—which, given the fact that many students experience learning difficulties, creates a major dilemma. Teachers and parents of students with disabilities must communicate clearly and effectively with one another about homework policies, required practices, mutual expectations, student performance on homework, homework completion difficulties, and other homework-related concerns.

Recommended ways that teachers can improve communications with parents include

- Encouraging students to keep assignment books.
- Providing a list of suggestions on how parents might assist with homework. For example, ask parents to check with their children about homework daily.
- Providing parents with frequent written communication about homework (e.g., progress reports, notes, letters, forms).

