

Best Practices for Improving Homework: Presenter Notes

Slide 2:

- Today we are going to focus on discussing the importance of family involvement
- We will be discussing specific strategies that if applied correctly can improve the school's approach to family friendly practices
- Finally we will discuss how these strategies impact our environment & how we can take steps towards improving partnerships with families in our schools.

Where are we going today?

- Let's talk about family involvement
- What are some strategies to improve how we get families involved?
- Feedback & Goal Setting



Slide 3:

- Review the definition of Indicator 8 of Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).
- Focus on the importance of involving families in the education process and strengthening partnerships between families and schools.

Every state is responsible for taking positive steps to include families. The Department of Education monitors parents perception of how well schools reach out to families and how this improves services for their students.

Indicator B-8

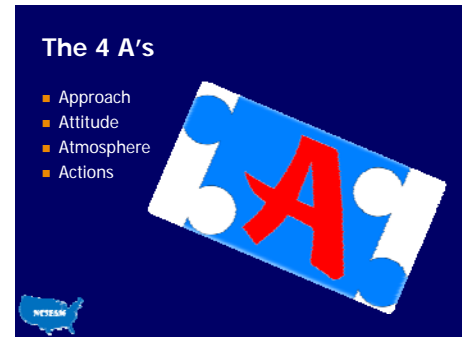
- Percent of parents with a child receiving special education services who report that **schools facilitated parent involvement** as a means of **improving services and results** for children with disabilities



Slide 4: The 4 A's

* More information is contained in the PowerPoint presentation at the end of this document*

- For flourishing family-school partnerships to occur, certain conditions should be met.
 - These include:
 - An *approach* that invites and expects family involvement
 - Positive *attitudes* educators hold regarding family involvement
 - A welcoming *atmosphere* created by educators.
 - Once these conditions are in place, effective family-school partnerships can take place (*actions*).



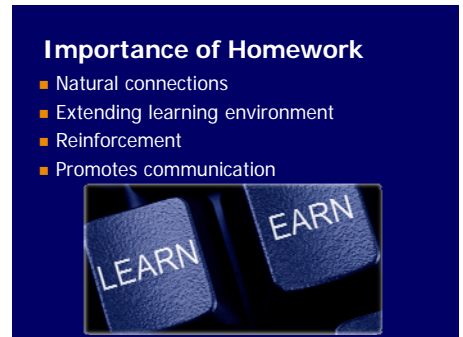
Slide 5:

- Discuss how the approach, attitude and atmosphere must be appropriate **before** parent friendly “action” can be taken. Conduct a discussion with the audience of suggestions of how these areas can be improved within your school environment.
- This is a schematic to better understand how the 4 A's connect



Slide 6:

- Natural connections - provides a natural connection between home and school
- Extending learning environment – academic learning is not limited to the school day during class periods, rather it extends beyond into other parts of the day and child’s environment
- Reinforcement - reinforces academic learning from the school day at home
- Promotes communication – homework promotes the communication between the school environment and home
- Involving parents in homework is important for positive academic outcomes!



Slide 7:

- Point person – Select one person from each grade to be available for parents to contact regarding homework questions. This person could provide parents information concerning school homework policies, homework clubs, peer tutoring, or contact information for teachers
- Flexible planning – Schedule parent-teacher conferences with flexibility and consideration for parents’ availability
- Common planning periods – Coordinate a common planning period with other relevant teachers during the school day in order to plan homework together



Slide 8:

- Homework Hotlines – Establish systems for parents to gain access to assignments by telephone/voice mail (“homework hotlines”) or web-based sites
- Homework Planners- A homework planner kept by each student provides an opportunity to write down assignments and special instructions for work or projects. This is also a good way for parents to know what assignments their students are bringing home.
- Email; phone; voicemail - Telephone network hot lines (email; voicemail) should be established so that parents can call teachers or parents when questions or problems arise over homework assignments
- Mail - Mail important information about homework home



Slide 9:

- Explain that the following ideas are to help students with homework by providing them with an opportunity to ask questions from teachers and receive peer support with assignments. These suggestions are not intended to take the “home” out of home work but they provide an alternative to parents when they feel they are having difficulty assisting their student. These ideas also facilitate positive communication between school and home

Schools Can Establish . . .

- Study halls
- Community volunteers
- Homework club
- Peer-tutoring programs





- Study halls – Allow adequate study time during school hours for students to complete homework
- Community volunteers – Recruit community volunteers to assist students in completing homework
- Homework clubs – After school “homework” clubs may be offered that offer support for students who may need assistance in completing their homework and provides a clear time when homework is expected to be completed
- Peer tutoring programs – peer tutoring programs could be offered which would offer peer assistance for questions related to homework

Slide 10:

- List of major projects - Early in the school year, provide a list to parents describing the main projects and assignments for the year
- Homework planners – Consider using homework planners for communication purposes and to keep the students organized for homework tasks
- Frequency & consistency – a homework system should be used everyday with consistency. To be effective the student must know what is expected of them and be prepared for homework time with assignments & materials readily available

Tips for Teachers

- Communication routines
 - List of major projects
 - Homework planners
 - Frequency & consistency





Slide 11:

- Positive reinforcement system – Teachers should establish a positive reinforcement system for work completion – individual or class wide strategies (e.g., chart moves; sticker charts, etc)
- Review assignments – Teachers should review assignments during class and make sure the students are capable of the work
- Prompt feedback – Teachers should provide feedback about homework assignments (completion & accuracy) as soon as possible. This will promote positive results for the student regarding completion and prevent against practicing errors if the homework contained mistakes


Tips for Teachers

- Positive reinforcement system
- Review assignments
- Prompt feedback




Slide 12:

- Indicate timeframe – teachers should provide parents with an approximate amount of time students should work on homework, including a breakdown of how long each assignment is anticipated to take
- Acknowledge differences – given differing ability levels of students, teachers should acknowledge student differences, and needs. This should be communicated appropriately with parents & assignments should reflect these differences
- Homework not complete? Teachers should contact parents immediately if homework is not being completed. Teachers should also establish some system of consequences for not completing homework (e.g. all work must be completed the next night, not participating in fun activities during the school day in lieu of completing the unfinished work; special rewards for students who do complete all homework – similar to a perfect attendance award – for a specific period of time)



Tips for Teachers

- Indicate timeframe
- Acknowledge differences
- Homework not complete?



Slide 13:

- Scheduled daily activity – Parents should make homework a planned daily activity
- Establish a routine – Parents should establish a homework time and place to be followed everyday. Have the child complete homework assignments at a table while sitting in a chair, with enough room to work. It may be necessary to have the student in close proximity to the parents so that parents can be sure homework is being completed and distractions are reduced.
- Decrease distractions – Parents should decrease distractions such as noise, siblings, and television while child is completing assignments



Slide 14: Refer to Handout 4

- Review tasks – Parents should review work that needs to be completed with the student before the child begins the assignments
- Monitor time – Parents should monitor how much time their child is spending on homework each night
- Provide praise & feedback – Provide the child with praise and reinforcement for homework completion (see praise and reinforcement handout)



Slide 15:

- Promote independence – Parents should promote students’ independence in homework completion. One way to do this is to structure homework practices (e.g. the amount of time or number of problems that should be completed each night)
- Allow breaks – It may not be possible for the student to sit and attend to all homework at one time. Parents should provide periodic breaks from homework as necessary.
- Incorporate siblings – Parents should attempt to incorporate siblings into the homework routine whenever possible. For example, an older sibling may be able to “tutor” or review concepts with a younger student or oral reading practice or flash cards drills may be performed between siblings.

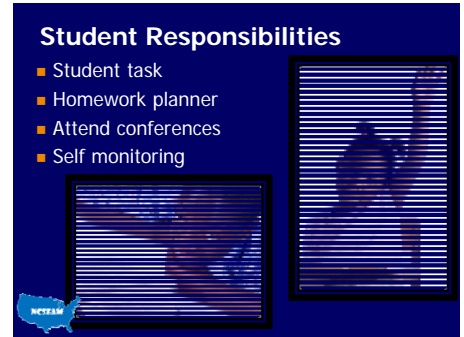
Tips for Parents

- Promote independence
- Allow breaks
- Incorporate siblings



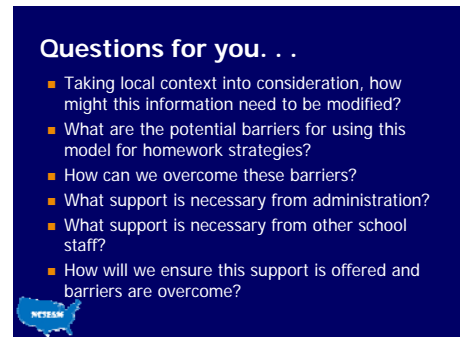
Slide 16: Refer to Handout 1, 2 & 3

- Student task – Remember that homework is the student’s responsibility, not the parents or teachers!
- Homework planner – Students should keep a homework assignment planner, which lists assignments and is checked and signed by both parents and teachers daily (see homework planner handout)
- Attend conferences – Invite students to attend parent-teacher conferences, and allow them to provide input with some assistance
- Self monitoring – Teach students to self-monitor homework completion and accuracy (A self-monitoring handout is included in the packet. This handout includes an explanation of the procedures and provides as example of a completed self monitoring chart)



Slide 18:

- Discussion points for your school staff



Evidence-Based Family-School Interventions with Homework

What we know...

Model: Homework Strategies

Goal:

- Provide effective homework strategies
- Complete school work, reinforce academic learning, and promote home-school communication
- Extend the learning environment and provide a natural connection between home and school
- Involve parents in homework

Description:

- Provide communication strategies for teachers, parents, and students related to homework
- Offer suggestions for parents regarding establishing an appropriate homework environment within the home
- Provide suggestions for teachers and schools to improve homework effectiveness

Methodological Rigor of Various Studies:

- Appropriate unit of analysis
- Appropriate outcome measures utilized
- Multiple assessment methods
- Information obtained from multiple sources
- Educational-clinical significance of change assessed
- Studies conducted in natural environments

Results:

- There is a positive relationship between homework completion and academic completion, for students with and without learning difficulties
- Several studies have shown that specific strategies are effective in increasing the quantity, as well as the quality of homework completed
- Suggested strategies have been associated with an increase in parental involvement in their child's academics

Selected References:

Bryan, T., & Sullivan-Burstein, K. (1998). Teacher-selected strategies for improving homework completion. *Remedial and Special Education, 19*, 263-275.

Epstein, M. H., Munk, D. D., Bursuck, W. D., Polloway, E. A., & Jayanthi, M. (1999). Strategies for improving home-school communication about homework for students with disabilities. *The Journal of Special Education, 33*, 166-176.

Jenson, W. R., Sheridan, S. M., Olympia, D., & Andrews, D. (1994). Homework and students with learning and behavior disorders: A practical, parent-based approach. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 27*, 538-548.

What we don't know...

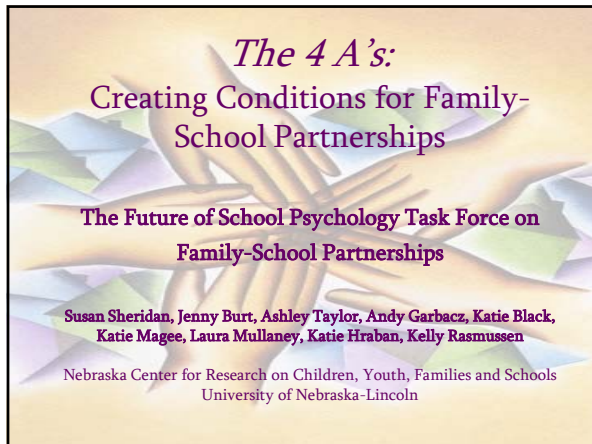
- Outcome effects with longitudinal studies of early interventions
- Effects with significantly larger sample with random assignment
- Effectiveness with a culturally and linguistically diverse population
- Long-term outcomes of strategies
- Effectiveness of homework completion among various academic subject areas

The 4 A's: Creating Conditions for Family-School Partnerships

The Future of School Psychology Task Force on Family-School Partnerships


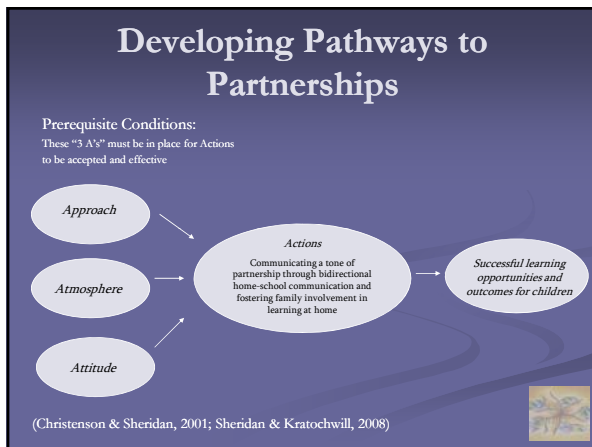
Susan Sheridan, Jenny Burt, Ashley Taylor, Andy Garbacz, Katie Black, Katie Magee, Laura Mullaney, Katie Hraban, Kelly Rasmussen

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The Four A's


- Certain attitudes and beliefs need to be in place before any family-school intervention can be effective
- Four A's (Approach, Attitudes, Atmosphere, and Actions) define the conditions that are necessary for effective family-school partnerships

Approach


Approach: The framework for engaging in positive interactions with families

- *Belief in shared responsibility* is central to family-school partnerships
- *Both families and educators are essential* for children's growth and development
- Emphasis placed on *relationships* between family members and educators, rather than on separate roles that each assume



Approach

- How To Engage in a Partnership Approach:
 - Request parental assistance – create opportunities for dialogue and empowering parents
 - Encourage a role for parents – share information and resources to solve concerns
 - Provide rationales and expectations for families and schools to work together
 - Structure interventions that require cooperation and communication (e.g., home-school notes, home reinforcement for school performance)
 - Increase responsibility for successful outcomes by including all participants (parents, teachers, and child when appropriate)




Attitude

Attitude: The values and perceptions held about family-school relationships

Includes attitudes that:

- All families have strengths.
- Parents can help their children succeed in school -- they must be provided with the opportunity and necessary information and support.
- Parents have important information and perspectives that we need to help educate their children.
- Parents and educators each bring unique and important perspectives and expertise to the table as co-equals.



Attitude

- How To Adopt a Partnership Attitude:
 - Attempt to take parents' perspectives whenever possible.
 - Ask yourself:
 - Do I put myself in the parents' place and mentally reverse roles to consider how I would feel as the parent of the child about whom there are concerns?
 - Do I really believe that parents are equal to me as a professional and are experts on their child?
 - Do I consistently value the comments and insights of parents and make use of their reservoir of knowledge about the child's total needs and activities?
 - Do I listen to parents, communicating with words, eye-contact, and posture that I respect and value their insights?
 - If I had a child in this situation, what information would I want and how would I like to be treated?



Atmosphere

Atmosphere: The climate in schools for families and educators to engage as partners.

- The affective climate in interactions among families and schools.
- The physical climate in schools that make them inviting and "family-friendly."
- All families must feel welcome!
 - Differences in parent backgrounds & experiences must be recognized.
 - Personal difficulties in school or previous conflicts may be prominent.
 - Ethnic, linguistic, religious, class differences can widen the gap.



Atmosphere

- How To Create an Inviting Atmosphere:
 - Recognize and appreciate diverse family structures, circumstances, and responsibilities, and how they may impact roles
 - Make your classroom welcoming and family-friendly
 - Spend time getting to know families and developing on-going relationships
 - Refrain from making assumptions and generalizations about families



Actions

Actions: What schools do to build partnerships and shared responsibility for education with families through effective communication.

- There is no one-size fits all approach
- Examine your current practices for partnering with families, and your willingness to include families and ask for their input
- Effective communication and administrative support are *key!*



Actions: Communication

- How To Practice Effective Communication:
 - Provide regular information to parents about their child's progress (e.g., make "good news" phone calls; use home-school notes; share information through e-mails, weekly folders, newsletters)
 - Engage in effective conflict management strategies by using clarifying statements and problem-solving strategies
 - Use words that convey a partnership (e.g., "we, us, and our" versus "you, I, yours, and mine")
 - Share information about how families can help their child at home



Actions: Communication

- How To Practice Effective Communication:
 - Use statements that express concern for the child
 - Retain focus on the child's goals and how to achieve them together
 - Elicit ideas, information, and perspectives from parents using open-ended questions (e.g., "How?" "When?" "Describe")
 - Paraphrase and validate message from parents to check understanding (e.g., "I hear you saying..."; "You are concerned about...")



Actions: Administrative Support

- Establish policies for partnering with all families
- Include policies for:
 - Requesting parental input throughout all phases of decision-making, not just when problems arise
 - Participation of parents who lack literacy skills or do not speak English
 - Professional development for teachers and staff to enhance their effectiveness with parents
 - Opportunities for parents to assist in the instructional process at school and at home



Key Points to Remember

- The development of effective approach, attitude, atmosphere and actions takes time.
- The aforementioned strategies may not work equally for all students, families, and educators.
- Individual schools may want to discuss what type(s) of programs will best meet their needs and school communities.
- Committing the time and resources while developing and implementing effective strategies will allow the process and outcomes to be most effective.

