

PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF ROBESON COUNTY

HOMEWORK GUIDE



**Helping your child with homework
is an opportunity to improve your
child's chances of doing well in school.**

Foreword

Homework practices vary widely across our state and nation. Sometimes students never receive brilliant assignments that combine learning and pleasure. Other times homework is a routine to provide students with additional practice on important activities. Homework will not be assigned as “busy work” which may harm the educational process by making students feel that learning is not enjoyable or worthwhile.

Homework has long been a vital part of education, for many good reasons. It extends the time available for learning. Also, children who spend time on constructive homework, and who receive timely constructive feedback do better in school.

The ideas in this guide are based on best practices in educational research. The information comes from a broad range of top-notch, experienced teachers and educational experts. As you read through, you will find some familiar ideas, but you may also find tips and assignments that suit your teaching needs and style. The information contained in this guide support our local Board Policy relative to homework.

Students, teachers, and parents or caregivers all play vital roles in the homework process. I challenge you to contribute all you can to making homework reasonable, meaningful, and beneficial to our students.

Public Schools of Robeson County

Homework Policy

Homework should be an integral and relevant part of every student's instructional program. It should be used consistently throughout the grades and classes.

Homework has two important purposes: (1) to provide opportunities for vital parent-school partnerships in support of education; (2) to emphasize the high academic standards of the school district.

The Board of Education for the Public Schools of Robeson County encourages the assignment of homework to extend the knowledge, aid in mastery of skills, develop independence in learning, and create and stimulate interests.

A pattern of meaningful homework assignments should be established by the teacher and/or the student so the students and parents may plan accordingly. Homework is intended to be completed after school and only a limited amount of classroom instructional time should be devoted to completion of homework.

Homework assignments should take into consideration the individual differences of pupils such as health, ability, conditions at home, and educational resources at home. Homework should not be used as punishment and should not require the use of reference material not readily available in most homes or school libraries and should not require the use of those materials only when the pupil has had instruction in their use.

The purposes of all homework assignments must be clearly understood by both the teacher and the students. Appropriate follow-up activities, grading, or review of homework assignments should always occur.

Approved by the Board of Education August 16, 1994

Homework: a Concern for the Whole Family

Various research studies have addressed the benefits of homework. Homework is a great vehicle for students to learn and for families to be involved in their children's education. However, helping children with homework isn't always easy. Parents are often concerned whether the homework is too much, too little, too hard, or too easy. The Office of Educational Research and Improvement has produced a handbook entitled, "Helping Your Child With Homework."¹ We have included excerpts from this handbook to help answer questions that parents, family members and others who care for children in elementary and junior high school often ask about homework.



¹ Lehr, Fran and Osborn, Jean, Helping Your Child With Homework. (Washington: Office of Educational Research, and Improvement)

The Basics

Why Do Teachers Assign Homework?

Teachers assign homework for numerous reasons.
Homework can help students

- * review and practice what they have covered in class
- * get ready for the next day's class;
- * learn to use resources, such as libraries, reference materials and computer Web sites to find information about a subject;
- * explore subjects more fully than classroom time permits;
- * extend learning by applying skills they already have to new situations; and
- * integrate their learning by applying many different skills to a single task, such as book reports or science projects.

Homework also can help students develop good study habits and positive attitudes. It can

- * teach them to work independently; and
- * encourage self-discipline and responsibility.



Does Homework Help Children Learn?

Homework helps your child do better in school when the assignments are meaningful, are completed successfully and are returned to the student with constructive comments from the teacher. An assignment should have a specific purpose, come with clear instructions, be fairly well matched to a child's abilities and help develop a child's knowledge and skills.

In the *early grades*, homework can help children develop the good study habits and positive attitudes described earlier. From *third through sixth grade*, small amounts of homework, gradually increased each year, may support improved school achievement. In *seventh grade and beyond*, students who complete more homework score better on standardized tests and earn better grades, on the average, than do students who do less homework. The difference in test scores and grades between students who do more homework and those who do less increases as students move up through the grades.



What's the Right Amount of Homework?

The right amount of homework depends on the age and skills of the child.

Please note that some students may need more time to complete some assignments. Because reading at home is especially important for some children, reading assignments might push the time on homework a bit beyond the amounts suggested here.



If you are concerned that your child has either too much or too little homework, talk with his teacher and learn about her homework policies.

How to Help: Show That You Think Education and Homework Are Important

1. Set a Regular Time for Homework



Having a regular time to do homework helps children to finish assignments. The best schedule is one that works for you child and your family. What works well in one household may not work in another. Of course, a good schedule depends in part on your child's age as well as her specific needs.

Your child's outside activities, such as sports or music lessons, may mean that you need a flexible homework schedule. Your child may study after school some days and after dinner on others. If there isn't enough time to finish homework, your child may need to drop some outside activity. Let her know that homework is a high priority.

You'll need to work with your elementary child to develop a schedule. An older student can probably make up a schedule independently, although you'll want to make sure that it's a workable one. You may find it helpful to write out his schedule and put it in a place where you'll see it often, such as a refrigerator door.

How to Help: **Show that You Think Education and Homework Are Important**

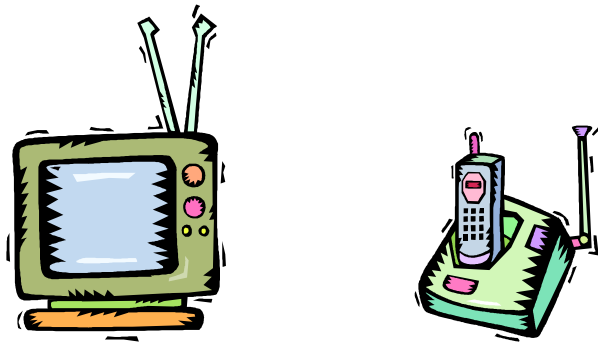
2. Pick a Place

Your child's homework area doesn't have to be fancy. A desk in a bedroom is nice, but for many children, the kitchen table or a corner of the living room works just fine. The area should have good lighting and should be fairly quiet.



3. Remove Distractions

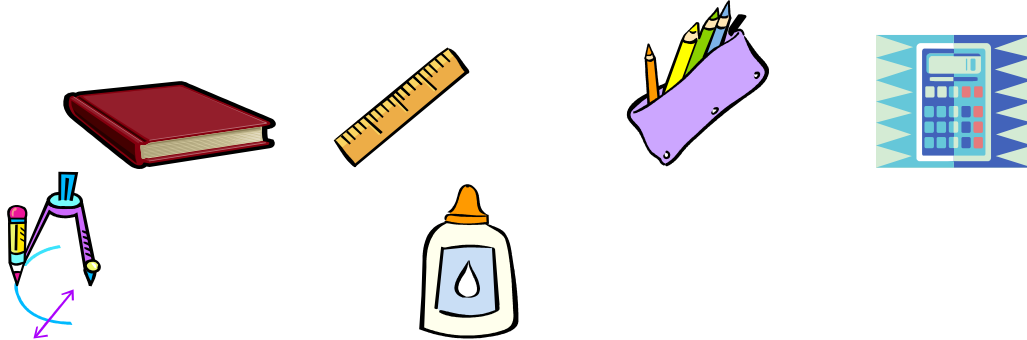
Turn off the TV and discourage your child from making and receiving social telephone calls during homework time. (A call to a classmate about an assignment, however, may be helpful.)



Some children work well with quiet background music, but loud noise from a CD player, radio or TV is not OK. One history teacher laments, "I've actually had a kid in an assignment that had written in the middle 'And George Washington said, "Ohhhhh, I love you."' The kid was so plugged into the music that he wasn't concentrating.

4. Provide Supplies and Identify Resources

Have available pencils, pens, erasers, writing paper and a dictionary. Other supplies that might be helpful include a calculator, a pencil sharpener, tape, glue, paste, scissors, a ruler, a calculator, index cards, a thesaurus, and an almanac. If possible, keep these items together in one place. If you can't provide your child with needed supplies, check with her teacher, school guidance counselor or principal about possible sources of assistance.



For books and information resources, such as suitable computer Web sites, check with the school library or your public library. Some libraries have homework centers designed especially to assist children with school assignments (they may even have tutors and other kinds of individual assistance).

5. Set a Good Example

Show your child that the skills he is learning are an important part of the things he will do as an adult. Let him see you reading books, newspapers and computer screens; writing reports, letters, e-mails and lists; using math to balance your checkbook or to measure for new carpeting; doing other things that require thought and effort. Tell your child what you do at work.



6. Show an Interest

Make time to take your child to the library to check out materials needed for homework (and for enjoyment) and read with your child as often as you can. Talk about school and learning activities in family conversations. Ask your child what was discussed in class that day. If she doesn't have much to say, try another approach. For example, ask her to read aloud a story she wrote or to talk about what she found out from a science experiment.

Attend school activities, such as parent-teacher conferences, plays, concerts, open houses and sports events. If you can, volunteer to help in your child's classroom or at special events. Getting to know some of your child's classmates and their parents builds a support network for you and your child. It also shows your child that his home and school are a team.



How to Help: Monitor Assignments

1. Ask About the School's Homework Policy

At the start of the school year, ask your child's teacher about any rules or guidelines that children are expected to follow as they complete homework. Ask about the kinds of assignments that will be given and the purposes for the assignments.

Talk with the teacher about your role in helping with homework. Expectations for parent involvement vary from teacher to teacher. Some teachers want parents to monitor homework closely, whereas others want them simply to check to make sure the assignment is completed on time.

Ask the teacher to call if any problems with homework come up. Let her know that you will do the same.



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2. **Be Available**

Many elementary school students often like to have someone with them to answer questions as they work on assignments. If your child is cared for by someone else, talk to that caregiver about how to deal with homework. For an older child, if no one will be around, let him know when you want him to begin work and call to remind him if necessary.

3. **Look Over Completed Assignments**

It's usually a good idea to check to see that your elementary school child has finished her assignments. If your middle-school student is having trouble finishing assignments, check his work, too. After the teacher returns completed homework, read the comments to see if your child has done the assignment satisfactorily.



4. **Monitor Time Spent Viewing TV and Playing Video Games**

American children, on average, spend far more time watching TV or playing video games than they do completing homework. In many homes, more homework gets done when TV viewing and “game” time is limited.

Once you and your child have worked out a homework schedule, take time to discuss how much TV and what programs she can watch. It's worth noting that television can be a learning tool. Look for programs that relate to what your child is studying in school, such as programs on history or science or dramatizations of children's literature. When you can, watch shows with your child, discuss them and encourage follow-up activities such as reading or a trip to the museum.

Likewise, limit the amount of time your child spends playing video games. As with TV programs, be aware of the games she likes to play and discuss her choices with her.

How to Help: Provide Guidance

The basic rule is “Don’t do the assignment yourself.” It’s not your homework—it’s your child’s. “I’ve had kids hand in homework that’s in their parents’ handwriting,” one eight-grade teacher complains. Doing assignments for your child won’t help him understand and use information. And it won’t help him become confident in his own abilities.

Here are some ways you can provide guidance without taking over your child’s homework.

1. Help Your Child Get Organized

Help your child to make a schedule and put it in a place where you’ll see it often. Writing out assignments will get him used to the idea of keeping track of what’s due and when. If your child is not yet able to write, write it for him until he can do it himself.

A bookbag or backpack will make it easier for your child to carry homework to and from school. Providing homework folders in which your child can tuck his assignments for safekeeping also can help him stay organized.



2. Encourage Good Study Habits

Teachers generally give students tips on how to study. But it takes time and practice to develop good study habits. To reinforce good habits at home you can:

*Help your child manage time to complete assignments. For example, if your eighth grader has a biology report due in three weeks, discuss all the steps she needs to take to complete it on time, including:

1. selecting a topic;
2. doing the research by looking up books and other materials on the topic and taking notes;
3. figuring out what questions to discuss;
4. drafting an outline;
5. writing a rough draft; and
6. revising and completing the final draft.

Encourage your child to make a chart that shows how much time she expects to spend on each step.

*Help your child get started when he has to do research reports or other big assignments. Encourage him to use the library. If he isn't sure where to begin, tell him to ask the librarian for suggestions.. If he's using a computer for online reference resources-whether the computer is at home, school, or the library-make sure he's getting whatever help he needs to use it properly and to find age-appropriate Web sites. Many public libraries have homework centers with tutors or other kinds of one-on-one assistance. After your child has completed research, listen as he tells you the points he wants to make in the project.



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- *Give practice tests. Help your third grader prepare for a spelling test by saying the words as she writes them. Have her correct her own as you spell each word.
 - *Help your child avoid last-minute cramming. Review with your fifth grader how and what to study for his social studies test long before it's to be given. You can have him work out a schedule of what he needs to do to make up a practice test and write down answers to the questions he's made up.
 - *Talk with your child about how to take a test. Be sure she understands how important it is to read the instructions carefully, to keep track of the time and to avoid spending too much time on any one question. (See the **Resources** section, page 23, for the titles of books and pamphlets that give more tips on how your child can get organized and develop good study habits).



**Encourage him to use the library.
If he isn't sure where to begin,
tell him to ask the librarian for
suggestions.**

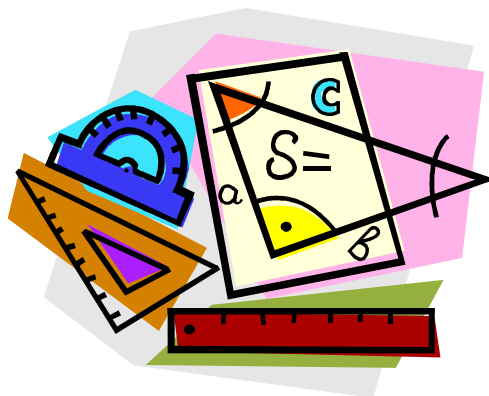
3. Talk About the Assignments

Talking and asking questions can help your child to think through an assignment and break it down into small, manageable parts. Here are some questions to ask.

*Do you understand what you're supposed to do? After your child has read the instructions, ask her to tell you in her own words what the assignment is about. (If she can't read yet, the teacher may have sent home instructions that you can read to her.) Some schools have homework hotlines that you can call or Web sites that you can access by computer for assignments in case your child misplaced a paper or was absent on the day it was given. If your child doesn't understand the instructions, read them with her and talk about the assignment. Does it have words that she doesn't know? How can she find out what the words mean? If neither you nor your child understands an assignment call one of her classmates or get in touch with the teacher.

*Do you need help in understanding how to do this assignment? See if your child needs to learn more, for example, about subtracting fractions before she can do her assignment. Or find out if the teacher needs to explain to her again when to use different kinds of punctuation marks. If you understand the subject yourself, you may want to work through some examples with your child. However, always let her do the assignment herself.

*Do you have everything you need to do the assignment? Sometimes your child needs special supplies, such as colored pencils, metric rulers, calculators, maps or reference books. Check with the teacher, school guidance counselor or principal for possible sources of assistance if you can't provide the needed supplies. Check with your local library or school library for books and other information resources.



*Does your answer make sense to you? To check that your child understands what he is doing, ask him to explain how he solved a math problem or have him summarize what he has written in a report.

4. Watch for Frustration

If your child shows signs of frustration, let him take a break. Encourage him and let him see that you know he can do the work.

5. Give Praise

People of all ages respond to praise. And children need encouragement from the people whose opinions they value most-their families. “Good first draft of your book report!” or “You’ve done a great job” can go a long way toward motivating your child to complete assignments.

Children also need to know when they haven’t done their best work. However, make criticism constructive. Instead of telling a sixth grader, “You aren’t going to hand in that mess, are you?” say, “The teacher will understand your ideas better if you use your best handwriting.” Then give praise when the child finishes a neat version.



How to Help: Talk with Teachers to Resolve Problems

Homework problems often can be avoided when families and caregivers value, monitor and guide their children's work on assignments. Sometimes, however, helping in these ways is not enough. If you have problems, here are some suggestions for how to deal with them.

1. Tell the Teacher about Your Concerns

You may want to contact the teacher if

- *your child refuses to do her assignments, event though you've tried hard to get her to do them;
- *the instructions are unclear;
- *you can't seem to help your child get organized to finish assignments;
- *you can't provide needed supplies or materials;
- *the homework is assigned in uneven amount-for instance, no homework is given on Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday, but on Thursday four assignments are made that are due the next day; or
- *your child has missed school and needs to make up assignments.

In some cases, the school guidance counselor or principal also may be helpful in resolving problems.

Most elementary and middle schools hold regular parent-teacher conferences or open houses.

2. Work with the Teacher

Continuing communication with teachers is very important in solving homework problems. As you work with your child's teacher, here are some important things to remember:

- *Talk with each of your child's teachers early in the school year. Get acquainted before problems arise and let each teacher know that you want to be kept informed. Most elementary and middle schools hold regular parent-teacher conferences or open houses. If your child's school doesn't provide such opportunities, call the teacher to set up a meeting.
- *Contact the teacher as soon as you suspect your child has a homework problem (as well as when you think he's having any major problems with his schoolwork). Schools have a responsibility to keep you informed about your child's performance and behavior and you have a right to be upset if you don't find out until report card time that your child is having difficulties. On the other hand, you may figure out that a problem exists before the teacher does. By alerting the teacher, you can work together to solve a problem in its early stages.
- *Request a meeting with the teacher to discuss homework problems. Tell him briefly why you want to meet. You might say, "Rachel is having trouble with her math homework. I'm worried about why she can't finish the problems and what we might do to help her." If English is your second language, you may need to make special arrangements, such as including in the meeting someone who is bilingual.
- *Approach the teacher with a cooperative spirit. Believe that the teacher wants to help you and your child, even if you disagree about something. Don't go to the principal without giving the teacher a chance to work out the problem with you and your child.
- *Let the teacher know whether your child finds the assignments too hard or too easy. (Teachers also like to know when their students are particularly excited about an assignment.) Of course, not all homework assignments can be expected to interest your child and be perfectly suited to her. Teachers just don't have time to tailor homework to the individual needs of each student. However, most teachers want to assign homework that their students can complete successfully and they welcome feedback.

Many teachers structure homework so that a wide range of students will find assignments interesting. For example:

- They offer students options for different approaches to the same topic or lesson;
- They give extra assignments to students who want more challenge; and
- They give specialized assignments to students who are having trouble in a particular area.

*During your meeting with the teacher, explain what you think is going on. In addition, tell the teacher if you don't know what the problem is. Sometimes a student's version of what's going on isn't the same as the teacher's version. For example, your child may tell you that the teacher never explains assignments so that he can understand them. But the teacher may tell you that your child isn't paying attention when assignments are given.

*Work out a way to solve or lessen the problem. The strategy will depend on what the problem is, how severe it is and what the needs of your child are. For instance:

- Is the homework often too hard? Maybe your child has fallen behind and will need extra help from the teacher or a tutor to catch up.
- Does your child need to make up a lot of work because of absences? The first step might be working out a schedule with the teacher.
- Does your child need extra support beyond what home and school can give her? Ask the teacher, school guidance counselor or the principal if there are mentor programs in your community. Mentor programs pair a child with an adult volunteer who assists with the child's special needs. Many schools, universities, community organizations, churches and businesses offer excellent mentoring programs.

*Make sure that communication is clear. Listen to the teacher and don't leave until you're sure that you understand what's being said. Make sure, too, that the teacher understands what you have to say. If, after the meeting, you realize you don't understand something, call the teacher to clarify.

At the end of the meeting, it may help to summarize what you've agreed to do:

“OK, so to keep track of Kim's assignments, I'll check her assignment book each night and write my initials beside new assignments. Each day you'll check to make sure she's written down all assignments in her book. That way we'll be certain that I know what her assignments are.”

*Follow up to make sure that the approach you agreed to is working. If the teacher told you, for example, that your child needs to spend more time practicing long division, check back in a month to talk about your child's progress.

Homework can bring together children, families and teachers in a common effort to improve children's learning.



Helping your child with homework is an opportunity to improve your child's chances of doing well in school and life. By helping your child with homework, you can help him learn important lessons about discipline and responsibility. You can open up lines of communication-between you and your child and you and the school. You are in a unique position to help your child make connections between school work and the “real world,” and thereby bring meaning (and some enjoyment) to your child's homework experience.

General Homework Tips For Parents

Make sure your child has a quiet, well-lit place to do homework.

Avoid having your child do homework with the television on or in places with other distractions, such as people coming and going.

Make sure the materials your child needs, such as paper, pencils, and a dictionary, are available.

Ask your child if special materials will be needed for some projects and get them in advance.

Help your child with time management.

Establish a set time each day for doing homework. Don't let your child leave homework until just before bedtime. Think about using a weekend morning or afternoon for working on big projects, especially if the project involves getting together with classmates.

Be positive about homework.

Tell your child how important school is. The attitude you express about homework will be the attitude your child acquires.

When your child does homework, you do homework.

Show your child that the skills they are learning are related to things you do as an adult. If your child is reading, you read too. If your child is doing math, balance your checkbook.

When your child asks for help, provide guidance, not answers.

Giving answers means your child will not learn the material. Too much help teacher your child that when the going gets rough, someone will do the work for him or her.

When the teacher asks that you play a role in homework, do it.

Cooperate with the teacher. It shows your child that the school and home are a team. Follow the directions given by the teacher.

If homework is meant to be done by your child alone, stay away.

Too much parent involvement can prevent homework from having some positive effects. Homework is a great way for kids to develop independent, lifelong learning skills.

(General Homework Tips for Parents continued)

Stay informed.

Talk with your child's teacher. Make sure you know the purpose of homework and what your child's class rules are.

Help your child figure out what is hard homework and what is easy homework.

Have your child do the hard work first. This will mean he will be most alert when facing the biggest challenges. Easy material will seem to go fast when fatigue begins to set in.

Watch your child for signs of failure or frustration.

Let your child take a short break if she is having trouble keeping her mind on an assignment.

Reward progress in homework.

If your child has been successful in homework completion and is working hard, celebrate that success with a special event (e.g., pizza, a walk, a trip to the park) to reinforce the positive effort.

Reading Homework Tips For Parents

Have your child read aloud every night.

Choose a quiet place, free from distractions, for your child to do his nightly reading assignments.

As your child reads, point out spelling and sound patterns such as cat, pat, hat.

When your child reads aloud to you and makes mistakes, point out the words she has missed and help her read the word correctly.

After your child has stopped to correct a word he has read, have him go back and reread the entire sentence from the beginning to make sure he understands what the sentence is saying.

Ask your child to tell you in her own words what happened in a story.

To check your child's understanding of what he is reading, occasionally pause and ask your child questions about the characters and events in the story.

Ask your child why she thinks a character acted in a certain way and ask your child to support her answer with information from the story.

Before getting to the end of the story, ask your child what he thinks will happen next and why.

Math Homework Tips For Parents

Encourage your child to use daily math assignment book.

Follow the progress your child is making in math. Check with your child daily about his homework.

If you don't understand your child's math assignments, engage in frequent communication with his or her teacher.

If your child is experiencing problems in math, contact the teacher to learn whether he or she is working at grade level and what can be done at home to help improve academic progress.

Request that your child's teacher schedule after-school math tutoring sessions if your child really needs help.

Advocate with the principal for the use of research-based peer tutoring programs for math. These tutoring programs have proven results, and students really enjoy them.

Use household chores as opportunities for reinforcing math learning such as cooking and repair activities.

Try to be aware of how your child is being taught math, and don't teach strategies and shortcuts that conflict with the approach the teacher is using. Check in with the teacher and ask what you can do to help. Ask the teacher about online resources that you can use with your child at home.

At the beginning of the year, ask your child's teacher for a list of suggestions that will enable you to help your child with math homework.

Good Websites For Homework Help (K-12)

www.homeworkhotline.com

www.Help-Your-Child-Learn.org

www.make-the-grade.com

www.Learning-Without-Tears.com

www.schoolnotes.com

www.discoveryschool.com

www.trainingwheels.kids

www.school-discovery.com/homework/bjpinchbeck

www.my.exexpc.com (N.C.State-OwlsBasicFacts)

www.links4kids.co.uk

www.studyplans.com

www.ericfacility.net

www.homeworkspot.com

www.ncsu.edu

www.sandhills.cc.nc.us

www.surfnetkids.com

www.shawnee.edu (U.S. Dept. of Ed. Homework Tips)

Resources

The following publications provide more information about how to help your child with homework.

Canter, Lee and Hausner, Lee. (1993). *Homework Without Tears: A Parent's Guide for Motivating Children to Do Homework and to Succeed in School*. New York: HarperCollins.

Cholden, Harriet, Friedman, John A. and Tiersky, Ethel. (1998). *The Homework Handbook: Practical Advice You Can Use Tonight to Help Your Child Succeed Tomorrow*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Cooper, Harris M. (2001). *The Battle over Homework: Common Ground for Administrators, Teachers, and Parents*. New York: Corwin Press.

Klavan, Ellen, (1992). *Taming the Homework Monster: How to Stop Fighting with Your Kids over Homework*. New York: Poseidon Press.

National Parent Teacher Association and National Education Association. (1995). *Helping Your Student Get the Most Out of Homework*. (Available from the PTA Web site: <http://www.pta.org/programs/edulibr/homework.htm>).

Rich, Dorothy. (1992). *Megaskills: How Families Can Help Children Succeed in School and Beyond* (rev. ed.). Boston: Houghton Mifflin

U. S. Department of Education. (2002). *Homework Tips for Parents*. (Available from the Department's Web site: <http://www.nclb.gov/parents/homework/index.html>).

U. S. Department of Education. (1997). *Parents Guide to the Internet*. (Available from the Department's Web site: <http://www.ed.gov/parents/internet>).