

CONSEIL SUPÉRIEUR DE L'ÉDUCATION

ABRIDGED VERSION

**TOWARD A CONSIDERATION
OF HOMEWORK IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS**

BRIEF TO THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION, RECREATION AND SPORT

March 2010

Québec 

The present document is an abridged version of the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation's brief **Pour soutenir une réflexion sur les devoirs à l'école primaire**. The Conseil has mandated the preparation of the brief to the Commission On Preschool and Elementary Education (CPEP), comprised at the time of its adoption of the following members: Édouard Staco (Chair), Natascha Bacher, Dominic Bouchard, Jean-Claude Brien, Renée Champagne, Julie Desjardins, Marie-Noëlle Jean, Anne-Frédérique Karsenti, Nancy Laterreur, Dominic R. Martini, Diane Miron, Karine Soucy and Diane Talbot.

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LE CONSEIL SUPÉRIEUR DE L'ÉDUCATION

Established in 1964, the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation is an arm's-length advisory body to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sport. It is comprised of 22 members representing the education community and other segments of Québec society. Intended as a forum for the advancement of a comprehensive vision of education, the Conseil is mandated to advise the Minister on any issue related to education.

The Conseil also includes five commissions, one for each level or sector of the Québec education system: Commission on Preschool and Elementary Education, Commission on Secondary Education, Commission on College Education, Commission on University Education and Research, and the Commission on Adult Education and Continuing Education. The work of the Conseil and its commissions is made possible thanks to the civic engagement and participation of close to one hundred dedicated volunteers.

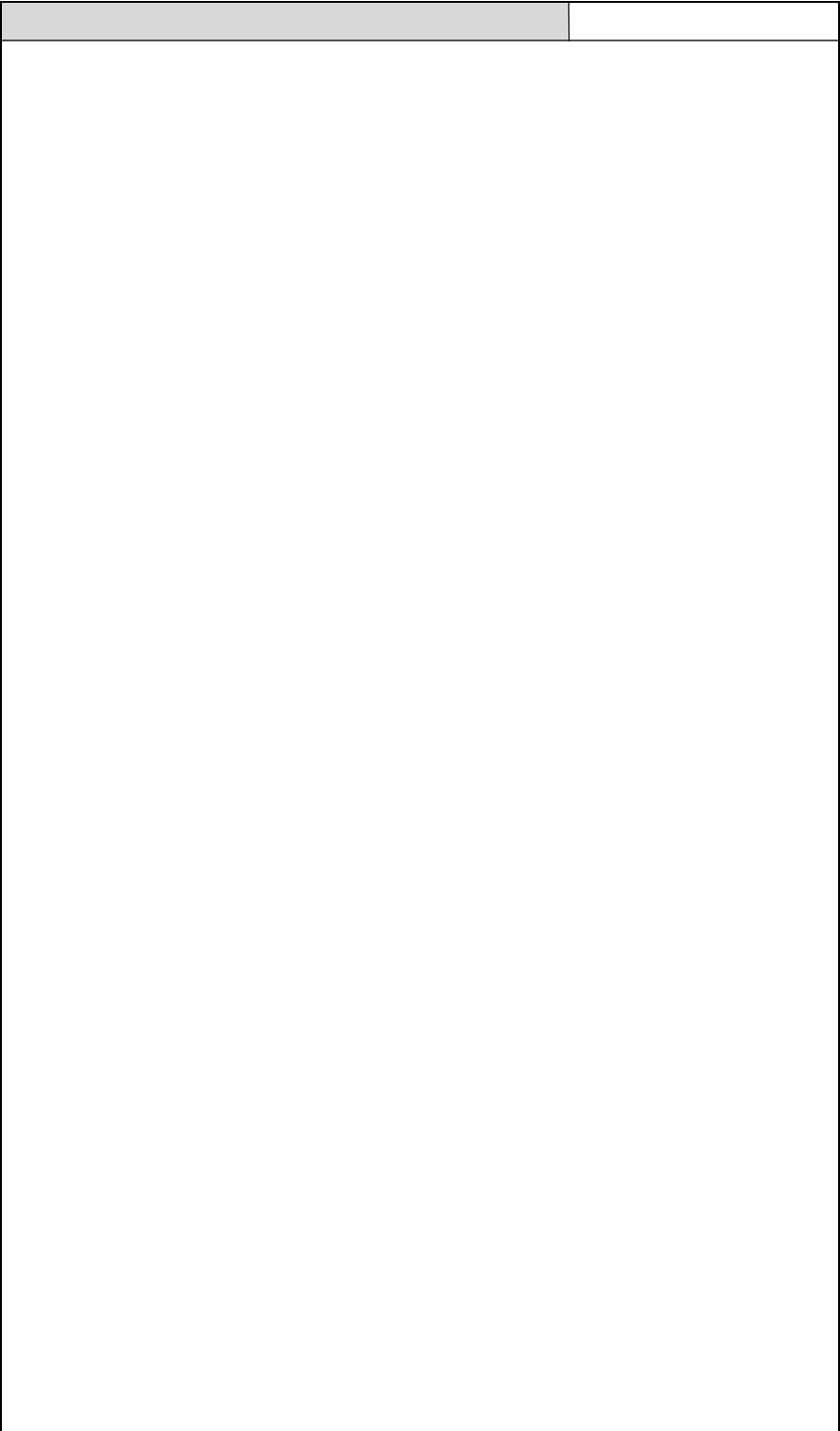


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INTRODUCTION

Homework and assignments have long been an integral part of learning. Even with the introduction of education reforms, the evolution of family structures and fundamental changes to the social landscape, the vast majority of teachers continue to give homework and assignments to their students.

For more than a century, researchers around the world have examined the issue and practice of homework and assignments.¹ Their findings reveal that while this practice may be a time-honoured tradition, it is just as often the subject of controversy. Yet unlike in some countries such as the United States or Australia—where certain social groups are actively lobbying to abolish it—this has not been the case in Québec. Notwithstanding the occasional debate, neither Québec teachers nor parents seem to question this near-universal practice in elementary education.

Why, then, should the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation prepare a brief on homework and assignments? How would its examination of this issue be relevant? The Conseil began its considerations with the observation that over the course of past few decades, the family—like society—has undergone a considerable transformation, and with one or both parents working outside the home, the juggling of work and family responsibilities has become a fact of modern life. Today's family structure now ranges from two parents to single parents to blended families, where children may alternate living with one separated parent or the other.

While there may never have been a “golden age” for homework, it is clear that reconciling homework with the organization of work and family has become a delicate balancing act for a great number of families. Homework and assignments can also present hurdles for parents with low levels of education or whose mother tongue is other than the language of instruction, as well as for children with learning disabilities and their parents. This in turn raises the question of equity: if homework is assigned, how is it possible to ensure that all students—irrespective of their skills or the support available at home—can benefit from it? In the Brief, the Conseil will examine the issue of homework from this perspective, notably focusing on school-based support or homework assistance measures likely to promote equity.

As society and families have changed, so has the role of education. With an increase in the overall level of education, today's knowledge-based society is in a phase of rapid expansion, and now places even greater emphasis on

1. For the United States, see Gill and Schlossman (2004); for France Capolarello and Wunsche, cited in Glasman and Besson (2004).

student success as a means of ensuring greater social participation. Consequently, homework is viewed by many as an essential tool to support this success.

However, research has yet to show any causal relationship between homework and educational outcomes at the elementary level, and while many advocates also view homework as a means to develop good study habits and self-discipline in students, there have been very few studies on the possible link between homework and these intended benefits. In the absence of empirical evidence on the effect of homework and assignments at the elementary level, and recognizing that homework can represent an indispensable tool to involve parents in the education of their children, the Conseil calls on school teams and their homework partners to undertake a careful consideration of the issue of homework. This process should be primarily focused on the relevance of homework within the unique context of those families and students served by the school and—should a policy on homework be adopted—on the optimal conditions for all to benefit from it. Why assign homework, or why not? What type of homework (or other means of reinforcing classroom learning) is best, and in what context? What type of support should students and their families receive? These are some questions the Conseil urges all education players to consider.

The Conseil takes a neutral position with regard to homework in the Brief. It also does not specify what constitutes—in absolute terms—“good” or “bad” homework, nor sets forth any recommendations in this regard. Rather, it maintains that to promote student success, *the issue of homework and assignments must be considered at the local level*, where it is possible to better consider the range of student needs and characteristics of their families and environment. This, in essence, is the first of three guiding approaches the Conseil recommends in the area of homework. The second is focused on *ensuring equity and consistency in school-based support or homework assistance measures*, while the third approach involves *leveraging these measures to build a stronger school-family-community partnership*. In its recommendations, the Conseil will specify guidelines for translating each approach into practice.

The Conseil supérieur de l'éducation is indebted to a great many individuals for their collaboration in preparing the Brief, and would like to thank all school administrators, teachers, and representatives from various community organizations who took part in the Conseil's survey and focus groups. It would also like to thank the experts, members of the Commission on Preschool and Elementary Education, as well as all others who contributed to this brief.

1 HOMEWORK AND ASSIGNMENTS: WHAT ARE THEY AND WHAT EFFECT DO THEY HAVE?

Research confirms that in Canada, homework and assignments are ubiquitous instructional tools, even more so in Québec schools (Julien and Ertl 2000). A 2008 study conducted by the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation found that nearly all elementary schools in Québec assign homework.

For the Brief, the Conseil will examine *homework* and *assignments* as a single issue, although in Québec a distinction is typically made in French between the two terms (*devoir* and *leçon*). Yet as most research published in English often refers to both practices under the umbrella term *homework*, the Conseil concedes that it would be nearly impossible to separate the two. For example, when a teacher instructs the class to do some studying and requires that they submit written proof of doing so, is this homework or an assignment?

Consequently, henceforth the term *homework* will also cover the term *assignment(s)*. In defining homework, the Conseil has adapted the 2007 definition by Harris Cooper—a leading researcher on the effect of homework—and expanded on it. *Homework* is **tasks assigned to students by school teachers that are intended to be carried out during non-school hours for the purpose of deepening understanding and reinforcing classroom learning or preparing students for upcoming lessons or classes.**

○ DIFFERENT TYPES OF HOMEWORK

The term *homework* also refers to a variety of practices, from the type of tasks assigned to students and the goals established by the teacher to the methods of completing the tasks and the expected outcomes. Cooper defines these distinctions in the table on page 4.

DISTINCTIONS IN HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS	
Distinctions	Variations Within Distinctions
1. Amount	Frequency Length
2. Difficulty	Easy Hard Interspersal of easy and hard items
3. Purpose	Instructional - Practice - Preparation - Integration - Extension Noninstructional - Parent-child communication - Fulfilling directives - Punishment - Community relations
4. Skill area utilized	Writing Reading Memory or retention
5. Degree of individualization	Geared to individual student Geared to groups of students
6. Student choice	Compulsory With task options Optional
7. Completion deadlines	Long-term Short-term
8. Social context	Independent Assisted - Parent, sibling, other students Group

Source: Cooper 2007, p.5

The Conseil has identified four different types of commonly-assigned homework in Ontario, where most school boards have a policy on homework: *completion*, *practice*, *preparation* and *extension*. Intended outcomes and application methods vary depending on the type of homework assigned.

Homework Type, Definition, Intended Outcome, and Application

TYPE	DEFINITION	INTENDED OUTCOME	APPLICATION
Completion	Any work assigned during the school day not completed in class	Helps students keep up to date with the classroom program	The classroom program should be differentiated if a student consistently has homework as a result of incomplete work
Practice	Any work that reviews and reinforces skills and concepts taught in class	Helps students practice newly acquired skills to develop subject fluency	To be effective, practice homework requires students to already be able to independently perform the skills required
Preparation	Any work that prepares students for upcoming lessons or classes	Encourages students to acquire background information or to bring their prior knowledge and experiences to upcoming units of study	Preparation homework can effectively be used to differentiate the classroom program for individual student learning needs
Extension	Any work that explores and refines learning in new contexts or integrates and expands on classroom learning	Encourages students to problem solve, think creatively and think critically	To be effective, extension homework should not require a student to learn curriculum content independently. Instead, students deepen understanding and relate learning to the real world

Source : Avon Maitland District School Board:

http://blog.amdsb.ca/pdf/admin_procedures/ed_programming_materials/206-HomeworkProcedure.pdf

○ ARE THE EXPECTED BENEFITS OF HOMEWORK ALWAYS DEMONSTRATED?

Many parents and teachers are in favour of homework because they consider it to be beneficial. Cooper (2007) has documented the positive effect attributed to homework by American teachers, who believe that it can produce better educational outcomes as it increases knowledge retention and expands understanding. They also feel that homework can promote the development of good study habits, organizational skills and independence, as well as parental involvement in their children's education. These teachers concede, however, that it can have a potential downside: decreased interest in learning, less leisure time, and—at times—conflict due to parental interference in homework.

Yet what does research say about the effect of homework on learning? Findings appear to be contradictory, likely due to the range and—in some cases—flaws in the methodologies used. Moreover, studies on the effect of homework often exclude other variables and limit themselves to considering the time spent doing homework, with the measurement of time being very subjective.

Despite these methodological limitations, research seems to indicate that at the secondary level, time spent doing homework and the quantity of homework assigned can positively influence educational outcomes (Cooper, Robinson and Patall 2006; Conseil canadien sur l'apprentissage 2009). This, however, does not appear to be the case at the elementary level: depending on the method of analysis used, the effect of homework may be either weak to negative (i.e. the more time spent on homework, the lower the achievement), or positive, yet so low as to be statistically insignificant (Cooper 2007).

How can this difference in the effect of homework at the elementary and secondary levels be explained? Cooper (2007) formulates several hypotheses. At the elementary level, younger students have less-developed concentration skills or less-than-effective study habits that could lead to a less-than-optimal use of homework time. Another possible reason may lie in the goals established by the teacher: Some elementary teachers use homework primarily to develop organizational skills, something rarely measured in studies on its effect. Lastly, children with some learning difficulties may spend more time doing homework, diluting any potential positive impact it may have on the results for the other students. Cooper believes further research is needed to clarify the effect of assigning homework at the elementary level.

In fact, researchers have begun to broaden the scope of their studies to include variables beyond the time spent on homework. Some findings show that varying and differentiating the type of homework depending on student needs or allowing students to choose the tasks assigned could have a positive impact on learning. The role played by motivation, which drives the effort required to complete homework, is also emphasized by many researchers: Motivation depends on many other variables such as self-confidence and the

perceived benefits of homework, which in turn are influenced by individual characteristics, the learning environment, the role of the parents, etc. (Trautwein *et al.* 2005).

Lastly, the results of research conducted on homework's effect on perceived "non-instructional" benefits (rather than strictly academic achievement)—such as developing good study habits—are mixed. Regrettably, there is very little literature devoted to this issue.

In the absence of more empirical evidence of homework's positive effect on learning at the elementary level, and given the arguments made in favour of and against homework, the Conseil has noted the two opposing positions have the same underlying rationale:

1. Some believe that *for the sake of equity*, homework should remain in place at the elementary level (albeit in moderation), given its potential positive effect on student achievement;
2. Others believe that *for the sake of equity*, homework should be abolished at the elementary level (or at least not assigned on a regular basis), given the lack of conclusive empirical evidence that supports its benefits and the challenges it creates for some children and their families.

2 HOMEWORK AND FAMILY: NEW REALITIES

Elementary students do not complete their homework alone. They often need help, which is required less and less as they become more independent. This help is typically provided by parents, in the form of emotional support and a physical environment conducive to the completion of homework, and through guidance, encouragement and help in developing independence, thought, and concentration.

Homework support is one way parents can be actively involved in their children's education. Given that several researchers have found a link between parental involvement (measured in a variety of ways) and student success at the elementary level, fostering parental involvement therefore becomes fundamental. As many sources have demonstrated (Deslandes 2007; Deslandes, Bastien and Lemieux 2004; Conseil supérieur de l'éducation 2009), there are numerous ways of doing so:

- Making parents aware that their involvement in their children's education is an integral part of their role as parents;
- Helping parents feel confident in supporting their children;
- Defining and clarifying the complementary roles of parents and teaching personnel;

- Coaching teachers on the importance of including parents in their children's education;
- Training future teachers on strategies that foster parental involvement;
- Making the school-family partnership a priority for the school.

While homework support can make parental involvement in their children's education real and tangible, it is by no means free of challenges. The rapid transformation of society over the past few generations has seen the institution of the family splinter into a variety of changing structures: dual-parent families, single-parent families and blended families. Children of split households often alternate living with one parent or the other. More women, including mothers, are becoming active participants in the labour force, demand for services to help reconcile work and family life is on the rise, and children are now being cared for outside of the home in greater numbers. These changes have had a significant impact on family schedules and organization. A study conducted by Statistics Canada found that on average, Canadian workers spent 45 minutes less per typical workday with family members in 2005 than they did in 1986 (Statistique Canada 2007). Another study also revealed that due to greater work demands, work-life conflicts in Canadian families increased markedly between 1991 and 2001, and time spent by parents doing household tasks (taking care of their children, housework, etc.) decreased over the same ten-year period, dropping from 16 to 11 hours per week (Duxbury and Higgins 2001).

As a result, many contemporary families are faced with challenges of organization and scheduling, and the addition of homework only heightens these challenges. Some Québec studies show that between 36% to 40% of elementary students spend 30 to 60 minutes per weeknight on homework (Deslandes *et. al.* 2008; Saint-Laurent and Giasson, 2005). According to a survey conducted by the Canadian Council on Learning/Conseil canadien sur l'apprentissage, approximately 20% of Canadian parents of school-age children believe that elementary school students have too much homework (Conseil canadien sur l'apprentissage 2007), and 72% believe that homework is a source of household stress. Some researchers (Cooper, Robinson and Patall 2006) emphasize that homework is at the root of most school-family conflicts, and even conflicts within the family itself.

Lastly, in addition to conflicts arising from a lack of time, some parents feel that they do not have enough knowledge or are unsure of their role in helping their children with homework. For some types of family, such as those of children with learning disabilities, homework presents even greater difficulties: "the lower the level of the child's academic functioning, the more time spent on homework, the greater the number of problems, the less independent the child will be, the more disagreeable the activity becomes for the parent."

(Saint-Laurent and Giasson 2005, p.50, free translation). Homework for students with learning disabilities appears, then, to be more of a chore than a stimulating or meaningful activity.

3 HOMEWORK SUPPORT: A QUESTION OF EQUITY

The above observations on the challenges faced by many families with regard to homework leads the Conseil to raise the question of equity. As homework is an extension of or complement to pedagogical activities established by the teacher, once outside the classroom, students can no longer count on the teacher to explain concepts not well grasped in class or provide alternative methods of learning them. It is therefore important that assigned homework be related to classroom learning, otherwise students will not be able to successfully complete it. Moreover, in order for students to draw any benefits from homework, the types of task assigned must go hand in hand with student skills and motivation. Differentiating homework according to student skills is one way to ensure equity and enable students at all levels of academic functioning to develop their potential.

Any consideration of equity must also include the context in which homework is completed, notably the physical environment and the necessary materials required, as well as the availability and quality of support on which students can rely.

Lastly, given the social changes noted previously, the question of equity in homework extends beyond families of children with learning disabilities or those traditionally considered “at risk” (such as those from socioeconomically disadvantaged communities). Indeed, a large percentage of families are likely to experience transitions such as separation, single parenthood, or blending at some point or another. Many will likely encounter conflict in reconciling work demands and parental responsibilities, particularly in the area of homework support. Consequently, in a great variety of families and social backgrounds, children may not always have a parent available to help them with their homework.

○ DEVELOPING HOMEWORK ASSISTANCE

To provide alternatives for parents unable to help their children with homework, support measures are often established in partnership with a number of organizations and players, including community groups, schools, daycare services and the private sector.

The Conseil consulted with about a dozen community organizations to learn more about their work in the area of homework assistance. One such organization, Allô Prof, stands out as it specializes in qualified teachers offering homework assistance by telephone and online across Québec. Other

groups were somewhat smaller and more locally based. In Québec, community groups whose mission is based exclusively on academic achievement are relatively few. Indeed, the primary mission of most is to act as a broader outreach resource for families that reflects the specific needs of the community, and homework assistance services are one of several means for these groups to carry out this mission. Many of them view homework assistance as a parental responsibility first and foremost, and are mindful not to infringe in this area. As a result, many have adopted mechanisms to foster parental involvement by providing them the necessary tools to better fulfil their role. Through homework assistance services, these community groups find themselves strategically positioned between school and family.

Homework assistance services offered by community groups usually take the form of non-specialized tutoring. The service is individualized—with a ratio of one adult to eight, five or even one child—and, according to these groups, goes beyond simple homework supervision yet stops short of actual instruction. Emphasis is placed on developing independence and promoting a positive attitude toward school, as well as forging relationships with attentive and caring adults, all within a global perspective of growth that encourages healthy lifestyles, social skills, and respect for rules. Some maintain that the benefits of the support provided, by championing school work and the child as a learner, far exceed simply completing homework.

Homework assistance is also provided in nearly all Québec elementary schools, thanks in large part to funding allocated by the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport's *Homework Assistance Program in Elementary School*. This program was modified in the Fall of 2009 to include three notable changes: first, homework assistance programs no longer need to be primarily intended for students with learning disabilities (a requirement of the old Program); second, under the new Program, schools must provide an array of services to a broader spectrum of users, not just students; and last, the Minister has committed to maintaining the Program for at least three more years, pending funding from the government for each year.

The old *Homework Assistance Program* was evaluated during the 2006–2007 school year, and in general received positive feedback from concerned players. Indeed, homework assistance services could not exist without it, as most of the time it is their primary source of funding (Ministère de l'éducation, du loisir et du sport, 2008). Currently, the Program does not meet the needs of all students, notably due to a shortage of qualified staff required to run these services, a lack of bus transportation after school hours, insufficient resources and a reluctance to limit the number of students per homework helper.

To learn more about the different types of homework assistance services offered in Québec schools, the Conseil conducted a survey in the Fall of 2008. Offered in 95% of schools where teachers assign homework, these services are most often provided on site by the school, but also by its daycare services

or by a community group mandated by the school. Occasionally schools will outsource them to the private sector. More than half of schools combine more than one type of homework assistance service. Catering primarily to students (support services for parents or teachers in the area of homework are often few and far between) these can vary from provider to provider: daycare services mainly offer supervision and an environment that is conducive to homework (in accordance with their primary mandate) while assistance offered by the school or a community group is often more pedagogical in nature. The ratio of students to adults can also vary, often ranging between two to five in services provided by the school or a community group and between 11 to 20 in daycare services. Lastly, schools with on-site homework assistance services often employ personnel qualified in teaching or special education, daycare services for the most part use their own staff, while community groups employ salaried employees and/or volunteers.

The gamut of qualifications for homework assistance staff leads some players in the education community to question the quality of the services. The notion that personnel should be qualified is not surprising, given that until very recently the *Homework Assistance Program* stipulated that students with learning disabilities had priority of access to homework assistance services. In fact, a good number of the homework assistance programs observed in schools during the Conseil's 2008 survey appeared to have objectives of a remedial or rehabilitative nature.

4 INNOVATIVE HOMEWORK PRACTICES IN SCHOOLS

Some Québec schools have already begun to consider the issue of homework. About 30% of school administrators who took part in the Conseil's 2008 survey reported that their schools had begun to apply innovative approaches in homework practices. Consultations on homework carried out in close to 20 elementary schools helped the Conseil learn more about the issue and document innovative pedagogical practices in the area of homework and new changes in organizing homework assistance services.

With regard to innovative pedagogical practices, the consideration of homework undertaken by school teams had several starting points: new homework tools offered to schools by the school boards;² concerns voiced by a parent or school member (e.g. teachers noting that time devoted to preparing, explaining, and correcting homework as well as review could be better utilized); debate

2. One such tool is a document produced by the school boards Commission Scolaire de la Capitale and Commission Scolaire des Découvreurs that recommends considering homework from a number of angles—including study methods and strategies, the respective roles and responsibilities of teaching personnel and parents, and homework support in daycare services—when creating a policy or reference framework on it (Côté 2004).

on another issue that led to questioning the practice of homework; and the desire to ensure consistency in pedagogical practices all represented opportunities for schools to engage in a consideration of the issue.

This process resulted in many innovative pedagogical practices, such as: standardized duration of homework per cycle of instruction; homework modified to allow for a better integration of subjects in accordance with the Québec Education Program (e.g. choosing a reading assignment that could cover a concept being taught in Social Sciences); replacing written homework with an assignment or reading activity to be done in class, after school hours or at home; regularly scheduled time for study during school hours in lieu of homework and assignments; schools incorporating objectives related to homework (e.g. increasing the number of students who complete it in their educational project; or coaching teaching personnel on the optimal conditions for effective homework.

Many schools also reported changes in the area of homework assistance services. Some of these schools broadened their offer of support by providing a continuum of services comprising in-class homework assistance by teachers, a homework club twice weekly, and support at home for children and parents who require it. In working with local partners, some schools were able to integrate their own support services within a larger community program, while others coordinated homework assistance services with daycare service schedules to allow students to attend both. Other changes observed included mandatory attendance in both homework period and recess for children in daycare services (with the goal of striking a balance between physical and intellectual activities), and in schools that did not assign homework, support devoted to developing good study habits and organizational skills.

Some education players consulted by the Conseil believe these innovative changes have had positive results: for example, better consistency in pedagogical activities, more motivated and independent children, greater equity among students, a more rewarding school life, as well as a stronger school-family relationship.

Others, however, have cautioned that any consideration of homework requires time and the engagement of all players, despite any divergence of opinion they may have on the issue. Implementing homework assistance measures is in and of itself a considerable management challenge for schools. To make these measures viable, engagement and cooperation are crucial, as is consistency. In addition, many schools must deal with persistent turnover, both in teaching personnel and homework support staff. Appointing a coordinator could help them ensure the stability and continuity of homework assistance services by offering a focal point for both logistic and pedagogical assistance to homework providers while promoting ties with parents.

5 GUIDING APPROACHES

As previously noted, many parents and teachers are in favour of homework because they believe it can have a positive impact on student success. It is also seen as a tool to make parental involvement in their children's education real and tangible, a form of participation that has been shown to have a significant effect on student success at the elementary level.

However, studies have not found as positive a correlation between homework and education outcomes at the elementary level, and the “non-instructional” benefits of homework—such as the development of good study habits—have not yet been widely researched. In addition, completing homework can present challenges to many parents who either do not have the time to help their children or do not feel adequately equipped to do so.

In light of these observations, should homework be assigned at the elementary level, and if so, what type of homework would be best? Based on a review of literature and practices on the subject, the Conseil believes that there is no single answer to either question. Rather, these questions should be addressed through a collective consideration of homework at the local level, where its pedagogical relevance could be examined in the unique context of the families and students served by the school. This, in essence, is the first guiding approach in the area of homework proposed by the Conseil.

○ **FIRST APPROACH: Considering Homework at the Local Level**

The Conseil believes the collective consideration of homework is best undertaken at the local level, as it will serve as a foundation for decision-making in the classroom and by the school. To support schools in this process, the Conseil proposes an integrated analytical framework and recommends that any ensuing decisions be included in school policy.

- **Considering Homework Based On the Principles Of Relevance, Consistency and Equity**

Any consideration of the issue of homework should begin with the principles of relevance, consistency and equity. As homework is one of many pedagogical tools, it must be relevant and allow educational objectives to be realized. It must also be consistent with other classroom tools, with those used in the school, with the school's educational project, and with the Québec Education Program.

In addition, the relevance of homework needs to be considered in context by taking into account the individual, family and social characteristics of the students concerned: Given these characteristics, does the assigned homework allow these students to attain the goals established for them? This notion refers to the principle of equity among students. Equity, however, does

not mean treating everyone the same. As previously noted, many factors can affect students' ability to benefit from homework: individual factors such as age, task comprehension, level of skill, motivation, likes and dislikes; environmental factors such physical setting or materials; or access to and quality of available support. Taking these factors into account and ensuring that students benefit from the optimal conditions for homework is one way of ensuring equity.

- **Collective and Teacher-Based Homework Decisions**

Considering the principles of relevance, consistency and equity, the Conseil favours undertaking the process of considering homework at the school level rather than at a regional or Québec-wide level, as it believes local players are best positioned to ensure an appropriate response to meeting the needs of students and their families.

In addition to being local, this process must also be collective. To be sure, the issue of homework concerns teaching personnel and the school team (notably daycare service staff, who provide homework assistance services in many schools), but it also affects students, parents, and the community at large, namely community organizations. Considering homework should take place within a broader examination which, led by school administrators, would engage all stakeholders and ensure consistency within the school. This consistency, however, should encompass more than simply harmonizing practices related to the frequency or quantity of homework assigned. It should be based on a shared analysis of goals, an underlying rationale for or against homework (or other means adopted to reinforce classroom learning), the respective expectations of teaching personnel and parents, and the support measures required.

Schools can draw on an array of methods and opportunities to elicit the participation of all stakeholders in this process and in any decisions regarding homework. In some cases teachers may decide to discuss the various pedagogical aspects of homework among themselves first before opening the discussion up to other players. In other cases, consultations with parents may trigger the process or school administrators could establish a committee on homework comprising representatives from all concerned parties. Regardless of the method or opportunity, what is important is bringing all stakeholders to the table as well as informing them of any courses of action adopted at the end of the process.

Although considering the issue of homework needs to be a collective process and consistent with pedagogical practices, the Conseil would like to note that the choice of instructional methods and pedagogical tools for the classroom is ultimately the domain of the teachers. Any pedagogical decisions regarding homework must remain theirs.

• An Integrated Framework For Analysis

To provide schools with a foundation for considering the issue of homework, the Conseil here proposes an analytical framework based on the principles of relevance, consistency and equity, drawing on the following five “pillars of thought”:

- Definition of the current state of homework practices in the school;
- Application of research findings on homework and how they relate to student success;
- Analysis of the family environment of students (based on family characteristics and the impact of homework on family life and the quality of the parent-child relationship);
- Evaluation of the needs of homework stakeholders as they relate to their goals:
 - > Students (e.g. needs relating to developing good study habits);
 - > Parents (e.g. a better understanding of their role in helping their children with homework);
 - > Teaching personnel (e.g. the need to spend more time on classroom instruction rather than explaining or reviewing homework).
- Assessment of resources, both human and financial, needed to offer homework assistance services or any training required to meet the abovementioned needs.

Starting from these five pillars, a consideration of the issue of homework could assist the school in making well-informed and collective decisions, such as whether or not to assign homework (or other methods of reinforcing classroom learning), the frequency and duration of homework according to cycle of instruction, or how to clearly define the responsibilities of each stakeholder.

The school and its partners must then consider support measures needed in light of these decisions. The measures adopted (homework assistance, school-based support programs to encourage motivation, support for parents or homework support staff, ongoing training for teaching personnel, etc.) should be varied and meet the diverse needs of stakeholders. Lastly, communication strategies should then be developed to ensure an optimal exchange of information and collaboration among stakeholders.

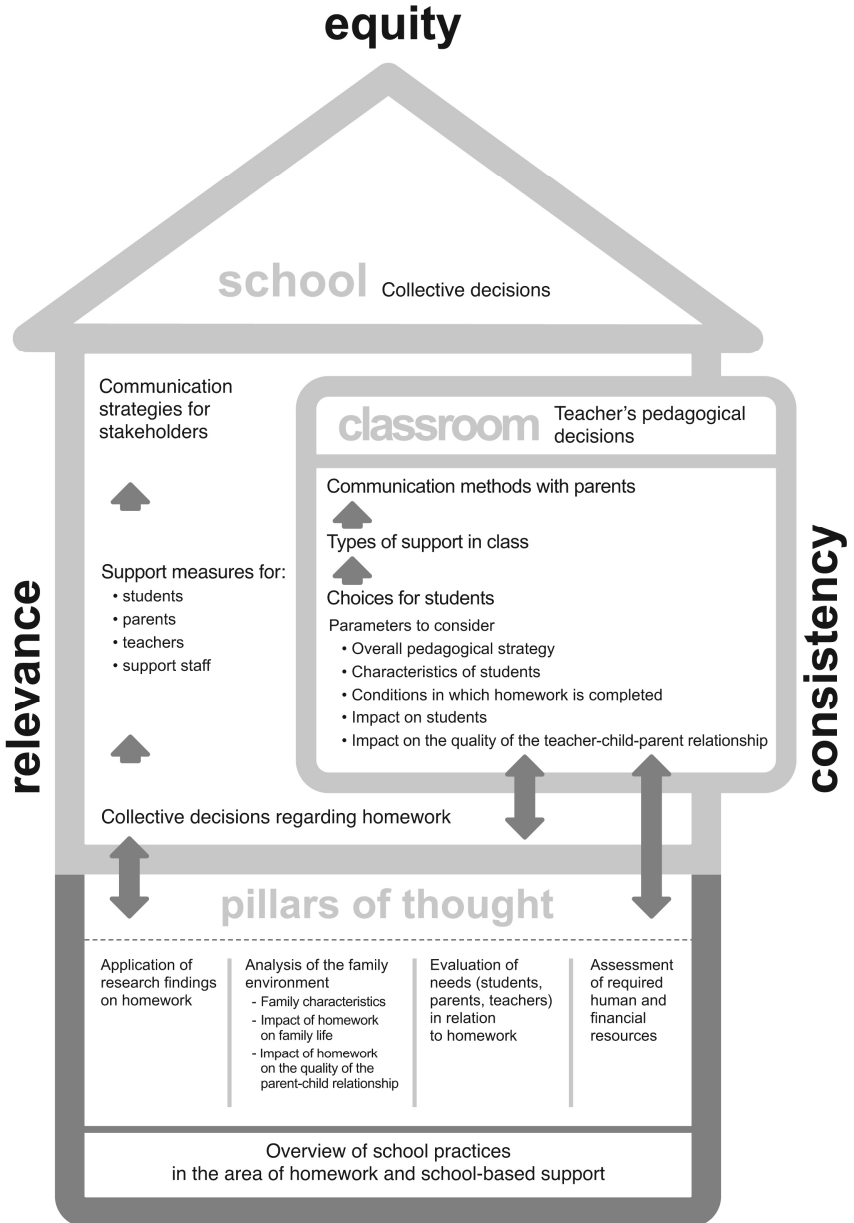
Using the same five pillars of thought, the collective process undertaken at the school level can be mirrored at the classroom level by teachers. The collective decisions taken by the school in the areas of homework, support and communication strategies can also guide their individual decisions, which must also consider key homework parameters such as:

- Its effectiveness and consistency with overall pedagogical strategy;
- Its relevance and equity given the characteristics of students and their families;
- Its relevance and equity given the conditions in which students complete it;
- Its impact on students;
- Its impact on the quality of the teacher-child-parent relationship.

By taking these parameters into account, teachers can make informed decisions on homework (whether or not to assign it, when and where to use other methods of reinforcing classroom learning, varying the method depending on the situation, etc.) and the support they provide to their students. Teachers can also choose the methods of communication to inform parents of their pedagogical decisions as well as any information on their children's progress.

Within this proposed approach, the teachers' process and the collective process of considering homework mutually influence each other. Both porous and interdependent, these two different decision-making spheres can be structured in an integrated analytical framework on homework, shown in Figure 1 on page 17. Illustrative examples of its application can be found in the Appendix.

FIGURE 1 INTEGRATED ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK
FOR INFORMED DECISION-MAKING
Relevance – Equity – Consistency: Three key principles



• Including Homework Guidelines In School Policy

While it is important for schools to consider the issue of homework, it is equally important to ensure the continuity of any decisions that result from this process. To do so, the Conseil recommends these decisions be included in school policy.

School decisions on homework can be the subject of a given policy or school guidelines, or included in an already existing official document, such as the school's educational project or its success plan. Indeed, the collective approach used to establish and carry out the educational project—itsself founded on an assessment of the school, the needs and characteristics of its students, and the goals of community—can be fully leveraged to set a consideration of homework in motion.

The Conseil believes that by documenting decisions regarding homework and giving them an official stamp, the school would ensure their clarity and continuity, and would also simplify the dissemination of information to all stakeholders. Yet including these decisions in school documents would not make them irrevocable; indeed, the Conseil believes their official status would not only ensure continuity of practices, but make any future modifications or dialogue easier.

Following an examination of a cross-section of homework policies³, the Conseil recommends that schools collectively establish homework guidelines that specifically address:

- the underlying rationale of the decision whether or not to assign homework;
- the objectives and overall goal of homework (or any alternative methods adopted);
- the respective responsibilities of teachers, students, parents, and school-based support or homework assistance staff;
- the type and objectives of support measures in the area of homework (or any alternative method adopted by the school) intended for students and their parents;
- the communication strategies for homework guidelines.

In schools that opt for homework, the following elements—which can vary according to cycle—could also be defined:

- the frequency of homework;
- the time students are expected to spend on homework.

3. The Conseil examined homework policies in Québec elementary schools, at the English Montreal School Board, as well as provincial or national guidelines and/or policies for British Columbia, Ontario, France, the United Kingdom, and Australia.

Lastly, experiences in the area of homework policy or guidelines—both in Québec and elsewhere—reveal the importance of partnership and collaboration between school administrators, teaching personnel, parents, students, and community organizations.

• **Tools To Facilitate the Consideration Of Homework**

For the Conseil, research, training future teachers, and support for professional development represent three effective tools to facilitate the consideration of homework and informed decision-making in schools.

Research findings are an indispensable tool in undertaking this process. Yet these findings need to be validated, updated, and broadly applicable to be useful for school teams. The Conseil also notes that very little research on homework has been conducted in Québec. It is therefore important to begin documenting the most promising practices, particularly in the area of reinforcing classroom learning or support for students or families. It would also be valuable to create new opportunities for networking between schools.⁴

The Conseil believes that teachers should be introduced to the issues surrounding homework as of their initial training. Better knowledge of the subject could facilitate the collective consideration of homework in schools as well as any pedagogical decisions within the teacher's responsibility. Regrettably, guidelines on competency requirements for teachers barely address the issue of homework (Ministère de l'éducation, 2001). The Conseil believes, however, that this could be redressed during development of the various competencies.

Lastly, the Conseil notes that professional development rarely focuses on the area of homework. Universities and school boards should play a more active role in this regard. Evaluating and implementing existing tools or adopting new ones are also areas in which school boards can actively support schools in their reconsideration of homework.

4. For more detail, see the unabridged version of the Brief (in French only).

○ SECOND APPROACH: Ensuring Equity and Consistency In School-Based Support or Homework Assistance Measures

Any consideration of homework that schools engage in must include, as previously mentioned, decisions on the type of support services students should receive. In this section, the Conseil will present its second guiding approach, which centers on ensuring equity and consistency in school-based support or homework assistance measures. These measures can be simply referred to as “school-based support services,” as this term covers traditional direct homework assistance and beyond.

• **Establishing Objectives for School-Based Support or Homework Assistance Services**

The Conseil has noted that homework assistance services offered by most schools are intended for students with learning disabilities, as stipulated until recently by the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir, et du Sport's *Homework Assistance Program in Elementary School*. For some stakeholders, this type of service requires employing specially-trained professionals. The Conseil cautions, however, that school-based support or homework assistance services should not replace the remedial work teaching personnel provide to students experiencing delays, nor the specialized services required by students with learning disabilities. Rather, school-based support services should resemble more the type of support parents could provide themselves were it not for some barriers at home. The Conseil therefore recommends schools review the objectives and rationale of these support services—and, by extension, the very nature of homework itself—from this perspective. Consequently, teachers should only assign homework that students can complete on their own or with the help of a parent or another concerned adult, with a goal of eventually working independently. Homework requiring more specialized help or instruction after class should be avoided.

The Conseil acknowledges that students with learning disabilities will continue to require the use of support services. This in itself is not an issue, provided that these services do not replace the specialized support required by these children and as long as they benefit from the assistance provided by non-specialized services.

In the opinion of the Conseil, school-based support or homework assistance services are best differentiated. While mandated to provide students a setting conducive to doing homework, daycare services do not always have the type of organizational structure required to provide differentiated support (e.g. the educator/student ratio can be a barrier). Nonetheless, the Conseil deems that schools should explore the possibility of fully utilizing daycare services to be able to provide differentiated support.

• Diversifying School-based Support Services

Students and their parents have a wide range of support needs; the same applies for those players providing the support. For schools to meet the specific needs of their communities, support services must encompass more than just direct homework assistance. Regardless of whether or not they assign homework, more schools should be offering students workshops on study organization and methods, learning strategies, reading tutorials, motivation, research, relaxation and concentration. More schools also need to provide support services to parents, train homework support staff, and organize events to encourage partnerships between parents, teachers and homework support staff.

While the Conseil calls for a greater diversity of school-based support services, it cautions against relying on this diversification as the only solution. The school, in partnership with stakeholders, is best positioned to decide which services best meet their needs, and can thus avoid spreading services too thinly.

• Ensuring Greater Stability and Accessibility to School-Based Support or Homework Assistance Services

As the primary funding source for school-based support or homework assistance services in Québec, the *Homework Assistance Program in Elementary School* is an indispensable program. To ensure the stability of the services funded by this program and to facilitate partnerships between schools and community groups providing these support services, schools need to create programs that last longer than the current one-year programs. To achieve this, the Conseil recommends that funding be allocated on a three-year budget rather than a one-year budget.

As schools are currently not able to meet the demand for homework assistance services, the Conseil recommends that funding be adjusted in order to increase the number of places available in these services. The lack of after-school bus transportation is another barrier to student access to these services. As school boards are responsible for organizing bus transportation on their territory, they need to address this issue in partnership with the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, given that the latter allocates funding for transportation.

• Improving Consistency and Coordination In School-based Support Services

School-based support or homework assistance services are the most widely-offered complementary after-school programs. Intended to serve the needs of certain students, they differ from daycare services in that they require new partnerships, separate management of human and financial resources as well as separate accountability. More than 50% of elementary schools in Québec

now have more than one type of homework assistance service, and sometimes a certain degree of competition can arise between daycare services and community groups mandated by the school.

To streamline its workload, school administrators could appoint a specific individual or form a team to coordinate these services. Administrators, however, must ensure coordination—both internal and external—among the various stakeholders, as well as the consistency and complementarity of services, without weakening those already existing and leveraging the invaluable experience of community groups in working with families.

○ **THIRD APPROACH: Leveraging School-Based Support or Homework Assistance Measures to Strengthen the School-Family-Community Partnership**

In addition to the coordination required to ensure consistency in the various support services provided by schools and their partners, the Conseil believes that greater emphasis should be placed on the value of day-to-day collaboration in the support provided to students and their families. This entails fostering the appropriate level of parental involvement in their children's education and—in some cases—in their homework. The third guiding approach proposed by the Conseil is to leverage school-based support or homework assistance services in building a stronger school-family-community partnership.

• **Towards More Involved Parents**

Parental involvement is one of the cornerstones of student success, and homework is one of many ways for parents to get involved. As supporting academic achievement is a shared responsibility between the school, parents and the community at large, and given that each plays a distinctive role, it is therefore important that both the responsibilities and expectations of each be clearly defined.

Regarding homework, parents are responsible for providing their children with the appropriate physical environment and materials to complete it. They must also guide, support and encourage them to become more independent. Research shows that parents are sometimes under the assumption that it is up to them to explain concepts their children did not understand or were not covered in class. Children, too, have the same expectations of their parents. This often results in parents feeling overwhelmed by the scope of the task and inadequately equipped to successfully carry out their role. Yet parents, even those with higher levels of education, are no substitute for an education professional. A distinction must therefore be made between *educating*, which is primarily carried out by the parents, and *instructing*, which is carried out by the school.

Regardless of whether or not they assign homework, teachers should inform parents of any decisions they make in this area, explain the various types of homework (or any alternative methods of reinforcing classroom learning adopted), and meet with them to discuss their respective expectations and roles regarding their children's education. It is also important that teachers and parents maintain an open channel of communication, one that would relay information from the teacher as well as any concerns the parents may have.

- **Facilitating Communication Between Stakeholders**

Education players have at times raised concerns about the reduced responsibility of those parents whose children use homework assistance services. How can it be possible for parents to be "part of the team" when another person is helping their children do their homework, organize their work or develop their reading skills? To address this, some schools offer school-based support or homework assistance services only a few times per week to ensure parents are not completely removed from the homework equation. To complement this strategy, parents are also coached on how they can help on the other nights. For the Conseil, a healthy dialogue between these services and parents is one way of ensuring that parents remain team players.

To maintain the continuity of children's education, this dialogue should include teachers as well as parents and the homework support staff. Facilitated through a range of methods, from writing comments in student agendas to face-to-face meetings, this would also ensure these three stakeholders could effectively assume their respective roles in the area of homework and support. For their part, school administrators should take a leading role by proposing innovative methods in the area of stakeholder communication.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

To support its three guiding approaches, the Conseil addresses its recommendations to the various homework stakeholders.

○ FIRST APPROACH – Considering Homework at the Local Level

Considering:

- the advantages of undertaking the process of considering homework and decision-making at the local level;
- the professional autonomy of teachers regarding pedagogical decisions, including those related to homework;
- the need for intra-institutional consistency of pedagogical practices;
- the importance of leadership in undertaking a consideration of homework on the part of all stakeholders and encouraging their participation;
- the need to ensure both the continuity of collective choices and their ongoing adaptability to changing conditions;

the Conseil recommends to school administrators:

1. to exercise leadership in undertaking a collective consideration of homework that would engage the various stakeholders (teaching personnel, other education professionals, daycare service staff, governing boards, parents and the community) while respecting their roles and responsibilities;
2. to include all guidelines adopted following the collective consideration of homework in school policy and ensure this is disseminated to all stakeholders and updated as necessary;

to teachers:

3. to undertake a consideration of homework at the classroom level and contribute to their school's collective consideration of the issue.

Considering:

- the benefits that research can bring to the process of considering homework and decision-making;
- the value of accountability mechanisms and shared knowledge in ensuring the application of research findings;
- the importance of training current and future teachers on the pedagogical and social issues of homework;
- the role of school boards in supporting and providing tools to schools;

the Conseil recommends**to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sport:**

4. to encourage and support research on homework, notably research on evaluating homework practices;
5. to support the dissemination of research findings and the sharing of promising practices for the optimal application of knowledge in the area of homework by the various stakeholders.

to researchers in Québec universities, particularly those in the field of education:

6. to conduct research on the issue of homework and ensure that the findings are accessible to education practitioners.

to education faculties:

7. to ensure initial training programs for future teachers include topics and issues related to homework;
8. to urge their members to develop ongoing training programs for education personnel on the issue of homework.

to school boards:

9. to support training on homework for teachers;
10. to acquire or develop tools to inspire the consideration of homework and make them available to schools.

○ **SECOND APPROACH – Ensuring Equity and Consistency
In School-based Support or Homework Assistance Measures**

Considering:

- the importance of ensuring equity in school-based support measures;
- the importance of providing, to all students, parents and homework support staff, the proper support with regard to homework;
- the underlying principle that school-based support or homework assistance services provided to students should mirror the individualized—yet non-specialized—support that parents could provide to their children;

- the 2009 modifications introduced to the *Homework Assistance Program in Elementary School*, whereby the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport:
 - > maintains yearly funding for programs and announces its intention of keeping the program in place for at least three years;
 - > mandates schools to diversify their offer of homework assistance services;
 - > no longer requires homework assistance programs to be intended primarily for children with learning disabilities;
- the consistency and complementarity required of the various homework assistance providers and the various educational services provided to students.

the Conseil recommends

to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sport:

11. to ensure adequate funding for the *Homework Assistance Program in Elementary School*, in order to improve access to school-based support or homework assistance services;
12. to ensure a greater stability of school-based support services by making the *Homework Assistance Program in Elementary School* into a three-year program that could support multi-year projects;
13. to ensure the services supported by the Program address needs prioritized by the schools first and foremost, while promoting diversified services and clients.

to school boards and to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sport:

14. to study the problem of school bus transportation with regard to attendance of school-based support or homework assistance services and facilitate addressing this problem;

to school administrators:

15. to ensure that school-based support services—regardless of the student—do not replace the assistance teachers provide in the area of remedial work nor special education services;
16. to ensure the harmonization of the various services provided by the school, notably between daycare services and school-based support or homework assistance services, and to promote greater collaboration between school and community partners in organizing these services.

○ **THIRD APPROACH – Leveraging School-Based Support or Homework Assistance Measures to Strengthen the School-Family-Community Partnership**

Considering:

- the importance of parental involvement in the education of their children to promote student success;
- the need to clearly define the expected roles of parents in supporting their children in the area of homework and their education in general;
- the importance of ensuring that school-based support or homework assistance services do not infringe on parental responsibilities nor interrupt their children's learning;
- the obligation of the various education stakeholders, in their respective areas of responsibility, to support parental involvement in their children's education.

the Conseil recommends to teaching personnel:

17. to leverage meetings with parents in order to:

- > inform them of their homework-related decisions and those of the school;
- > discuss with them their role in supporting their children's progress;

18. to maintain open communication with parents and school-based support or homework assistance service staff regarding their children's progress.

to school administrators:

19. to encourage healthy dialogue and collaboration between support providers, parents and teachers.

CONCLUSION

The institution of the family and society at large have both undergone a considerable transformation over the past few decades. The massive influx of parents in the workforce, a sharp increase in the number of after-school daycare services, as well as divorce, single parenthood and the blended family have all contributed to the creation of an environment at home where the completion of homework is often a challenge. This challenge can be heightened if a child has learning disabilities, or if parents are not fluent in the language of instruction or feel left out of the education loop. In these cases, homework can become a source of household stress and often contributes to a negative attitude toward learning, which in turn has a direct impact on student retention. When it comes to homework, it would appear that all students are not created “equal”: they simply don’t all share the same conditions for them to enjoy the benefits of homework.

Nevertheless, many Québec parents and teachers firmly believe in homework. Although its influence on student success has yet to be proven at the elementary level, and its non-instructional benefits such as developing good study habits are not well researched, homework does provide an important bridge between family and school. It is also a tangible and real way for parents to be actively involved in their children’s education, a participation that has been shown to be a cornerstone of student success.

While the Conseil acknowledges that homework has benefits and drawbacks, it believes the answer to the question of whether or not to assign homework should be more than a purely theoretical exercise. Rather, the issue of homework must be considered within a larger context that includes the realities of students and their families and the concomitant question of equity that arises from this issue. As one of many pedagogical tools available to teachers, homework must also be relevant to and consistent with the objectives of a comprehensive educational program.

The Conseil therefore calls on schools and their partners to bring the issue of homework to the table and undertake a collective consideration rooted in the realities of the local community, a consideration that would pave the way for informed decision-making. To ensure continuity and enable the transfer of knowledge, any decisions in the area of homework that result should be documented in guidelines to be included in school policy. A variety of means must be implemented to facilitate this process in schools, however the Conseil emphasizes that despite the need for a collective approach and intra-institutional consistency, the decision of whether or not to assign homework, what type of homework (or other alternative methods of reinforcing classroom learning) and when, is ultimately the responsibility of the teacher.

Schools must also examine the role of school-based support or homework assistance services in their consideration, and must provide services to children when their parents cannot or are unable to offer the appropriate support. Many schools are already offering this type of assistance, however, the Conseil believes that the need for diverse, consistent, and accessible services remains. It is also important to clearly define the objectives of these services so they do not infringe on remedial programs provided by teaching personnel or specialized rehabilitation services for children with learning disabilities. These services should not require the expertise of specialists; only individuals who, like parents, care about the children's achievement.

Like the collective consideration of homework, organizing school-based support or homework assistance services relies on the cooperation of all stakeholders while respecting the roles and responsibilities of each. Parents, teachers, the other members of school team and community organizations must be engaged and involved at every stage of the process. School administrators should take the lead in forging partnerships and fostering greater collaboration between stakeholders.

To maintain this collaboration on a day-to-day basis, school-based support or homework assistance services can be leveraged to build stronger ties between school, family and the community at large. To this end, the Conseil recommends teachers make parents aware of their role in the education of their children and maintain an open dialogue with them on homework (or any other alternative methods used to reinforce classroom learning). In the case of students using any of the support services, good communication is essential between the stakeholders—parents, teacher, homework assistance staff—for all to fully carry out their respective role. Not only is this dialogue practical, it is a necessary condition to ensure continuity of learning and ultimately student success.

APPENDIX

○ CASE ONE: SCHOOL A

School A is located in a rural, socioeconomically disadvantaged and predominantly French-speaking community. Incomplete homework is a chronic problem in every cycle of instruction. Teaching personnel devote considerable time and energy to motivate their students using the reward-and-consequences method, which leads to frustration among teachers and students alike. As it is usually the same students who do not complete their homework, this raises the issue of equity. The school team decides to engage in a collective consideration of the issue of homework.

An assessment of the situation and the issues regarding homework leads the teaching personnel to surmise that the children are most likely not receiving the right support at home to reach the objectives of the homework assigned. Parents are therefore invited to attend a school meeting on homework. Many of those who attend admit that homework is a source of stress at home and that they feel somewhat powerless to help.

Consulting the literature on the subject, the school team concludes that the parents' role is fundamental to student success, not only at the elementary level, but also at the secondary level, and thus decide to strengthen the school-home partnership. The school team sees homework as an ideal opportunity, or a "foot in the door" to do so, provided that the homework experiment proves to be a successful one.

Following their investigation of the issue, the school team agrees upon the following action plan:

- The development of independence in completing homework will be made a priority in every classroom;
- Teaching personnel will reduce the amount of homework assigned overall and each cycle team will establish cycle-specific priorities:
 - > Cycle One: No written homework, with a focus on reading skills instead;
 - > Cycle Two: Assignments and written homework based on solid learning acquired in the classroom (maximum duration 20 minutes);
 - > Cycle Three: Written homework or assignments with priority given to developing solid study habits to prepare students for secondary school (maximum duration 30 minutes);
- Teachers will determine the most effective types of homework for their own classrooms within collectively established guidelines. Cycle teams will meet to discuss homework practices on a regular basis.

- Teaching personnel will pay special attention to homework assigned to students with learning difficulties, so these students too can reach objectives and be better prepared to succeed. Workshops on developing independence in completing homework will be organized for these students during study periods.
- Based on available resources, the school will establish a homework support program, with priority given to students in need of a significant relationship with an attentive and caring adult (i.e., mentor). All students will be able to use the service twice a week. Communication methods (e.g. writing in student agendas) and coaching for parents will be implemented to allow them to remain the primary homework providers for their children.
- Where possible, the school will forge a partnership with an established community outreach group to explore ways to strengthen ties with parents and foster a more positive dialogue between families and the school, namely:
 - > Holding special events (e.g. sports or festivities) to draw more parents to “meet-the-teacher” nights at the beginning of the school year or at report card times;
 - > Jointly offering workshops to parents;
 - > Leveraging the resources of the community outreach group to provide homework support at home in some special cases;
- Teachers and the school will promptly advise the governing board and parents of any decisions regarding homework, be they at the start of the school year or at any time throughout the year.

○ CASE TWO: SCHOOL B

School B is situated in a predominantly multicultural allophone community. The teaching personnel believe that homework will pose a problem in Cycle One, as children at that age are not as independent and require support that parents in this community are ill-equipped to provide, given that many have not mastered the language of instruction. As reading skills are one of the key goals of the school success plan, the Cycle One team therefore decides to undertake an extensive examination of the issue of homework.

To better define the needs of the families, the team meets with several members of a parent group for them to share their experiences in the area of homework. In general, parents seem to have a positive view of school. They make sure their children do their homework and regularly talk with them about their school day. However, due to the language barrier they can barely support their children in their homework, particularly with reading. The team then consulted research that suggested reading skills are a key component of student achievement.

The school already offers a homework assistance program, and its daycare services provide a quiet period conducive to homework. To prioritize reading would require additional human resources, yet no funding is available. Following their assessment of the situation, the Cycle One team, in collaboration with the entire school, implement the following action plan:

- The homework assistance program will prioritize Cycle One students who do not have the necessary support at home, particularly in the area of reading;
- The daycare services, in collaboration with teaching personnel, will create a team of “reading buddies” comprised of Grade 6 volunteers who already attend the service and have excellent reading skills. Teachers will lead them in a short training session of 60 minutes and each volunteer will be paired with two students from Cycle One. The reading buddies will then help the younger students read books as required for their homework. During homework period, 30 minutes will be spent on reading;
- Parents will be advised of the implementation of this new practice, and will also be encouraged to elicit the help of older siblings at home;
- Cycle One teachers will assign short homework to be completed at home so that parents can continue to supervise their children. Teachers will need to ensure that this homework can be completed independently.

○ CASE THREE: SCHOOL C

School C has a mixed student population: some children come from a disadvantaged socioeconomic background while others are from a more affluent one where both parents work outside the home. However, very few of the former use the school's daycare services.

Homework is a problem in this school. Teachers complain that managing homework (explaining, correcting and grading, etc.) takes up valuable time better used for teaching. Also, many students do not complete their homework or do it poorly. Teachers at first try punishment whenever homework is not completed (by taking away the free period on Fridays), but soon find that more than half of the students in the classroom lost this privilege as a result.

To find out why so many children fail to do their homework, the school team decides collectively undertake an examination of and discussion on the issue:

- The school enlists the services of a pedagogical advisor from their school board to review research on homework's effect on learning and note that the findings are inconclusive at the elementary level;
- The school team decides to survey students and their parents on their experience with homework. Teachers note a level of frustration in students who feel unjustly punished for not completing their homework. Some students mention they have to do their homework on their own, since their parents can't read or speak the language of instruction and therefore don't understand it;
- Some parents say they feel helpless with homework, while others simply don't have the time for it: after picking up their children at the daycare services and finishing supper, it's already time for bath and bed. Many admitted to feeling guilty for not being able to help their children with their homework.
- In light of this feedback, the school team decides to no longer assign homework to be completed at home. Instead, teachers will focus on developing reading skills during school hours. Weekly notes in student agendas will be sent home to keep parents informed of their children's progress. Support services will be made available to those children needing additional help with reading. The school team will first inform the governing board of their decision and the rationale behind it, then advise parents at a school meeting, explaining that the practice will be re-evaluated following the first report card.
- In November, a follow-up survey on this new practice is conducted with parents, providing them with an opportunity for feedback.

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The full text (in French) of the Brief entitled

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