A black background with a black square

Description automatically generated with medium confidenceFive Strategies for Effective Homework and Tutoring Time

**Tip Sheet**



**What to do:** Think about the homework help and tutoring that already happens in your program. Then review these five key strategies and highlight any ideas you’d think might help you structure a more effective academic support program.

**Why it matters:** Homework help and tutoring programs that are well planned, organized, and staffed with competent and caring adults provide many benefits. Students can learn how to manage their time, workload, and activities efficiently. Adults can boost students’ confidence, behavior, and grades. A strong homework help or tutoring program can improve student productivity and lower stress levels.

1. **Set Goals and Gather Needed Information**
2. **Setting goals:** Create brief goal statements that align with your program’s mission and vision. Describe what your program intends to achieve. Include measurable outcomes related to your program. For example:

*Our program’s guided homework help and tutoring sessions will help students set high goals for their education and establish and maintain routines for completing their schoolwork.*

*Students who participate in the guided homework help and tutoring sessions will demonstrate improved academic performance and take ownership of their own learning.*

**Program goal:** Before structuring the homework help or tutoring environment, review the 21st CCLC grant proposal the State approved for your program. At least one of the goals in that document probably addresses the intent behind these sessions. If not, review recent needs assessment data and needs statements to write your **program goals for academic** **supports**. When setting goals, consider the following:

* What are the academic, social, and emotional needs of our students?
* Do our goals and objectives align to student needs?
* How will the activities address our goals and objectives?

1. **Gathering Needed Information:** When gathering information, program directors and site coordinators should consider the following:

* Are there other homework help and tutoring programs in the community? Who offers them — teachers, businesses, organizations, or others? Are there partnering opportunities?
* What are our policies and procedures for intentional activity design?
* How and when will sessions be monitored and measured for effectiveness?

1. **Design and Staff Homework Help and Tutoring Program**
2. **Designing sessions:** For tutoring, make sure students receive individual or small-group (three to four students to one tutor) support. Homework help sessions can have more students per staff member. Once staffing is determined, program directors and site coordinators will need to address the following:

* When will the sessions begin? How many days a week? At what times? For whom?
* If tutoring is not mandated for all program students, how will students be identified for each type of academic support? Will any students receive a combination? What will the different groupings look like?
* For both types of support, are there predictable routines, clear expectations, and procedures in place to reduce behavior problems and disruptions?Will students need to choose between doing their homework and participating in an exciting or new activity? What activities are available for students with no homework or tutoring, such as reading quietly or wearing headphones while at computer stations?
* Is there a system in place to help maintain the schedule and a procedure to notify participants when there are changes?
* Do you have a system such as sign-in log, notebook, or assignment chart to support students with organization and routines?
* Will there be enrichment activities available during the sessions?
* Will students use any online programs or tools?
* How often and in what format (e.g., email, progress reports, logs, phone calls) will families receive information about how well students are doing?

1. **Staffing the programs:** Recruiting staff, volunteers, or program partners with experience in teaching and tutoring will greatly benefit students with greater academic needs. Homework helpers don’t always require the same level of academic expertise and can be selected for other strengths. Consider these factors when staffing your program:

* What do identified needs tell us about how many students will require the intense academic support of tutoring? How many tutors will be needed to maintain individual or small-group support?
* What do identified needs tell us about how many students will require help to establish efficient homework practices and get answers to occasional content questions? What does our approved grant application say about staff-to-student ratios? How many staff members should oversee homework help sessions?
* Who on our current staff already has teaching or tutoring experience?
* How will the program recruit and screen volunteer tutors?
* How will we work with community partners to recruit homework helpers or tutors? (Consider resources such as school-day professionals and university work-study students with majors in education, math, English, history, science, or business).
* Who will provide an orientation or professional development sessions to ensure we have quality homework helpers and tutoring staff*?* (For example, tutors will participate in a three-day initial orientation conducted by the program's educational specialist.)
* How will tutors and homework helpers be observed? How often? Who will provide them with feedback and support?

1. **Organize and Map Out Space**

Keep the homework space free of distractions. Tutoring session workspaces should allow for intimate, direct interactions between staff and students, or among the small group of students, without causing distractions to other tutoring groups. If your space is less than ideal, consider expanding to a conference room, gym, library, or other area. When organizing and mapping your space, consider the following:

* Do you have a quiet, well-lit space where homework helpers and tutors can provide instruction and students can complete their work without interruption?
* Are seating and table or desk heights comfortable and appropriate for the students’ ages and sizes?
* Are resources organized and easy to access?
* Are there visuals/pictures around the space with agendas, schedules, and procedures?
* Is there space set aside for quiet activities such as reading or computer stations with headphones for students who complete their assignments early?

1. **Select Resources and Plan the Program**

Effective homework and tutoring sessions function as an important point of connection between school-day staff and out-of-school time staff. When selecting resources and planning your program, consider the following:

* Is there a list of academic resources or technology programs that each student’s teacher can provide?
* Did you ask teachers or district staff to share standards, curriculum goals, and related resource materials?
* Are there appropriate grade-level resources and supplies available (e.g., books, manipulatives, practice and enrichment materials, educational games, homework logs, paper, pencils, pens)?
* Do students have opportunities to explore activities and engage in experiences that support their interests and developmental needs?
* In both tutoring and homework help sessions, is there a balance of instructor-directed and student-directed activities?
* Are there resources and materials to accommodate learning opportunities that arise unexpectedly, such as a caterpillar spinning a chrysalis outside your window?
* Is the program structured in a way that encourages students to contribute to planning future sessions or activities?
* Do the materials and resources reflect, value, and honor the lives and cultures of your students and their families?

1. **Build Systems of Communication and Foster Relationships**

Students who have enjoyed strong relationships with caring adults who have high expectations of them are more likely to succeed in school and in life (Metz et al., 2008). Reflect on these strategies to build a robust system of communication as a foundation for stronger relationships with students.

* Schedule and adhere to regular meetings (daily, weekly, biweekly) with families, teachers, and school administrators.
* Explain the goals and expectations of the program.
* Provide information about schedules, modes of communication, materials, and resources. Ask teachers and families to share information that can further support and address students’ needs in their tutoring or homework sessions.
* Include opportunities and activities that promote family involvement.
* Encourage students to set attainable yet challenging goals and monitor their progress toward meeting those goals.
* Provide students with visuals, goal-setting logs, assignment sheets, planners, and other materials to help them organize and manage their time effectively.
* Provide opportunities for students to ask questions and discuss their strengths and progress. Respond positively and frequently, focusing on their accomplishments and strengths, but framing their challenges as growth opportunities.

# Reference

Metz, R. A., Goldsmith, J., & Arbreton, A. J. A. (2008). *Putting it all together: Guiding principles for quality after-school programs serving preteens.* <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED503265>

# Additional Resource

Moellman, L., & Matsalia, J. (2013). *SmartTALK: Homework support for kids: Staff guide.* Harvard Learning and Teaching Partnerships. <https://hwpi.harvard.edu/files/comm/files/smarttalk_staff_guide.pdf>

*This guide provides information about establishing strong afterschool homework programs. The appendix includes learning materials that can be used to support homework teaching and learning.*

A white rectangular frame with purple border

Description automatically generated

This resource was developed in 2024 by the Nita M. Lowey 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21stCCLC) National Technical Assistance Center (NTAC), funded under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education (Department) and administered by Synergy Enterprises, Inc. under Cooperative Agreement No. 287E230009 with the Department’s Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. Opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Department, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the Department or the federal government. This resource is in the public domain and is available at [21stcclcntac.org](http://www.21stcclcntac.org). Authorization to reproduce it in whole or in part is granted.