Preparing 21st Century Learners: Parent Involvement Strategies for Encouraging Students' Self-Regulated Learning

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Current thinking in education reform focuses on how we can prepare students to be successful in both the classroom and their professional careers. Preparing students for their lives beyond school is an important role of education, and this includes encouraging students to be independent and self-regulated learners. Cultivating an adaptive motivational foundation ideally begins in the early years of a student’s academic career, and it is best achieved through a collective effort by educators and parents to support students’ learning needs. This article addresses strategies for developing parent involvement activities in an environment of shared responsibility and respectful dialogue between home and school.

By Alyssa Gonzalez-DeHass

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Eight-year-old Mia is in the 3rd grade and is very bright. After she scores poorly on the math section of a state assessment, however, her teacher notices Mia losing confidence in her mathematical ability. Her teacher struggles to find ways to engage Mia during math, feeling particularly concerned, given the increasing academic rigor of new state content standards. After some conversations with Mia, he finds that she is unfamiliar with setting learning goals, doesn’t know how to identify helpful strategies, and thinks that seeking out help reflects poorly on herself as a student. Mia's teacher wants to help her take charge of her learning and build her confidence in the process.

Encouragement of self-regulated learning (the process by which learners activate and maintain cognition, affects, and behaviors oriented toward attaining their learning goals) represents a means to enhance academic performance (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2008). When students self-regulate their learning, they become aware of their strengths and limitations, establish realistic task goals, employ effective task-related strategies, self-monitor and adapt strategy usage as necessary, experience self-efficacy for strategy usage, and gain control over potentially debilitating anxiety (Schunk, 2012; Zimmerman, 2002).

The use of self-regulated learning skills is also consistent with the 21st century competencies identified in education reform initiatives designed to better prepare students for the workplace and in life more generally (Wolters, 2010). The National Education Goal One Technical Planning Group identified a student’s approach to learning (disposition and style that influence engagement in learning activity) as an area of early development that contributes to school readiness; when it comes to preparing children for school, how children learn is as important as what they are learning (Chen, Masur, & McNamee, 2011). In short, the use of student-mediated strategies has been identified as an evidence-based practice that accentuates students’ motivation (Gettinger & Walter, 2012).

Students as young as elementary school age can begin to acquire self-regulation strategies and show increased academic performance and motivation (Dignath, Buettner, & Langfeldt, 2008). Even as early as kindergarten, they benefit from instruction that scaffolds their self-regulated learning in reading, writing, and mathematics (Brabham & Lynch-Brown, 2002; Glaser & Brunstein, 2007). Despite their developmental readiness, however, many students do not master effective learning strategies that will help them get the most out of their academic experiences. Many students will not learn strategies automatically or be able to “pick up their correct use” (Howell & Schumann, 2010, p. 247). Or, while they may acquire basic learning strategies, they do not have the opportunity to become skilled in higher-order strategies. This deficit prevents students from maximizing learning outcomes and may even lead to risk for academic failure. Early on, students like Mia need to be exposed to developmentally appropriate strategies that lay the foundation for self-regulated learning.

Parental Involvement and Students' Self-Regulated Learning

Some research indicates self-regulated learning is being cultivated through informal channels that evolve out of students’ network of social support, including parents (Jones, Estell, & Alexander, 2008; Martin, 2005). Self-regulation skills (like goal-setting and self-evaluation) can be learned with teacher and parental modeling, verbal instruction, and corrective feedback (Schunk, 1998; Zimmerman, 2002). Research consistently demonstrates the effect parent involvement has on students’ persistence, engagement, self-efficacy, and self-regulated learning (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2011; Cooper, Steenbergen-Hu, & Dent, 2012; Xu, Kushner Benson, Mudrey-Camino, & Steiner, 2010). When parents are involved, students report more attention to academic tasks, interest in learning, and sense of personal responsibility for their learning. This involvement may be especially critical for young children whose self-regulatory skills and study habits are just emerging (Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008).

Parental beliefs and behaviors also can create a climate that motivates students to achieve (Grodnick, 2009; Wigfield, Eccles, Schiefele, Roese, & Davis-Kean, 2006). Students whose parents are involved are more likely to adopt a mastery goal orientation to learning, seeking out challenging tasks, persisting through academic challenges, employing better learning strategies, and experiencing satisfaction in their schoolwork (Gonzalez, Doan Holbein, & Quilter, 2002). This finding may be potentially explained by students feeling motivated as they see their parents take an active interest in school; parent involvement reinforces the value of education. In fact, parental involvement has been related to an array of motivational constructs, including school engagement, intrinsic motivation, mastery orientation, and self-regulation (Gonzalez-DeFass, Willems, & Doan Holbein, 2005). When parents...
are involved with their children’s homework, they can help students develop positive achievement motivation and cultivate strategies for coping with learning setbacks (Bempechat, 2004). Parents can socialize the behaviors that foster academic success by instilling adaptive motivational skills students will increasingly need as they progress through the school years.

Carol Dweck (2006) points out the importance of both teachers and parents encouraging students’ adaptive motivational mindsets toward learning. She asks us to consider the consequences of thinking about our intelligence as either something to be developed and cultivated through one’s efforts, a growth mindset, or as something finite, a fixed mindset. These mindsets have markedly different outcomes on students’ learning behaviors. Those with growth mindsets seek out challenging tasks and persist through academic challenges. They understand that failure doesn’t define you. The focus is on applying oneself, learning from mistakes, and making progress. Those with fixed mindsets avoid challenge and become paralyzed when confronted with failure. For these students, the necessity to employ effort means you are not smart or talented—if you have to work hard at something, you must not be good at it. Most important, Dweck’s research shows that just teaching students the strategies isn’t enough. They first have to be motivated to put strategies into practice by changing their mindset about learning. Thus, in order to equip students with effective self-regulated learning strategies, educators first must set the stage by encouraging a growth mindset (see Table 1).

### Strategies for Effective Parental Involvement

The remainder of this article focuses on parent involvement strategies that may be particularly helpful for nurturing independent and self-directed learners. Parent involvement activities are preferably encouraged within an environment of shared responsibility and meaningful and respectful dialogue between home and school. In such an environment, educators and parents are partners in education, and teachers construct meaningful homework activities that promote students’ self-reliance and motivation for learning.

### Establish School Goals for Parental Involvement in Students’ Learning

Goals for the school community might outline expectations that every student will become a self-directed learner, and that the school and families function as a community to support students’ learning (Redding, 2011). From the start of the school year, this strategy establishes a school culture within which teachers share study skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Encourage a Growth Mindset</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Reflect on your mindset as a teacher</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Grow students’ mindset</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Help students develop a concrete plan for meeting their learning goals</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Use praise effectively</strong></td>
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Source: Dweck, 2006
and learning strategies and invite family guidance on self-directed learning. “Children are most likely to become avid readers, skilled learners, and self-confident, socially adept, respectful, and responsible human beings when they are part of a community of people working together on their behalf” (Redding, 2011, p. 18).

Schools might outline a home-school compact that outlines suggested responsibilities of students, teachers, and parents. Home-school compacts rely on voluntary agreements from parents and educators and, therefore, could be a starting point for discussions between parents and educators (Moles & Fege, 2011). A compact might be developed as part of a school improvement plan that engages feedback from educators, community members, and parents. These compacts could be shared through communications sent home as well as verbally during parent-teacher meetings and open houses offered at the school. The compact then could be evaluated at annual school advisory council meetings for effectiveness in encouraging family involvement.

Sharing school goals with parents sends the message that the school values parental involvement. Epstein (2011) discusses the “overlapping spheres of influence” and how the six ways parents can become involved (parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating within the community) promote the perspective that school-family partnerships help students succeed academically. Including parents in school decision-making about education policies and developing parent leaders in this capacity creates true partnerships of parents and educators working toward shared goals for students’ learning.

**Encourage Parents to Create a Learning Environment in the Home**

Parental behaviors are instrumental in cultivating a climate for children’s motivation by establishing activities and resources in the home during the early elementary years that set the stage for learning in later years (Wigfield et al., 2006). For instance, providing reading materials and reading to preschool children predicts children’s later reading achievement and motivation. Wigfield et al. recommend that parents organize and arrange their children’s activities at home in order to promote opportunities to increase children’s interest and competence in these areas. Children are most likely to acquire those learning strategies that their parents afford them the opportunity to practice. With effective home-school communication, for example, Mia’s teacher might suggest her parents encourage Mia to take time at home to reflect on short-term, realistic academic goals and mathematical strategies she can apply to help her succeed.

Successful efforts to create an effective home learning environment include using homework folders to engage in two-way communication to keep parents abreast of school learning, sending home learning materials that reinforce skills being taught by the teacher, and creating home summer packets to reinforce learning strategies learned over the year (Epstein, 2011). Given the growing popularity of educational technology, more teachers are complementing homework activity with online learning resources. Teachers can suggest self-regulated learning resources to be used in connection with homework. Even hypermedia environments, with embedded scaffolds or instructional aids, have the potential to increase students’ self-regulated learning (Azvedo, Cromley, Winters, Moos, & Greene, 2005; Pedersen & Liu, 2002). Use of technology and homework is discussed further below.

However, parent involvement efforts will meet with limited success unless they address parental efficacy for helping their children succeed in school (Hoover-Dempsey, 2011). Educators can take proactive steps to empower parents in their involvement with children’s schooling and cultivating children’s self-regulatory strategies. Overall, parents will be motivated to encourage students’ self-regulated learning if teachers communicate the benefits of self-regulated learning skills and share some established learning strategies (Zimmerman, Bonner, & Kovach, 1996). Teachers can empower parents by communicating the effectiveness of these strategies for promoting their children’s learning and how influential their involvement is to their children’s academic success.

**Encourage Parents to Model Effective Strategies**

Educators might encourage parents’ modeling of self-regulated learning skills when they sit down to help children with homework. Even students not experiencing academic difficulties may use inefficient study strategies (Zimmerman et al., 1996). Children can internalize strategies from watching role models employ effective organizational skills, prioritize goals, monitor their progress, manage their time, and apply problem-solving strategies to cope with learning challenges (Schunk, 1998; Xu & Corno, 2003). Parents can help their children become reflective thinkers as they embark on academic tasks in the home. For
example, Mia’s parents can cue her to reflect on the steps she needs to take, what information is necessary to complete the task, and what resources are available to aid her mathematical learning. Overall, when a parent shares task-related skills with their children, children show enhanced performance, display higher-quality study strategies, and demonstrate better metacognitive understanding of academic tasks (Werdenschlag, Hernandez, & Moely, 1993).

However, students must be motivated to learn from the parent model. Students are more likely to model the behaviors of people when they believe the behavior will be helpful in their own lives (Bandura, 1986). When models practice what they preach, they validate their claim that the behavior is appropriate and useful (Schunk, Pintrich, & Meece, 2008). “Parental support for their children’s academic self-regulatory development is essential for the youngster’s valuing and internalization of these skills” (Zimmerman et al., 1996, p. 135). When children pay attention to how their parents display persistence, intellectual curiosity, and flexibility when solving problems, they learn adaptive thinking dispositions (Jeffrey, 2007).

Therefore, teachers might communicate to parents the importance of taking the time to convey the practical utility of the skills being demonstrated. To help open this discussion, the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) publishes a series of reports designed for schools to send home to assist parents in their child’s home learning. One recent report on the topic of setting goals shares tips for parents on helping their child pick meaningful goals, map out small steps on the path to achieve those goals, take responsibility for realizing their goals, and celebrate their efforts (NAESP, 2014). Students might be asked to include a structured interview with a family member in order to gain feedback and reflect on their learning. Weekly planners, homework logs, or checklists can focus students’ attention on time management of homework activity and effective motivational strategies (Bembenutty, 2011; Ramdass & Zimmerman, 2011). Teachers and parents can then use these self-assessments to show students their strengths and weaknesses in managing their own learning.

**Design Meaningful Homework That Fosters Students’ Independent Learning**

Family involvement is a critical factor in making the homework process a rewarding experience (Salend, Duhaney, Anderson, & Gottschalk, 2004). In contrast to the more teacher-directed activity of the classroom, homework assignments present ideal opportunities for students to increase learning autonomy, develop study habits, practice independent learning and time management skills, and reflect on their performance (Cooper et al., 2012; Epstein, 2011; Ramdass & Zimmerman, 2011). Meaningful homework activities complement classroom instruction, generate genuine interest in learning, connect school learning to real-life applications, and engage parental assistance (Bembenutty, 2011).

Learning becomes meaningful with authentic, problem-based activities that involve real-world tasks. Problem-based learning (PBL) assignments encourage student autonomy by engaging them in time-management, self-monitoring, and information-seeking activities and asking them to apply what they have learned to the problem situation (Loyens, Kirschner, & Paas, 2012). For example, parents might encourage students’ mapping skills as they navigate their neighborhood to locate important landmarks like the fire station, police station, grocery store, and post office. Students working with PBL demonstrate higher levels of elaborative learning strategies, critical thinking, and self-regulation in comparison to students instructed in a more traditional teacher and textbook-centered fashion (Sungur & Tekkaya, 2006).

The use of educational technology during homework is of particular interest, given rates of children’s exposure—both in and outside of the classroom. Children are introduced early on to tablets, e-readers, and smartphones that can be used for exponential learning opportunities when based on research and developmentally appropriate practices (McManis & Gunnewig, 2012). Use of technology can enhance students’ abstract reasoning, planning behavior, literacy, and mathematical skills, but children working with a mentor make the most substantial gains (McManis & Gunnewig, 2012). As discussed in Table 2, children learn best when activities are designed around central pillars at the core of learning research, in that they are engaged with meaningful experiences that relate to their lives, interact with others who scaffold their learning, and receive praise for effort that encourages a growth mindset and sense of control over their capacity to learn (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2015).

However, it is essential that parental help does not hinder the self-regulatory behaviors we wish homework activity to promote. Parental autonomy support, or the extent to which parents use strategies that encourage students’ independent
### Table 2. Technology and Homework

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<th>Tip</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Example</th>
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| Make assignments authentic and meaningful | Provide meaningful connections between app content and children’s lives, roles in the school community, and the academic domains they are studying. | • The Human Body app provides interactive multimedia representations of the human skeletal, circulatory, and digestive systems (http://tinybop.com/apps/the-human-body). With adult guidance during children’s exploration, superficial sensory experiences can be transformed into genuine inquiry about processes in their own bodies.  
• Plants encourages children to investigate interactive dioramas, discover plant life cycles, and “befriend dozens of species” (http://tinybop.com/apps/plants).  
• Online virtual field trips to a museum or historical sites like the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History (www.mnh.si.edu/panoramas/) or visit aerial 3D panoramas across the globe (www.airpano.com/google_map.php). |
| Align with learning goals | Work using educational technology should have clear alignment with curriculum and learning goals. | • Motion Math: Pizza! is a simulation game that embeds math concepts into a simulation of running a pizzeria (http://motionmathgames.com/motion-math-pizza/). The app encourages elementary students’ proportional thinking and mathematical strategies as they buy ingredients, design pizzas, and sell them to customers. The app targets Common Core Math Standards, including addition, multiplication, and word-problems. |
| Individualize and scaffold activities and pace | Allow children to proceed at their own pace, gain progressive access to more advanced content, and make adaptations to suit children’s individual needs (particularly important for children with special learning needs or who are dual language learners). | • TenMarks is a math resource schools for students in K-12 that provides math questions by grade level with visuals, hints, and tutorials students can access as needed. Questions are modeled after question format common to standardized tests and are designed around current curriculum standards (www.tenmarks.com/curriculum).  
• Online homework improves homework communication and completion, and serves as a useful tool for individualizing homework that is particularly effective for students with disabilities. A seamless feedback loop between students and teachers provides a chance to give more immediate feedback to facilitate understanding and provide extra scaffolding, and can be interactive and social with other students. For example, Google Classroom is a tool in Google Apps for Education that helps educators create lessons and discussions, provide feedback, easily communicate with their classes, and go paperless. |
| Allow for social contexts | Allow opportunities for young students to think out loud and verbalize their reasoning to parents and thereby enhance their understanding of the problem. | • Alien Assignment creates a scavenger hunt in which the young student takes photos to help a family of aliens fix their spaceship (www.funeducationalapps.com/2015/05/alien-assignment-a-fun-problem-solving-app-for-the-whole-family.html). For example, they have to take photos of objects that will solve problems, like finding something that will hold water or serve as a helmet. Parents review pictures to see if they fit the description. The app is designed to support literacy, creativity, and problem-solving through interactions between children and their parents. |

Sources: Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2015; McManis & Gunnewig, 2012; Salend et al., 2004
problem solving, choice, and self-determination, is most associated with academic motivation and self-regulated learning (Grolnick, 2009; Sha, Looi, Chen, Sewo, & Wong, 2012). While homework activity encourages self-regulated learning, parental oversight that is over-controlling may hinder students’ self-regulated learning (Bembenutty, 2011; Epstein, 2011; Xu et al., 2010). Overall, Xu et al. point out that parents need to “provide the types of homework help that communicate ‘choices’ and allow children to actually complete their own homework” (p. 261).

Therefore, teachers might offer suggestions about how parents can support children’s self-reliance, rather than inadvertently over-controlling homework activity and stifling students’ self-directed learning (Bembenutty, 2011). Educators might then design a schedule of interactive homework and provide information to families describing how to help students with homework that is designed to provide students experiences in setting learning goals, identifying helpful learning resources and strategies, allocating their study time to prioritized learning goals, and dealing with distractions (Epstein, 2011). Across grade levels, this communication includes information about how to monitor and discuss schoolwork and help students improve skills, emphasizing that help at home includes encouraging, listening, discussing, guiding, monitoring, and praising students’ efforts.

Salend et al. (2004) outlined how online Homework Assistance Centers (HAC) can be effective at improving homework completion rates and communication with families about teachers’ homework policies and goals (see Table 3). Schools can create their own interactive HAC via a school website that includes a welcome announcement, menu of information, frequently asked questions, and guidelines that cover the expected timeframe for a teacher’s response, homework policies, and

Table 3. Suggestions for Implementing an Online Homework Assistance Center

| Staggered introduction of web options | • At the start of the school year, introduce students and family to the site and how to access it. Proceed gradually and start homework-based sites with limited features, adding features as students and families become comfortable with the center.  
• Begin building in homework assignments, models and rubrics, how homework connects to educational standards, and electronic calendars of short- and long-term assignments.  
• Later options might be connecting to online educational resources that link to specific assignments, and online homework groups (chat rooms with specified times for homework assistance for teachers, students, and their families). |
| Resources on effective strategies | • Share study and self-regulatory skills and ask families and students to reflect on time management and the study environment in the home.  
• Share information about what constitutes plagiarism on the internet as well as how to be good connoisseurs of web content. |
| Online homework assistance | • When students submit responses online, it allows for immediate feedback and directions to online resources to extend students’ learning.  
• Also being considered are homework hotlines that allow for person-to-person connections where teachers field students’ questions in real time (Revenaugh, 2000). |
| Allow for family feedback | • A digital suggestions box or email will allow for examining families’ feedback on efficiency and effectiveness of web-based Homework Assistance Center. |
| Evaluate effectiveness and accessibility of program | • Collect data to examine extent of families’ access to technology or barriers to such access. Provide a list of free or low-cost resources, like the local public library, and print hard copies of materials for those who cannot access online materials.  
• Collect data to examine changes to students’ learning, mastery of standards, and homework completion. |

Source: Salend et al., 2004
appropriate type and level of family member assistance. Such an HAC can be helpful, given findings from research on homework indicating that families often need guidance to best support student learning at home (Van Voorhis, 2011). However, Salend et al. appropriately point out that any web-based system should be considered only one aspect of a multifaceted approach to home-school communication that complements face-to-face interactions with families.

**Promote Open Communication With All Families**

Technology such as e-mail and interactive school websites allow for two-way communication that may facilitate parent involvement, including parents from culturally and socio-economically diverse backgrounds (Smith, Wohlstetter, Kuzin, & DePedro, 2011). Teachers and parents can work together to support students’ strategy learning via a medium that allows parents to communicate with teachers in a way that is sensitive to their work schedules. Educators can maintain ongoing home-school communication about how to support student learning and respond to student and family concerns as they arise throughout the school year (Van Voorhis, 2011).

Communication between parents and educators, and between parents and children, also occurs via students’ homework and school assignments (Epstein, 2011). Communication may continue through parent-teacher conferences, especially for students whom teachers identify to be struggling during activities that require more self-regulated learning. It is especially important for teachers to be aware of children’s history and review students’ work folders, assessments, self-evaluations, and learning journals. Students like Mia would benefit from home-school communication efforts to create the foundation of self-regulated learning skills that will restore her confidence about mathematical learning. Concerns can be communicated and discussed with parents as both parties collaborate on developing concrete goals and milestones for the student’s self-regulated learning.

Dialogue between home and school must be sensitive to the diversity of family backgrounds and circumstances. Given the various languages spoken in the home, teams of educators and parents can collaborate to provide information to parents who do not speak or read English to ensure these parents can communicate with teachers (Epstein, 2011). Some parents from diverse cultural backgrounds may consider appropriate involvement to be more informal activities that take place outside the school, such as providing nurturance, engaging in meaningful
conversations with their children, encouraging their independence, and assisting with homework (Bower & Griffin, 2011; Lopez, Scribner, & Mahititvanichcha, 2001). While perspectives on how to define parental involvement may differ, parents and educators can collaborate on the shared goal of encouraging students’ learning and providing the learning strategies to succeed academically.

Conclusion
Substantial research has illuminated the academic benefits of encouraging students’ self-regulated learning skills. One viable avenue for maximizing students’ exposure to beneficial learning strategies may be parent involvement. Through effective parent involvement strategies, educators of young children can help students like Mia become self-directed learners who can set realistic task goals, understand the importance of adapting their use of learning strategies, and build confidence in overcoming the inevitable hurdles of learning. Such a motivational disposition, and growth mindset, will support students’ learning throughout their school years and help them be successful in the classroom and in their professional lives.

References


