Resource 3
Overcoming Homework Struggles

Use this tool to help students overcome homework struggles.

Take the time to teach homework.

Introduce homework slowly and provide plenty of time for students to practice the routine under your guidance before expecting them to do it at home independently.

Many educators suggest that during the first six weeks of school, primary grade students should complete all written homework in class. Older students should do the same for the first two to four weeks. During this practice period, teachers and students should work to define expectations for high-quality homework.

It's never too late to back up.

No matter what time of the year, if your students are struggling with homework, spend a week or two re-introducing homework to your class.

Be flexible and individualize as needed.

Differentiated homework, like differentiated instruction, will be more work for you in the short run, but the long-term pay-off of student success will be worth the effort.

Homework should be respectful of the student’s ability and developmental level, related to classroom work and, where possible, connected to the interest of the individual student.

Other modifications might include arranging for a student to get help with a homework assignment from a parent or sibling, modifying the way in which an assignment is done. For example, dictating rather than writing, or having a parent read a chapter from a textbook rather than the child reading it him/herself.

Involve parents in creating solutions to homework struggles.

Send a letter to parents at the beginning of the school year explaining the homework policy, expectations and enlisting parent support. Offer guidelines for setting up a space and time for homework and a checklist for homework expectations.

Write your own “Homework Manual” as a class project, perhaps including a “homework hint” from each student. Send the manual home to parents.
Follow-up

If students still forget or don’t finish their homework use logical, creative consequences that send the message that completing homework is a requirement of being a member of the class.

Make homework the students’ ticket into homeroom. Do not allow hanging out with friends or participating in the whole group until the homework assignment is completed.

Have the student who does not have his/her homework go directly to a buddy teacher’s classroom, to the library or to the guidance counselor’s office to complete it.

For the frequent “non-finisher”, a more careful, proactive approach of “incremental success” can be used:

1. Have a conference with the student to ascertain what the problem is and let him/her know you are willing to work together on this.

2. Then ask the student what a reasonable number of math problems is for a night’s assignment. If the student says “none,” say, “That’s not an option.” If he/she says “Three,” say, “Great! Bring in three beautifully done problems tomorrow.”

3. When the student brings in the completed homework, present him/her with a “learning log” or record sheet that you have prepared for him/her to keep track of progress. In it the student records successes and failures, ups and downs for a month or two.

4. Check in frequently with the student during this time and review his/her progress and adjust assignments accordingly.

5. At the end of the trial period, with more success than failure now a daily occurrence, decide together when to eliminate the log.