

Celebrate Us
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QUESTION

Will incorporating students' culture into the homework assignments in sixth grade improve parental involvement, resulting in an increase of students' completed homework, and ultimately impacting their academic achievement?

RATIONALE

One of the most important goals of any educator, (and certainly one of the goals of this action research project) was to increase academic achievement. There has never been a doubt in my mind that parental involvement plays a key role in the students' academic success. Therefore, the key factor in my action research was to understand the Haitian culture and the other cultures of the community and find a way to peak the interest of the students and their families so they would have a desire to become involved with their child's education. In Alphonse Kohn's article "Misusing Research: Homework and Other Examples, he refers to Corno's" (1996) he states, "The best teachers vary their use of homework according to students' interests and capabilities." When I incorporated students' culture into the homework assignments this motivated the parents and students to become more involved in their homework. According to Cotton (1989) there is an overwhelming amount of research that has already proven that increasing parental involvement can increase students' academic achievement, therefore parental involvement became the critical rationale for my action research project.

I have been a teacher in Miami Dade County Public Schools for the past 25 years. I have devoted my teaching career to inner city students from lower socioeconomic homes that receive free and reduced price lunches.

The setting for this action research project took place in an elementary school that houses three sixth grade classrooms. During the study I was teaching Geography to three different classes along with Reading and Language Arts to one class.

Students who attended the school lived in a large urban community and there were approximately 970 students enrolled at the time of this study. Seventy-five percent were Haitian, seventeen percent African American, eight percent Hispanic and zero percent Caucasian. The majority of students were of African American and Haitian decent. The school was labeled a “Title One” school based on the amount of students that received free and reduced lunch. The most difficult challenge I faced within this multicultural community is increasing parental involvement and getting students’ homework completed and turned in on time. I recognized the importance of increasing academic achievement and believed there was a direct correlation between home learning and student achievement; therefore, my rationale for this action research was based on the need to increase parental involvement and to enhance academic performance.

As educators we are well aware that our classrooms should be culturally sensitive, and the results of numerous studies have already proven the importance of teachers being culturally sensitive and integrating the culture of their students into the classroom. When contemplating my action research project I knew that I wanted to get parents involved and that I needed to see a boost in the percentage of students that turned in homework. Based on the information gathered from both parents and students, there was a longing to increase parental involvement at home. Based on research, data, and school climate surveys there was a general agreement that my 6th

grade class needed more parental involvement related to homework assignments. It was my hope that this involvement would improve students' academic achievement.

REVIEW OF RELEVANT RESEARCH

Research indicates that for schools in multicultural settings there is a need to incorporate the culture of the students into the curriculum in order to improve parental involvement and to assist students in completing their homework. According to Nye, (1998) the students in grades six through twelve that complete more homework will do better in school than the students that do not complete homework (1998). The research indicates that the attitudes of parents towards homework also play a key role in the educational process of their child. They explain that the attitude of parents in respect to studying at home has a direct effect on their child's attitude toward homework, and will effect their child's academic achievement. They further explain with regards to parental involvement that a parent can pass his or her attitude towards homework to the child, which will affect their child's education.

According to *Carter, (2002) for three decades the research has proven that parental involvement has contributed significantly in many ways to improving students' success in school (2002). Author Leon Lynn, (1997) recognizes the importance of parental involvement to the extent that a national infrastructure is recommended to support teachers in getting parent support.* While examining the research about whether or not increasing parental involvement can increase academic achievement I found that most research, if not all, supported my rationale for my action research.

Francine Johnson pointed out that there are some teachers that are not able to understand the complexity, diversity and social issues that can influence the development and progress of

the student (2001). Johnson explains that every teacher needs to understand the students' families and the role they play in the student's educational process. I believe infusing students' culture into homework assignments will help the teacher understand the students' families and assist them in their education. In "Building Communities of Learners" (McCaleb, 1994) there is a strong emphasis on the importance of making a connection with parents and building a partnership between the community and the school. Most research indicates that parents of diverse cultures are not involved with their children's educational processes due to the fact that they are not sure of how to become involved. It is the educational community's responsibility to assist parents in becoming involved with their children's educations.

THE STUDY

A sixth grade student was released from class, the student was eager to get home but turned around for just a moment and looked up at the teacher with a big grin and says, "My father told me last night that your homework touches his heart." Did I ever imagine that I could touch the heart of one of the families I taught? As teachers, we always hope to touch the hearts of our students, but I never expected to hear that I have touched the heart of a student's parent. After implementing my action research on incorporating students' culture into their homework, that's exactly what I was able to do, touch the hearts of the families of the community. My action research study took a new and different approach to learning through incorporating the culture of the students and community into the educational process. I called the project I created for my classroom "Celebrate Us."

INTERVENTION

During this project, the students, parents, community members and educators worked together to educate, motivate, and embrace the diverse cultures that make up the community. Students participated in hands on activities that focused on all aspects of the students' heritage and country of origin. Parents and students were given a survey at the beginning and end of the project to compare their involvement and perceptions on the need to be involved in their child's educational process (see appendices). For the first four weeks of the study students were given regular homework assignments from the text without any infusion of their respective cultures. After the first four weeks I began to infuse culture into the curriculum and homework assignments.

The students started their projects by maintaining a family journal and researching their culture, country of origin, and family heritage. Students were required to write a daily reflection in their family journals. These reflections were related to their culture and family experiences. The students had to discuss questions with a family member and reflect on the question in their journal. Students were required to create a family tree and map out the location of each family member's birthplace. Community members became involved through field trips, interviews, and guest speakers. Through research, technology, discussions, journals and field trips the students were required to create an extensive report and presentation based on their heritage and country of origin. The sixth graders improved their skills in Language Arts, Reading, and Geography. At the end of the project, the class was involved in creating a multicultural luncheon. Students and their parents prepared all of the dishes and shared music from their countries for the luncheon.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

1. A parent and student survey was given at beginning of the project.
2. The assignments were kept the same for four weeks of school without incorporating students' and parents' cultures into the homework assignments.
3. Over the course of the next four weeks I incorporated the parents' and students' cultures into the homework assignments. Students needed to involve their parents in order to complete the assignment. I attempted to make the assignments culturally unbiased, incorporate students' cultures and I slowly increased the need for parental involvement in order for the students to complete the assignment.
4. At the end of the project I compared the amount of homework assignments turned in during the first four weeks to the amount of homework turned in during the following four weeks, after culture was incorporated into the assignments
5. I recorded each student's grade for each subject before the infusion of culture, as well as, the student's grade for each subject after the infusion of culture. These grades were totaled, averaged, and compared with each other to see if there was a gain in academic achievement.
6. A second survey was given at the conclusion of the study and compared with the first survey to see if parental involvement did increase.
7. I compared students' fifth grade FCAT results to their sixth grade FCAT results in Reading and Language Arts.

DATA COLLECTION

Figure 1 indicates the amount of minutes parents spent reading with their children in fifth grade.

Figure 2 indicates the amount of minutes parents spent reading to their child during the project.

Figure 3 indicates the students' point of view of the amount of minutes parents spent reading

with them in fifth grade. Figure 4 indicates the amount of minutes students said their parents read to them during the project.

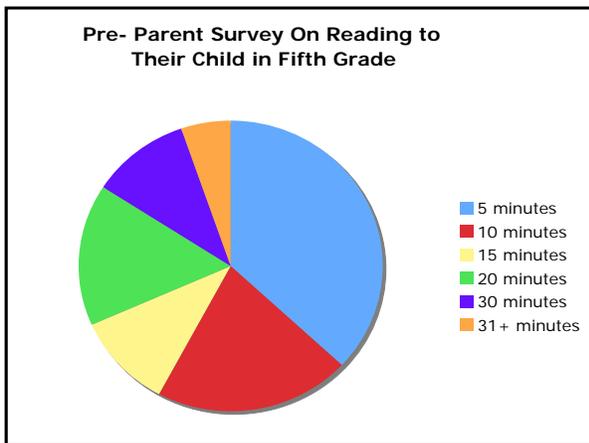


Fig. 1

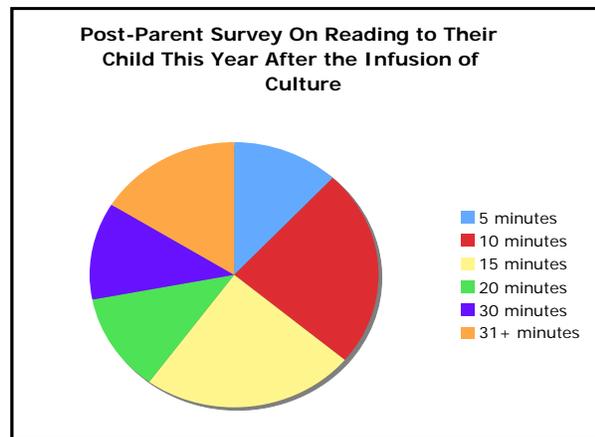


Fig. 2

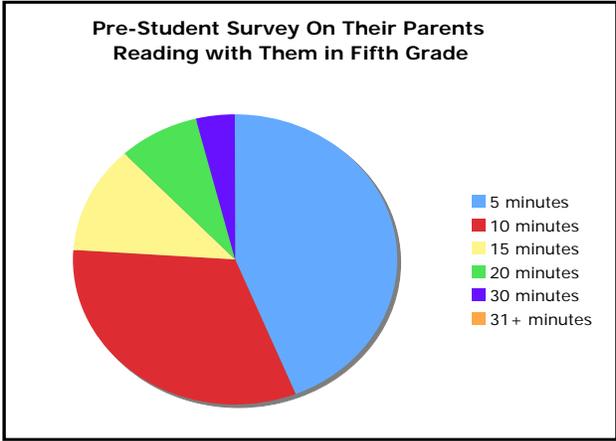


Fig. 3

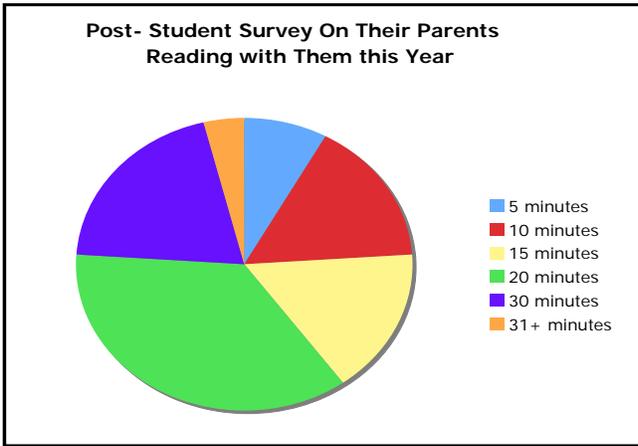


Fig. 4

Figure 5 indicates the amount of minutes parents indicated they spent assisting their child with homework in fifth grade. Figure 6 is the amount of time parents indicated they spent assisting their child with homework during the project “Celebrate Us. Figure 7 indicates the amount of time students said their parents assisted them with homework in the fifth grade. Figure 8 indicates the amount of time students felt their parents assisted them with homework during the project “Celebrate Us.”

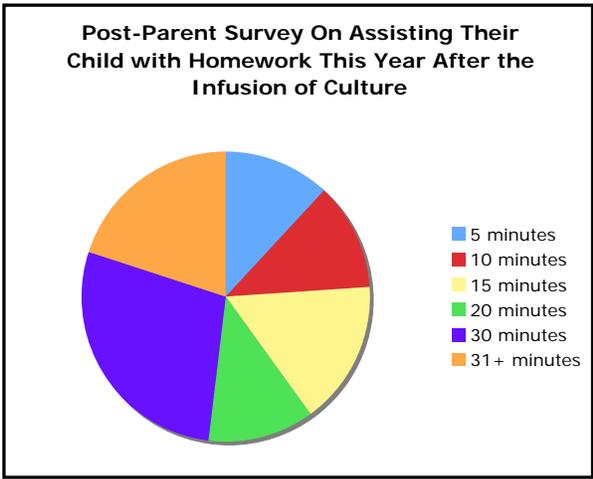
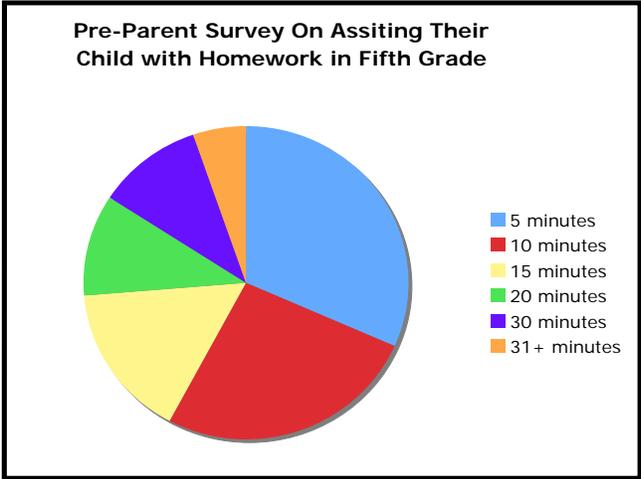


Fig. 5

Fig. 6

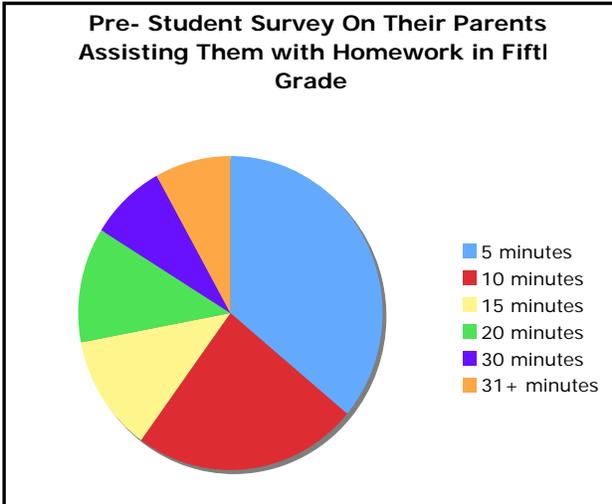


Fig. 7

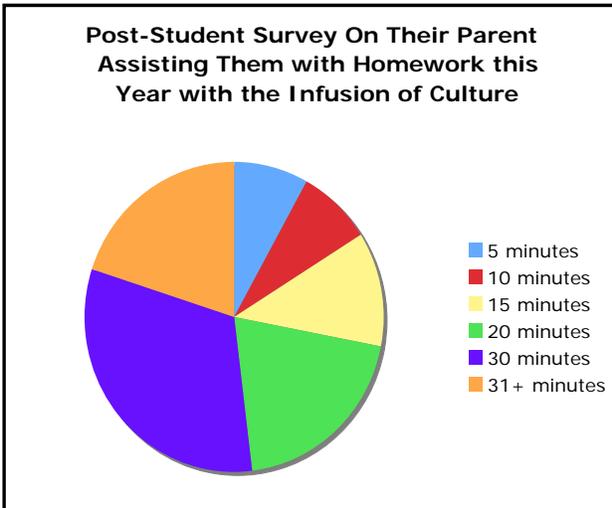


Fig. 8

When reviewing the surveys from both the parents and students there was a clear increase in parental involvement with homework once the homework assignments incorporated the students' culture. The most significant increase in parent time spent with their child was when "Celebrate Us" was implemented.

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT DATA CHARTS

Figure 9 reflects the students' grade in each subject for the first four weeks with out infusion of culture and the second four weeks with the infusion of culture. The grades were then totaled and averaged to determine the amount of gain or loss.

Student	Pre- Reading	Post- Reading	Pre - Lang Arts.	Post- Lang. Arts.	Pre- Geography	Post- Geography
1. H.A	80	85	80	85	79	85
2. S.B.	80	85	80	80	90	90
3.S.B.2	80	80	79	85	79	80
4.R.B.	89	90	95	99	89	95
5.K.C.	79	85	79	90	80	85
6.S.C.	85	85	95	95	89	85
7. J.C.	75	80	75	80	80	85
8.M.E.	75	79	75	80	70	75
9.M.F.	79	80	75	86	89	90
10.G.F.	79	79	85	85	79	85
11.J.F.	75	79	75	80	80	90
12.D.F.	80	85	79	90	80	80
13.T.G.	79	80	85	90	85	80
14.R.G.	80	80	85	89	80	85
15.W.H.	89	95	80	85	79	80
16.V.J.	80	90	89	89	79	85
17.T.J.	79	80	80	75	80	89
18.T.M.	85	80	80	80	85	89
19.A.M.	85	80	85	89	80	85
20.H.M.	75	79	80	85	95	95
21.D.N.	75	79	69	75	89	89
22.R.P.	75	80	80	85	80	85
23.K.S.	80	80	80	89	75	80
24.R.S.	70	75	70	75	60	70
25.D.S.	80	89	70	75	69	75
26.S.T.	75	70	80	85	70	75
Total	1986	2052	2085	2201	2090	2187
Average	76.38	78.92	80.19	84.65	80.38	84.11

Fig. 9

GRAPH OF STUDENTS' ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Figure 10 shows the academic average of the students with and without the infusion of culture.

There was a significant gain with regards to academic achievement in all subjects after the infusion of culture.

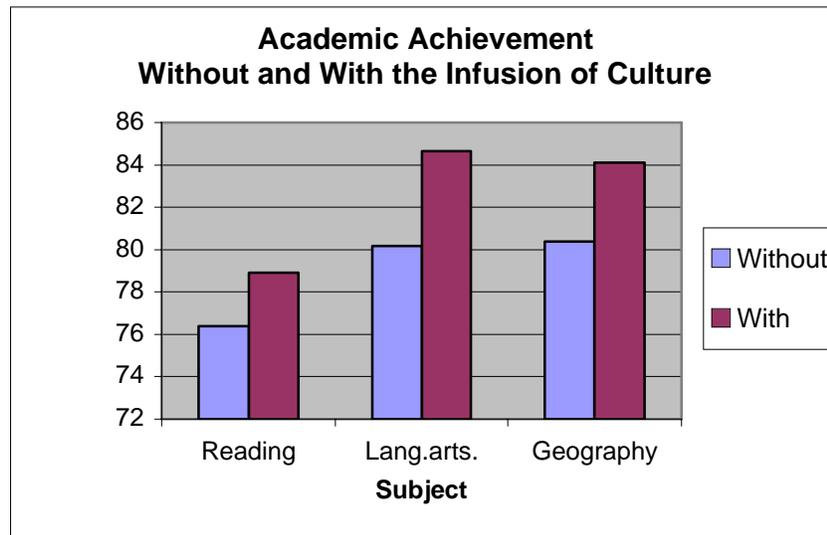
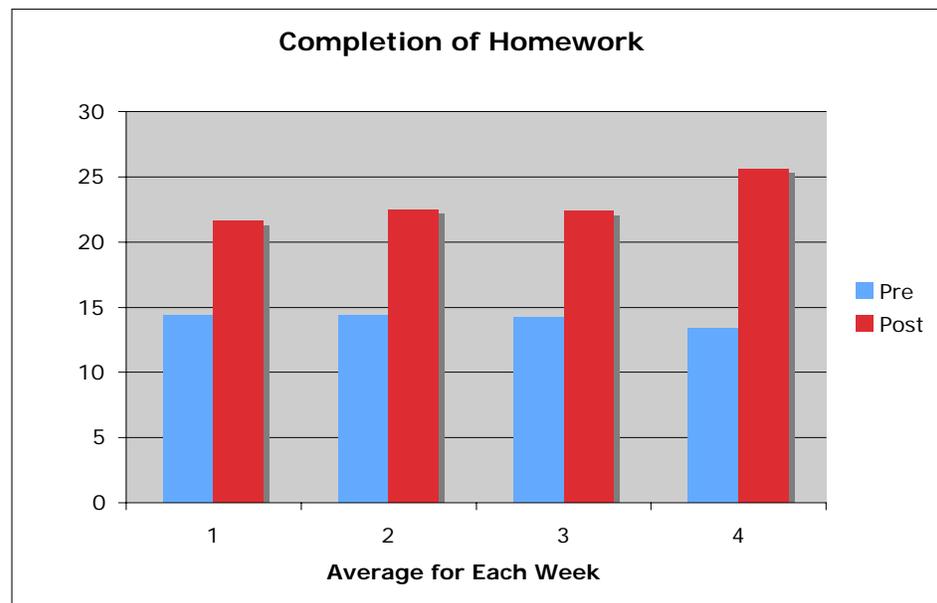


Fig. 10

Graph of Completion of Homework With and Without Incorporating Culture

Figure 11 represents the average amount of homework turned in during the first four weeks of the project without the infusion of culture and the average amount of homework turned in during



the second four weeks of the project with the infusion of culture.

Fig. 11

When comparing the data from figure 11 and 12, the students' performance increased significantly when "Celebrate Us" was implemented. There was a significant gain in the amount of homework that was turned in once the assignments infused culture. The results of the project "Celebrate Us" supported my theory that incorporating students' culture into home learning improved parental involvement and academic achievement resulting in an increase in the amount of students' that completed homework assignments.

Another indication of the success of my research study was that both the parents and students were asked if they enjoyed the assignments that related to their family's culture and the following responses were given. Out of the 22 parent surveys that were returned 11 strongly agreed with that statement, 9 agreed, 1 was not sure and 1 strongly disagreed. This shows that over all, 90% of the parents that returned the survey enjoyed doing assignments that related to their respective culture with their child.

Out of 26 children's surveys that were returned 10 strongly agreed with that statement, 12 agreed, 2 were not sure and 2 strongly disagreed. Over all 84% of the students agreed with their parents and enjoyed assignments that involved interaction with their parents and incorporated their respective culture.

The final indication of the success of my action research study was when I compared the students' fifth grade FCAT test results to their sixth grade FCAT test results and found that there was an average increase of 8% in students' scores.

CONCLUSION

This project was designed to create a bond between parents, students and schools, as well as to foster cultural pride within the community. Even though I did the project “Celebrate Us” with all three Geography classes I taught, for the purpose of my action research I elected to report on my homeroom classroom. My rationale for this was that I also taught these students Reading, Language Arts, and Geography, which enabled me to incorporate more culture into their homework assignments. I also wanted to infuse the culture into the curriculum and into the homework as much as possible and having my homeroom students for three hours gave me more time to accomplish this.

After reviewing and comparing all collected data it was evident that “Celebrate Us” was successful in increasing parental involvement, in helping students to complete their homework and increasing the students self esteem along with developing cultural appreciation and respect. Ultimately, this project increased the academic performance of the students as well.

One can conclude from the results of this action research study that we as teachers need to be culturally sensitive to the students in our classroom. Cultivating a caring community by incorporating the cultures of our students into the lessons and homework assignments will peak the interest of the students in the class. Ultimately, incorporating the various cultures of the community into the educational process will increase parental involvement and academic achievement. Breaching cultural barriers will motivate both parent and student to participate in the educational process. As a result of the success of my action research project, I will continue to infuse the cultures of my students into the curriculum. Next year, I have decided to enhance my project “Celebrate Us” by applying for a grant. I plan to purchase disposable cameras for the students and let them take pictures at home. These pictures will be used in creating a family

book. Activities that embrace the culture of the families we teach will touch all of our hearts. To quote Hillary Clinton “it takes a village to raise a child.” In other words, the school, the family, and the community cannot do it alone. We must raise children together and embrace the village in which we live. Empowering, acknowledging, understanding, and respecting all ethnicities in the classroom will make all the difference in the world.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

This was an action research study conducted by an individual teacher researcher. The researcher makes no claim that this is generalized to other settings. Results of this project indicate that all districts and states should develop curricula that incorporate the various cultures of all communities. It is recommended that support be given from school districts, state and local governments to train and prepare teachers in increasing family involvement and support. The development and implementation of programs that incorporate and cultivate a culturally sensitive approach to education and integrate parental involvement into the educational process will benefit all (families) stakeholders. An effort should be made to improve student and parental attitudes towards homework. Provide parental involvement training to parents in need of assistance.

FURTHER RESEARCH

There is a need for further research to see if students’ academic achievement increases after an entire year of incorporating the students’ culture into homework assignments. There is a need to further research the effect culturally infused assignments have on the motivation of

students to learn, and their self esteem. There is a need for further research that investigates the need for family involvement training and its influence on student achievement.

Biography:

Patti Ward is a graduate of Barry University, with a Bachelors of Science Cum Laude 1981. She received a Masters of Urban Education from F.I.U. in 1992. She has twenty-five years teaching experience in Miami- Dade County Schools. She has been selected four times for “Who’s Who of American Teachers,” selected as Chapter One teacher of the year, a directing teacher of 5 interns, a MetLife TNLI Fellow and has been awarded grants from Cedar’s Medical Center, Adopt a Classroom, and Citibank.

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Appendix

Samples of Surveys

Example 1: Parent Survey Before Project

Appendix A

Dear Parent(s),

This year your child will be involved in special projects and homework that will require parent involvement. I am trying to survey all of my parents to get an idea of the ways that we can help parents assist their children with homework assignments. Please take the time to answer these questions to the best of your knowledge. Circle the answer that you feel is correct concerning when your child did the homework assignments last year. Please answer all the questions the way it best describes your situation at home. This will only help me get a better understanding of you and your child and it is completely confidential!

Thank you

1. Last year we/I spent about _____ minutes a day reading or discussing the stories with my child.
 - a. 5 minutes
 - b. 10 minutes
 - c. 15 minutes
 - d. 20 minutes
 - e. 30 minutes
 - f. More than 30 minutes

2. Last year I/we spent about _____ minutes a day helping my child with the homework assignments.
 - g. 5 minutes
 - h. 10 minutes
 - i. 15 minutes
 - j. 20 minutes
 - k. 30 minutes
 - l. More than 30 minutes

3. I/ We would like to spend ____ minutes a day reading or discussing the stories with my child if it were possible.
 - m. 5 minutes
 - n. 10 minutes
 - o. 15 minutes
 - p. 20 minutes
 - q. 30 minutes
 - r. More than 30 minutes

4. I/We would like to spend ____ minutes a day this year helping my child with the homework assignments if it were possible.

- a. 5 minutes
- b. 10 minutes
- c. 15 minutes
- d. 20 minutes
- e. 30 minutes
- f. More than 30 minutes

5. As a parent and teacher I know there are many reasons for not being able to assist your child. What would you say is the main reason you are not always able to assist your child?

- a. I don't have a problem assisting my child.
 - b. I work at night.
 - c. Too busy with the house, family...
 - d. I don't understand the English Language.
 - e. My child didn't get much work.
 - f. My child doesn't want or need my help.
 - g. I don't understand the assignments.
 - h. Other and please explain _____
-

Thank you so much for taking the time out to complete this survey. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

Example 2: Student Survey Before Project Appendix B

Please circle the correct answer that you feel is correct concerning when you did your homework assignments last year.

1. My parent(s) spent about _____ minutes a day reading with me last year.

- a. 5 minutes
- b. 10 minutes
- c. 15 minutes
- d. 20 minutes
- e. 30 minutes
- f. More than 30 minutes

2. My parent(s) spent _____ minutes a day helping me with my homework assignments last year.

- g. 5 minutes
- h. 10 minutes
- i. 15 minutes
- j. 20 minutes
- k. 20 minutes
- l. More than 30 minutes

3. I would like my parent(s) to spend ____ minutes a day reading with me.

- m. 5 minutes
- n. 10 minutes
- o. 15 minutes
- p. 20 minutes
- q. 30 minutes
- r. More than 30 minutes

4. I would like my parent(s) to spend ____ minutes a day this year helping me with my homework assignments.

- g. 5 minutes
- h. 10 minutes
- i. 15 minutes
- j. 20 minutes
- k. 30 minutes
- l. More than 30 minutes

5. The reason my parent(s) can not spend more time helping me is because

Example 3: Parent Survey after Project Appendix C

Dear Parent(s),

As you know our class completed a special project named “Celebrate Us” in which you were required to assist your child in completing homework and reading with them. Please take the time to answer the questions to the best of your knowledge. Circle the answer that you feel is correct concerning when your child did the homework assignments during the project. Please answer all the questions the way it best describes your situation at home. This will only help me get a better understanding of you and your child and is completely confidential!

1. This year we/I spent about _____ minutes a day reading or discussing the stories with my child.

- a. 5 minutes
- b. 10 minutes
- c. 15 minutes
- d. 20 minutes
- e. 30 minutes
- f. More than 30 minutes

2. This year I/we spent about _____ minutes a day helping my child with the homework assignments.

- g. 5 minutes
- h. 10 minutes
- i. 15 minutes

- j. 20 minutes
- k. 30 minutes
- l. More than 30 minutes

3. During the “Celebrate Us” project about your child’s family and culture I/ We spent _____ minutes a day working with my child.

- m. 5 minutes
- n. 10 minutes
- o. 15 minutes
- p. 20 minutes
- q. 30 minutes
- r. More than 30 minutes

4. I/We enjoyed working on the homework assignments that related to our culture.

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Not sure
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

Example 4: Student Survey After Project Appendix D

Please circle the correct answer that you feel is correct concerning when you did your homework assignments during “Celebrate Us.”

1. My parent(s) spent about _____ minutes a day reading with me this year.

- a. 5 minutes
- b. 10 minutes
- c. 15 minutes
- d. 20 minutes
- e. 30 minutes
- f. More than 30 minutes

2. My parent(s) spent _____ minutes a day helping me with my homework assignments this year.

- g. 5 minutes
- h. 10 minutes
- i. 15 minutes
- j. 20 minutes
- k. 30 minutes
- l. More than 30 minutes

3. During the “Celebrate Us” lessons relating to my culture my parents spent about ____ time assisting me with my homework assignments.

- m. 5 minutes
- n. 10 minutes
- o. 15 minutes
- p. 20 minutes
- q. 30 minutes
- r. More than 30 minutes

4. I enjoyed working on the homework assignments that related to my culture.

- f. Strongly agree
- g. Agree
- h. Not sure
- i. Disagree
- j. Strongly disagree