Setting up a homework club at your school

IDEAS AND CONSIDERATIONS
A homework club in a school setting can offer a time for students to focus on their education in a relaxed, familiar setting where they can receive one to one support, often tailored to their specific needs. There are a broad range of models for Homework Clubs in school settings and plenty of flexibility in adjusting models to suit your school community’s needs.

These quotes indicate some of the benefits that can flow from having a Homework Club in a school setting.

“She had run-ins with most teachers. I was concerned she wasn’t coming to school. But since she’s been going to homework club, her commitment has improved and her grades greatly.” – Teacher

“She has learnt how to do a bibliography because she and I went through it. She can now use the library to get books, and knows it’s not a random system. Her teacher told me she’d done a proper bibliography as a result. And she knows you can’t quote material without acknowledging it. She’s in Year 12, but she’s only been here a short time and has no family around her. And the fact that through it all that she gets up and comes to school and will finish her exams is a good outcome.” – Homework Club coordinator

“I can finish my homework and that makes me feel excited to go to school the next day.” – Student
Initial considerations

The following key points are aspects to initially consider when establishing a homework program and are integral to a homework club’s success.

• Check for existing homework clubs in your local community (Learning Beyond the Bell has a database which can assist). Students from your school may already be attending a local community Homework Club with which you could form a partnership, especially if you need funding. There are a limited number of funding sources and funders are very unlikely to fund two Homework Clubs within close proximity.

• To ensure its long term viability it is vital that a homework club has an individual allocated to coordinate it. There are a range of people in your school community who could coordinate a homework club (see suggestions on page 3).

• Begin planning your Homework Club at least one term in advance of it starting and even longer if you will need to apply for funding for it.

• Start small and expand gradually. Run one session a week and then gauge whether there is a need for more sessions.

What is your school’s need?

Who will the homework club be for? There are several options including:

• open to the whole school.

• specific year levels or year level groupings e.g. Years 3 and 4 or VCE.

• students with specific needs e.g. low NAPLAN results, ESL students.

• transition program over a primary and secondary school for Years 5 to 8.

Why will the students be attending homework club?

Decide the main reasons students will be attending the homework club:

• to complete homework

• for extra tuition in specific subjects e.g. Maths, Science subjects

• a meeting place for teachers and students to work on a specific difficulty a student is having.

• development of study, organisational and research skills.

• a program to target students with specialised needs, such as those from a refugee background.

• specific subject or year level focuses at different sessions e.g. Maths on Monday and Literacy on Thurs or Year 7 and 8 on Tuesdays and VCE students on Wednesday and Thursday.

• as part of a transition program from primary to secondary school

• to develop oral vocabulary skills, particularly good for ESL students.

• peer tutoring to develop leadership and responsibility skills.

• increased IT skills

• foster increased friendship circles for students who are isolated.

• a homework club that is run at that same time as a program or information sessions for parents. A good way of increasing parental engagement.

• individualised or group support to students on career/education pathways

• focus on social and life skills.
Who will coordinate the program?

The success of the program relies on a dedicated coordinator. There are many people well placed to take on this role and it varies from school to school. Some schools offer extra time release to those with responsibility for this duty. Potential candidates include:

- teachers, as a part of their areas of responsibility.
- specialist teachers, this is particularly relevant if the homework club covers an area or subject they are involved with for example: ESL or maths.
- Multicultural Education Aides or other aide roles in the school
- School librarian
- somebody employed specifically for the role; this may happen if the Homework Club is run in partnership with a community organisation.

Who will tutor at the homework club?

Another key to the success of the homework club is having enough tutors including those with specialised skills to support students in particular subjects. School homework clubs obtain tutors from one or more of the following sources:

- teachers and other school staff rostered on to attend specific sessions. In a larger school this may mean they attend no more than once a term.
- other members of the school community: retired teachers, parents, teachers on maternity leave, exstudents
- peer tutors from your school or another school
- volunteer tutors obtained through the Learning Beyond the Bell Volunteer Referral Program or other Volunteer Resource Centres
- tertiary students, in particular pre-service teachers and those doing courses that require a community placement. You may also recruit those studying subjects you need expertise in, for example Chemistry.
- partnerships with community agencies or local government where some of their staff come to assist in the program. Some programs have youth workers or police officers volunteering as tutors.
- private businesses - many companies encourage staff to volunteer as part of their “social responsibility” policies
- advertisements on volunteer website such as govolunteer (www.govolunteer.com.au) and Victoria’s Volunteering Portal (www.volunteer.vic.gov.au)

Other key decisions:

There are a variety of factors that contribute to a homework club’s success, including:

**Timing**

- Most homework clubs in schools are run directly after school but it is important that it does not clash with other key events such as soccer practice. If it appears students may not stay back after school, some homework clubs run in the lunch break or before school perhaps alongside a Breakfast Club.

**The club’s name**

- The standard fall back name for programs is generally homework club or learning club but there is nothing holding you back from being a bit more creative. Whatever name is chosen, it
is best if the homework club is not associated with a place which students must attend due to some misbehaviour, such as combining it with after school detention.

**Afternoon snack and drink**

- To obtain the optimum concentration for students to work, homework clubs offer a healthy snack and a drink. Ensure the snack and drink offered is culturally appropriate and allows for any food allergies.

**Location of the homework club**

- The library is the most common place for a school homework clubs to be held. If this is not possible for your school, then any room with access to computers, reference materials such as dictionaries, tables and chairs will be appropriate. Ideally the room chosen should have close access to toilets as it is not safe for students to be travelling across a deserted school to go to the toilet after hours.

**Signing in and out forms**

- The majority of homework clubs get students and tutors to sign in and out when arriving at and leaving the club. This is not only vital for an emergency evacuation but also helps you and parents to know the child is safe. This information can also be vital for any reports or evaluations of the club or future grant submissions as it clearly outlines who has been attending, for how long and from what year level. Some homework clubs also get students to record what homework they planned to do and to note what was achieved when they are leaving.

**Parent information session**

- Many school-based homework clubs have information sessions about their homework club to inform parents of its aims, what happens there, who runs it and where in the school it is located. This is particularly important for parents who may not have a clear picture of what a homework club is. Ensure interpreters are booked for parents who need them. It is advisable to ring parents and inform them of the event, particularly for parents who may not be literate and/or fluent in English. For further promotion of the homework club see the Learning Beyond the Bell “Promoting your Out of School Hours Learning Support Program” information sheet, link to document

**Resources**

- The majority of homework clubs have a stationery box with key resources such as paper, pens, pencils, erasers, staplers, staples, calculators, scissors, tape, glue, and more for students to use. A selection of educational games and reading materials are valuable items to have on hand. Many homework clubs, particularly those in primary school settings, have spare literacy and maths activity sheets or booklets for students who don’t have homework. These are often kept in individual folders for the students.

**Liaison with the school community**

- It is important to keep the school community informed of what is happening in the homework club and who is attending. This communication can happen in a variety of ways from reports to staff meetings, email bulletins, updates on the school website to a six
monthly insert in individual student’s reports. This is important to not only enable teaching staff to know who is attending from their classes but also, for example, so that the cleaner is aware of which rooms in the school are being used after hours by the club.

Risk Management

- When running a homework club outside of normal school hours, it is vital to re-assess any normal school procedures that may have changed circumstances at this time. For example is the school’s first aid kit and access to students’ emergency contact details still accessible after hours? Will the normal school evacuation plan still be relevant in an out of hours situation? Does the coordinator of the have quick and easy access to a phone? If your homework club is open to students outside of your school it will be necessary to get students to return a registration form signed by their parents. In winter when it will be getting dark early, parents need to be made reminded of their responsibilities to ensure students can travel safely home.