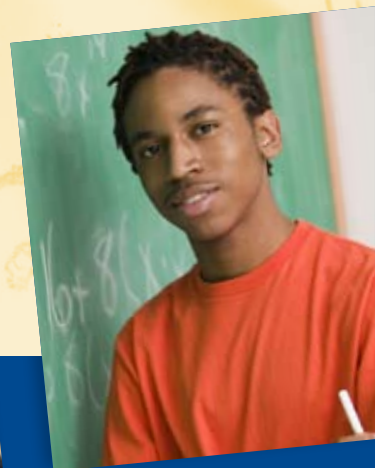




California Academic Partnership Program

[www.calstate.edu/capp](http://www.calstate.edu/capp)



What it Takes to Create an  
**EFFECTIVE HOMEWORK  
CENTER** in Your School

A GUIDE TO ACCOMPANY THE VIDEO

# INTRODUCTION



Over the past 10 years, the California Academic Partnership Program (CAPP) has supported a number of innovations in lower-performing public high schools in the state. One of the most successful is a model for an after-school homework center. Initially developed in the Sweetwater Union High School District's Mar Vista High, the model has spread to several other high schools, including most recently Calexico High. CAPP was sufficiently impressed with the success of the model for a homework center to support the development of a video that conveys not only the principles involved in "doing it right," but also the spirited environment that we think leads to success.

While we are leery about claims that a successful education practice is easily "replicated," we do feel that the model described in the video and in this "how to" supplemental guide will give interested high schools a real shot at success. We start with the essential attributes of a strong homework center and then discuss some of the details of implementation through questions and answers. At the end, we walk through some of the steps you should take if you wish to implement such a center at your high school.

## SOME ESSENTIALS

**The following are key attributes of a successful after-school Homework Center (HWC) that need to be considered carefully before moving forward:**

- 1 The Homework Center is designed and modified according to student needs.
- 2 The HWC does not serve purposes of detention or punishment.
- 3 The HWC helps schools and students acquire what Uri Treisman has called an academic culture—a shared feeling among students that academic learning is to be valued.
- 4 The HWC is always open during its posted hours. It is never closed. There are no exceptions. Students need to know that it is available to them even if there is some special event going on.
- 5 The HWC is staffed by qualified, enthusiastic teachers and tutors, especially ones proficient in math. Experience shows that having a strong math teacher at the center is crucial.
- 6 The HWC tutors are active at the center and seek to engage students in their work. There are no passive tutors.
- 7 The HWC provides clear, consistent and published expectations for students and staff.
- 8 The HWC's services are integrated within whole-school support efforts (and grant-funded initiatives), including the school's site plan.
- 9 All site teachers clearly understand the nature and purpose of the HWC and support a common vision of the service. Math departments especially need to embrace and support the HWC.
- 10 HWC data are collected, reviewed and used for program revisions on a regular basis. Teachers receive feedback on which of their students use the center and for what purpose.



## QUESTIONS TO ASK DURING THE PLANNING PHASE



**The following are some key questions that schools need to address during the crucial planning period for creation (or modification) of a homework or tutoring center:**

1

- Who will be responsible for leading the effort to establish a Homework Center?
- Why is he or she the best individual for the job?
- What support will this individual have making the program a reality?
- Will this person receive additional time or money?
- Does this person have a vision of what the HWC can become?
- Does he or she have a strong commitment to equity, i.e., ensuring that all students, including those with the greatest learning needs, are well served?
- Is the individual organized and willing to be the point person for all Homework Center matters such as finding substitutes for teachers and tutors who can't make their shifts?
- Has he or she demonstrated a willingness and/or ability to lead their peers?

- Where will the HWC be located?
  - Why is this a good place?
  - Does it offer easy access to both students and families?
  - Is it large enough?
  - Does it include necessary resources (computers, large tables, books, etc.)?
  - What individual is responsible for this space?
  - If the librarian is responsible for the space, is he or she supportive of a Homework Center?
  - What special preparation of the space is necessary?
  - What maintenance will be required on an ongoing basis?
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- Who will staff the HWC?
- Will the members of your math department step up to the responsibility of filling multiple, short (two hours or less) shifts on a weekly basis?
- Does the math department support the concept of a HWC?
- Are college tutors available to work in the HWC?
- If so, how are they recruited/hired/supervised/evaluated?
- If not, how can you form relationships with institutions of higher education in your region?
- Who else (family members, community members, older students) could provide qualified academic support in your HWC?
- What happens in the event of an absence of assigned staff?
- Which individuals can serve as qualified substitutes?





- # 4
- How will you fund the HWC?
  - What money is available, and how are the mandates attached to those funds related to academic support for students?
  - Can Title I money be directed toward an HWC? English Learner money? Gear Up? 21st Century Learning Communities? Healthy Start? Specialized Secondary Programs?
  - How can you coordinate money from multiple sources in order to make a Homework Center possible?
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- # 5
- How will your HWC be accountable for student learning?
  - What students are you most interested in targeting? Why?
  - How will you track student and staff participation in the program?
  - What outcomes will indicate that your program is successful?
  - What data should you begin collecting as soon as the HWC opens?
  - Who will evaluate the ongoing effectiveness of the HWC and recommend changes to the program?
  - How will all of this be presented to the entire faculty?
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- # 6
- How will you communicate with members of the school community regarding services offered by the HWC?
  - What documents should you prepare? A promotional flyer? A list of rules/expectations?
  - Who should receive those documents? Parents at Open House? Visitors to the school's website? Math teachers who attach them to course syllabi to send home for family signatures? Counselors? Administrators? The staff of the local Boys & Girls Club? After-school club advisors and sporting team coaches?

Addressing these questions will, of course, require some time. Making careful decisions regarding their answers will help your HWC get off the ground with enhanced likelihood of success.

## MORE IDEAS TO ENSURE SUCCESS



**Below are some practical suggestions from schools where Homework Centers have flourished:**

1

- Gather members of the math department around the concept of a Homework Center.
- Develop the collective expectation that all individuals participate in (paid) service at the HWC and that the project is a group effort.
- Reinforce the idea that consistent Homework Center services increase the chances that students will succeed in their math classes and reduce the number of excuses students (and their families) can offer in the face of difficulty.
- At a meeting early in the year, outline goals for the HWC and place a blank HWC staffing schedule on the table.
- Expect people to sign up for shifts so the schedule is full by the end of the meeting.
- Expect teachers to encourage students to visit the HWC because all teachers are actively involved in the program themselves.

- Coordinate with your school's principal and categorical coordinator (if there is one) to assemble necessary funds.
  - Prepare a detailed estimate of the HWC's cost ahead of time and propose possible funding sources when you meet with those responsible for spending the money.
  - Consult your school's consolidated site plan to formulate an appropriate rationale for implementing a Homework Center.
  - Cite specific references to academic support in the site plan.
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- Get to know math instructors (as well as administrators or outreach personnel) at a college or university near your school.
- Ask to visit second-year calculus classes for a few minutes early each semester in order to recruit students to work as tutors in your Homework Center.
- Communicate with college faculty on a regular basis, and ask them to recommend exemplary students to be tutors in your program.
- Nurture relationships between college students and school staff.
- Provide college students with challenging, flexible assignments that maximize their contributions to your school.
- Treat college students as the valuable resource they are.
- Pay them a consecutive hourly wage, and provide enough hours to make it worth their time.
- If the college is far away, seek students who live near the high school, especially your own school's graduates.





- # 4
- Work with members of your community to involve diverse stakeholders in Homework Center activities.
  - Invite family members to serve as interpreters between students and teachers/tutors.
  - Welcome community members who donate food or clerical support to the program. (If possible, provide students with a healthy snack during their time at the center.)
  - Provide HWC information to church and volunteer organizations in the community.
  - Maintain an open door policy and welcome younger siblings and parents to accompany students to the HWC.
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- # 5
- Bring a team (to include teachers and administrators or counselors) to visit a school that operates a successful Homework Center.
  - Take time to make a list of central issues/concerns you'd like to address while on the visit.
  - Spend at least an hour in the Homework Center and call ahead so that the person responsible for managing the program is available to talk with you.
  - Collect documents (sign-in sheets, verification of participation, referrals, pay logs, etc.) that might be useful to you.
  - Talk with students and staff about their perceptions of the program.
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- # 6
- Make time for members of your team to plan.
  - Produce written notes and goals that outline next steps.
  - Visit the CAPP website to find schools willing to share their after-school programs with others.



For more information  
and assistance

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