

HOME-NOTES

Home-Notes

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Training School Psychologists to be Experts in Evidence Based Practices for Tertiary Students
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Home-Notes

The focus of recent research and attention on the needs of children who do not gain adequate knowledge or behavioral skills from whole-class instructional practices has opened educational discussion and reform that have produced the response to intervention model of service. This three tiered model helps to identify the students who succeed with the universal strategies used in the classroom, those who require small group instruction and remedial skill development, as well as those tertiary students who fail to make progress and require more individualized supports in their educational program. Evidence-based tertiary interventions are employed to meet the needs of students who demonstrate behavioral concerns that impede their educational and social development. According to the U.S. Department of Education, the goal of tertiary interventions is to diminish problem behavior and to increase the student's adaptive skills, access to instruction, and opportunities for an enhanced quality of life (U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

Along with evidence-based instructional practices for enhancing the success rate in school for students, is the amount of meaningful home-school collaboration which bridges these two main environmental factors. A number of studies promote collaboration citing higher academic achievement and attendance rates, along with lower rates of classroom behavior problems, suspensions, and dropouts (Esler et al., 2002). Esler, Godber, and Christenson state the primary reason for families and schools to collaborate is to support the growth and development of students academically, behaviorally, and socially (Esler et al., 2002). To collaborate effectively, both sides of the partnership must recognize the critical importance of the other on the student.

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For example, the home participants must acknowledge the teacher's expertise with instructional practices and classroom management strategies. The school participants must alternatively recognize the parental knowledge of the student and cultural/family factors and demands (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2008). At the root of home-school collaboration is effective communication strategies. Moving past the traditional school to home communication model to a method where the responsibility is shared will help to promote an educational agenda where students can expect both their parents and teachers to operate under common expectations, reinforcements, and consequences (Esler et al., 2002). When accomplished appropriately, home-school collaboration creates positive student attitudes towards school, higher quality homework, and more time spent on homework. Parental benefits include gaining strategies to help their student in the home and learning about the educational system and ways to their child learns best (Epstein, 1995). Home-school collaboration and communication are essential components in meeting the educational and social needs of tertiary students to the highest degree. One evidence-based method for accomplishing this is to design a Home-Note program with suggestions and input from both teachers and parents on the goals and objectives of the student to be monitored and reported on.

Home-Notes Defined

According to Jenson, Rhode, and Reavis, a Home-Note, (also referred to as a School-Home Note or Daily Report Card), is "an informational note that goes from the classroom to home, and back to school [that] provides information between the parents and teacher about a student's classroom behavior and/or academic performance" (Jenson et al., 1994). Commonly, the teacher and parent collaborate to decide upon a number of behavioral or academic goals to be monitored.

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The teacher then rates the student on the performance of the decided upon goals and sends the note home. Parents are to review the note, sign, make comments to the teacher when needed, and return the note to school with the student. An critical factor in the program allows the parent to reinforce positive marks from the teacher and deliver a mild punitive consequence when ratings fall below expectations set by the parent and teacher. A response cost feature may be added that would permit points to be taken away from the student for poor performance. The home-note program is most effective when the behaviors being evaluated are socially valid, objectively defined, and encourage the delivery of immediate, positive consequences that are conditional on adequate marks (Kelley, 1990).

When a student is identified as a possible benefactor from having a Home-Note system, it is critical to consult with parents when developing the goals to be evaluated and the possible reinforcement items and schedule. Focusing on a mixture of explicit behavioral and academic goals is suggested, if needed, and keeping the number less than six for younger students and appropriate to the number of classes for secondary students (Jenson et al., 1994). An appropriate behavioral goal, including specific criteria such as, “interrupts 2 or fewer times within a whole class discussion” serves as a data tracking tool that could aide in developing an effective Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for those tertiary students needing specialized instruction in the future (Fabiano et al., 2010). Prior to beginning the Home-Note program, a system should be in place to heed off excuses from the student about forgetting the note. Students are then included in the dialogue and are briefed on the plan, possible reinforcements, and consequences. The program should begin at the start of a new week, helping to promote a fresh start, and the

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teacher should attempt to find positives in the student's behavior for the first several days (Jenson et al., 1994).

Variations

A Home-Note program can be devised with a number of reporting and evaluating schedules. A daily note is suggested at the start of the program to help develop a system with the student and to keep parents well informed. The note can be modified to a weekly note when the student demonstrates positive behavior (Jenson et al., 1994). Similarly, the intervals between teacher ratings during the day can be elongated after the student reaches a certain level of behavioral acceptance.

The layout and wording on the actual note should vary according to the age of the student. For example, younger elementary students that are not strong readers should have icons or pictures representing the various rating possibilities. Photographs of the student's themselves included on the page increase interest and promote buy-in as well. Middle to older elementary students should have a note with words describing the rating given by the teacher, while secondary students would need a note divided into the number of periods they have in a school day.

Likewise, there will be elementary students who require more structure on their note and would benefit from one that mimicked a secondary note. Students should also have space on their note to include upcoming test, homework, and projects (Jenson et al., 1994).

Response cost is the removal of privileges, token, or points contingent on misbehavior. This has been proven effective in increasing the on-task percentages of some students (Jurbergs et al.,

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2007) and is an option for including into the Home-Note program. While the note is intended to report a rating on specific, predetermined behaviors and goals, teachers and parents may choose to include a rule that when broken, results in a decrease of overall points.

Some schools implement the use of a weekly or daily planner for older elementary and secondary students. The Home-Note system can fit seamlessly into this school-wide system with some manipulation. Rather than a single sheet of paper with goals and a rating scale, the student and teacher would write the predetermined goals atop the planner page for the week. The teacher and parent can communicate an effective rating system using colors, stamps, or words in the planner daily or weekly. This use of a spiral bound planner may also assist in the organization of the notes from week to week.

Options for Home-Note implementation with the whole class can allow for individualized goals and various levels of parental communication. Reinforcement using group contingencies may aide in the desire and motivation for each student to promptly bring their note home, back to school, and reach their behavioral or academic goals. For example, a teacher may wish to choose five students at random from the class and check for parent signature on their daily home note. If those five students succeed, the class is rewarded with extra recess time (Jenson et al., 1994). A more anonymous option would have each student with a completed home note to put a red token in a clear jar and those who did not bring their note appropriately filled out, a blue token. At the end of the week, the teacher would randomly choose a token from the jar. If the chosen token is red, the class receives a reward. If the chosen token is blue, the class receives a punitive consequence, possible homework on the weekend or a loss of recess time.

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Benefits

Implementing a successful Home-Note program requires school personnel to collaborate with the parent to target specific behavior goals and objectives. This collaboration removes sole responsibility on any one party and focuses on problem solving, rather than on the cause of the problem, thereby eliminating blame. The frequency of positive communication between the school and home may lead to an increased focus on the strengths of the student, thus increasing the amount of praise and attention received at home and raising the student's self-esteem (Kelley, 1990).

Beyond having all of the benefits of teacher-parent communication, such as improved relationships and understanding, the Home-Note program can significantly support a school team in monitoring the progress of students to determine the appropriate level of service needed. The note itself can be utilized as a data tracking tool for numerous interventions and behaviors exhibited, and drawn upon to make educational decisions based on daily student performance. As previously mentioned, the Home-Note program can significantly assist a school team in creating goals and reporting current levels of performance for students referred to, and receiving Special Education. Teachers needing to keep track of specific IEP goals and progress, can treat the Home-Note as means of a direct behavior rating scale to ascertain the level of improvement and prevent "drifting" from the actual goals developed (Fabiano et al., 2010).

An effective Home-Note program has the ability to alleviate much of the typical time constraints placed on a teacher when implementing a behavior modification plan. With a home-note, the

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responsibility of delivering reinforcement and consequences rests on the shoulder of the parent at home rather than the teacher, thus reducing involvement time. When simply evaluating a student's performance at the conclusion of each day or week and communicating it to parents, teachers do not feel the need to substantially change their teaching practices (Kelley, 1990).

Current Research

Various research studies have explored the efficacy of the Home-Note program with diverse student populations and stipulations. After coding 18 empirical studies of home-school collaboration interventions, Cox reports that home-school collaboration interventions the involve communication (home-notes and daily report cards) are effective in helping achieve desired school outcomes for children including "changes in academic performance and school related behavior". These home-school partnership programs suggested positive effects on overall achievement and parent participation while decreasing absenteeism (Cox, 2005).

McGoey, Prodan, and Condit combined a self-evaluation procedure with a home-note program with two kindergarten boys with disruptive behaviors. In order to tailor the intervention to the specific developmental stage of the participants, the researchers chose to include pictures of the expected behaviors and smiley faces for the behavior rating section. Each student was able to alter the wording of the goal phrase to include their own language. The interval between behavior checks throughout the day remained short. The self-evaluation piece of this study had the student rating his/her own behavior with the appropriate "face". The teacher then discussed the rationale for the evaluation and reported their rating to the student. Another discussion followed where the teacher attempted to have the student understand their point of view. The

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note was ultimately sent home and indicated, based on the number of smiley faces earned, whether the student met his/her goal for the day. Results of this study suggest that the package of self-evaluation and home-note succeeded in reducing disruptive behaviors and encouraging home-school collaboration. The teacher involved in the study reported effective results and overall acceptability (McGoey et al., 2007)

African American students diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) utilized a Home-Note program to increase academic performance in a study by Jurbergs, Palcic, and Kelley. Home-Notes were developed for six elementary school students meeting the participant criteria. Each Home-Note contained a response cost and a non-response cost component. At the start of the work period, the teacher placed the Home-Note on the student's desk to serve as a reminder of the predetermined behavioral goals. Concluding the work time, the teacher rated performance on the two goals using a form of three point scale. Each "Yes" was worth two points, "So-So" rated as one point, and "No" received no points. The student's parents added the total at home and delivered the appropriate consequence. The response cost condition implemented the additional goal of "Used Classtime Well". Students were to cross off one smiley face in this section each time they were caught off-task. They in turn, received an extra point at home for each smiley face that remained on the Home-Note. The results of this study indicate that Home-Notes produced desired rates of attentiveness and academic productivity in all participants. Including response cost did not seem to affect the results positively or negatively. Both parents and teachers however, preferred the notes with the response cost component (Jurbergs et al., 2007).

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Fabiano et al. identified 63 students diagnosed with ADHD and with special education services and randomly assigned them to a daily report card (DRC) system that aligned with their IEP goals. Based on previous findings that faults in the planning, monitoring, and implementation of IEPs exist (Heward, 2003), resulting in their utility, the study sought to determine if a DRC would optimize the outcomes and goals of the students. Results indicate that students who received a DRC with behavioral consultation services were observed and rated as having improved behavior in the classroom and having more academic success when compared to their peers who did not receive the interventions. Teachers also noted that the students were more likely to attain the goals listed on their IEP. Positive findings, however, were not found on ADHD behavior scales, academic achievement testing, or ratings of student-teacher relationships (Fabiano et al., 2010)

In a study designed to test the feasibility and integrity of a daily report card intervention with a small group of elementary students diagnosed with ADHD, Murray et al. found significant improvements among participants in academic skills and classroom productivity. Parents were engaged at all levels of this study. They were invited to all meetings and served as part of the consultation team when changes were made to the DRC. With the help of the consultation team, teachers complied with integrity throughout the study and rated the intervention as feasible and acceptable. The amount of time the teacher spent with the consultant alone was lower than in similar studies, but produced greater implementation rates. The findings suggest that parent involvement may be directly related to teacher adherence to the intervention protocol (Murray et al., 2008).

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Case study research using a home-note system combined with study skills, peer tutoring, and contingency management programs with an unmotivated junior high school student indicate improved academic performance (Kelley, 1990). Reports from the student suggest improved relations with his parents and higher ratings of the overall school day. In addition, his levels of motivation and confidence with educational matters increased.

Troubleshooting

When teachers, parents, and students are all involved in the success of an intervention such as the Home-Note program, problems and dilemmas are sure to arise. One of the most common hurdles is when a student either forgets the Home-Note at home, leaves the note at school, or loses it all together. Parents and teachers must have the discussion in the planning phase of the program that no excuses shall be accepted for the lost or forgotten note. Rather, the student should lose one of their privileges at school or home such as recess, television time, or outside playing time. The Home-Note program can also use the Mystery Motivator as a reward for bringing the note back and forth from school to home (Jenson et al., 1994).

If a student disagrees with a specific rating given by the teacher she/he may choose to argue about the rating and may even forge the rating between school and home. Warnings and a reminder that a longer explanation for the rating can be given to the parent in the “Comments” section of the note should be given to the student. The teacher should also have current contact information for the parents, including telephone and email addresses, in order to call the parent and notify them of the possible forgery or argument (Jenson et al., 1994). If the problem

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persists, an electronic Home-Note sent home via email, but evaluated and rated with the student present, may need to be discussed and put in place. [This option can also be used if the student refuses to take the note home altogether or persistently destroys the note.]

Some inhibitors to a valuable Home-Note program stem from the home/parents. Some of these may include an ineffective reinforcement, schedule of reinforcement, or refusal of participation. Parents will benefit from instruction prior to the start of the program concerning the reinforcement responsibility. A list of possible rewards and punitive consequences should be given to the parents after their input, and the student's is gathered. Large rewards should be marked as possible "bonuses" for long periods of successful ratings from the teacher. Kits of small reinforcers can be sent home from school if parents have a difficult time providing new items for their children on a consistent basis. If the parent refuses to participate in the program, request a meeting and seek participation for a relatively small amount of time as a trial period after discussing the benefits of open communication. Similarly, if the parent seems to punish the student more than reward, schedule a meeting to stress the importance of a positive experience for the student (Jenson et al., 1994).

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Examples of Home-Note Programs

Figure 1 Daily Behavior Report Card (Chafouleas et al, 2002)

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Student Name: _____ Teacher: _____ Date: _____

Dear Parent,

This daily report card indicates how positive your child's behavior was today in the classroom. Ratings of **5 to 4** indicate good classroom behavior, **3 to 2** suggest fair to poor behavior, and ratings of **1** indicate inappropriate classroom behaviors. Please discuss this report card with your child and return a signed copy to me at school. Thank you.

Compared with other students of the same gender in the classroom, your child:

- Completed assigned schoolwork.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Always

-Complied with adult requests readily and without argument or complaint.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Always

-Interacted appropriately with classmates.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Always

Other Behaviors

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Always

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Always

Additional Comments:

Parent Signature: _____

Date: _____

Figure 2 Daily Home Note (Jenson et al. 1994)

My Daily Home Note						
Name:			Date:			
Parent's Initials						
Behavior(s)	Teacher(s) Initials	MON	TUE	WED	THUR	FRI
Rating Scale		Unsatisfactory = 1		Average = 2		Great = 3
Comments:						
Teacher's Phone:			Parent's Phone:			

See page 27 for suggestions for use.

Figure 3 (Jenson et al. 1994)

My Weekly Home Note							
Name:				Week of:			
Subject(s) or Behavior(s)	Teacher's Initials	MON	TUE	WED	THUR	FRI	Comments
Rating Scale		G = Great		A = Average		U = Unsatisfactory	
Parent's Initials	MON	TUE	WED	THUR	FRI		
Any homework?							
Any upcoming tests?							
Any missing work?							

See page 27 for suggestions for use.

Figure 4 (Jenson et al. 1994)

<div style="display: inline-block; width: 150px; height: 20px; background-color: white; border: 1px solid black;"></div> Information Note					
Name:		Date/Week of:		Phone:	
Periods	Teacher(s) Initials	Class Performance (circle one)	Assigned Homework	Upcoming Tests?	Missing Work?
		G Great A Average U Unsatisfactory			
		G Great A Average U Unsatisfactory			
		G Great A Average U Unsatisfactory			
		G Great A Average U Unsatisfactory			
		G Great A Average U Unsatisfactory			
		G Great A Average U Unsatisfactory			
		G Great A Average U Unsatisfactory			
Comments:					
Counselor's Signature:					
Parent's Signature:					

See page 32 for suggestions for use.

Figure 5 (Jenson et al. 1994)

<div style="display: inline-block; width: 150px; height: 20px; background-color: white; vertical-align: middle;"></div> Information Note					
Name:		Date/Week of:		Phone:	
Periods	Teacher's Initials	Class Performance	Assigned Homework	Upcoming Tests?	Missing Work?
Rating Scale		Unsatisfactory = ____	Average = ____	Great = ____	
Comments:					

Figure 6 (Murray et al. 2008)

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Example Daily Report Card

Name: _____

Week of: _____

Teacher: Please circle Yes or No to indicate whether student has followed directions at the end of each class period. Ask the student how he/she thinks they did. Let the student know what you liked and what he/she needs to work on for the next hour.

Student: Cross out a smiley face each time your teacher reminds you that you are *calling out or not using your class time well*.

Parent: Please review, initial, and return to your child's teacher the next school day. Please provide a reward or privilege at home if your child earned his/her daily GOAL OF _____ total Yeses + Smileys.

Day Goals	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
Raise Hand and Wait to be Recognized					
Complete Assignments					
BoardWork	Yes No N/A	Yes No N/A	Yes No N/A	Yes No N/A	Yes No N/A
Math	Yes No N/A	Yes No N/A	Yes No N/A	Yes No N/A	Yes No N/A
Reading	Yes No N/A	Yes No N/A	Yes No N/A	Yes No N/A	Yes No N/A
Other	Yes No N/A	Yes No N/A	Yes No N/A	Yes No N/A	Yes No N/A
Other	Yes No N/A	Yes No N/A	Yes No N/A	Yes No N/A	Yes No N/A
Follow Directions with 0-1 reminders					
BoardWork	Yes No N/A	Yes No N/A	Yes No N/A	Yes No N/A	Yes No N/A
Math	Yes No N/A	Yes No N/A	Yes No N/A	Yes No N/A	Yes No N/A
Reading	Yes No N/A	Yes No N/A	Yes No N/A	Yes No N/A	Yes No N/A
Other	Yes No N/A	Yes No N/A	Yes No N/A	Yes No N/A	Yes No N/A
Use Class Time Well (In designated area and no playing or talking when it is work time)					

Total Yeses+ Smileys _____

Teacher Signature _____

PARENT CHECKLIST:

I reviewed the report card with my child.

I praised my child for smileys.

I provided a reward if earned.

(If not earned, indicate N/A).

PARENT SIGNATURE _____


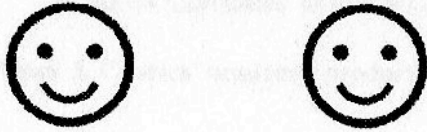
PARENT/TEACHER COMMENTS:

Figure 7 School-Home Note with Response Cost (Jurbergs et al, 2007)

School-Home Note

Name: _____ Date: _____

Used Classtime Well	YES	SO-SO	NO
Completed Classwork	YES	SO-SO	NO

Teacher Comments: _____

Total Points for Note: _____ (YES=2, SO-SO=1, NO=0, 😊 =1)

Good/Bad Note? _____ Reward Earned: _____

Parent Signature _____

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