

Engaging Parents

Testing parent engagement to improve math homework participation in elementary school

Education Partner:
P.S. 182Q Samantha Smith School, Queens, New York

Trial Duration:
12/03/18–12/07/18

Pracademics*:
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Context

Parent engagement is associated with improved student outcomes. However, traditional methods of notifying parents via paper notices are often insufficient. This study examined the effect of supplementing paper notices with a phone call as a means to increase the participation rate in required online math homework.

Key Finding

Supplementing paper notifications with a phone-call reminder appears to be a simple way to improve parent engagement and increase homework participation.

*BetaEd trains educators to become research-savvy "Pracademics" who lead trials.

Background

Home-based parent engagement has been shown to improve educational outcomes. Strong math skills in early education are associated with better socioeconomic outcomes in adulthood. School-based efforts to increase parent engagement can be difficult to coordinate around each parent's availability and language preferences. As technology becomes more accessible, there may be new ways to reach parents more directly, at lower costs.

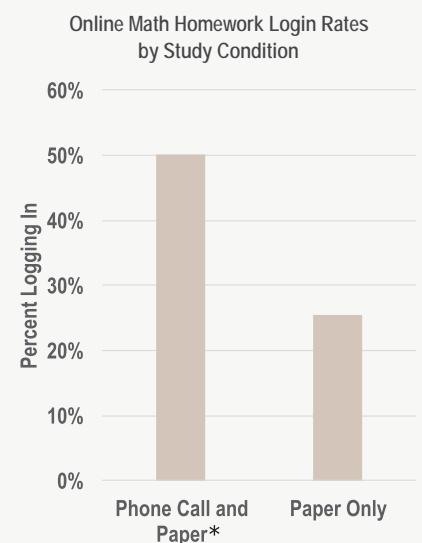
P.S. 182Q Samantha Smith School, in Queens, NY, conducted a randomized controlled trial to evaluate the effect of a live phone call to remind parents about their children's online math homework. As regulations require that schools provide parents with a hard-copy version of all information, the school continued to provide these documents for the duration of the trial.

Trial Design

Ten classrooms, comprising 188 students in grades 3–5 who had not logged on for their required online math homework, were randomized to receiving paper notices, or paper notices plus a phone call for parent reminders. Phone calls were made in parents' preferred language: English, Spanish, or Bengali. Detailed messages were left for parents who did not answer the phone. The school recorded data on students' grade level, class, method of communication, and whether they logged onto their online math homework.

Results

About 90% of the parents who received phone calls answered (voicemail messages were left when parents did not answer). Compared to the paper reminders only, paper plus phone-call reminder almost doubled online math-homework login rates (from 25.5% to 50%; $p < 0.001$). Supplementing paper reminders with a phone-call reminder appears to be a simple way to improve homework participation. We will continue to track homework participation to assess the longer-term effects. Subsequent trials will assess whether automated calls yield similar improvements.



*a phone call resulted in a statistically significant increase in homework participation rates.

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