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LEADSTORIES

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Homework helpers

County dips into university and community resources to offer a variety of outlets for students wanting an educational booster

By Rhiannon Brewer Patrick
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Clarke Central High School senior Gavin Brown says he usually has from 10 minutes to four hours of homework at a time.

"It all depends on the night," he said. "I've got five classes. Sometimes it's 30 minutes for each class. Sometimes none of my classes have homework."

Sometimes he needs help with his assignments, but Brown said he doesn't turn to his mother for answers for Latin class.

"Most of the time, she doesn't really understand it, especially my foreign language class," he said, adding that he asks teachers for help.

At every grade level, Clarke County students have resources within the school district for homework help.

In Clarke, there are no rules for how much homework teachers assign.

At Oglethorpe Avenue Elementary School, Principal



■ University of Georgia freshman Stephanie Altenbach, right, works with Alps Road Elementary fifth-grader Courtney Faust. Altenbach, officially a homework helper, listens as Faust reads to her at the school's library recently.

Dot Paul/Staff ■

Scarlett Dunne said pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students have no homework, while students in grades 1 through 3 have no more than 20 minutes of homework each night. Students in grades 4 and 5 have no more than one hour, Dunne said.

At Coile Middle School, Principal Tim Jarboe said students have 30 minutes to an hour of homework each night. Coile teachers have common planning periods so they can coordinate their assignments.

And in high school, the amount of homework depends.

"It depends on what teacher (you have)," Clarke Central junior Jashondra Kenney said. "I usually have Spanish homework, and I usually study my literature vocabulary for 15 minutes."

Clarke Central senior Tiffany Hayes said she regularly has 90 minutes of homework each night, usually in physics and language arts.

Most students can get homework help after school with volunteer tutors. At Oglethorpe Avenue, a group of 25 University of Georgia students help students with homework, Dunne said.

At Alps Road Elementary, anyone can sign up to be a "Homework Helper" as part of a volunteer program started by a parent 15 years ago, according to teaching assistant Melissa Blackstone.

"It's an easy way for people to come work with kids," she said.

Blackstone said parents and others who want to volunteer must fill out an application and provide a reference. The volunteers then come to the school where a sign-in book lists the names of students who need help and scheduled help times.

At Coile, the school uses grant money to fund free after-school academic programs for students, Jarboe said.

After-school tutoring is offered at both Cedar Shoals and Clarke Central high schools. Each school also has its own programs geared toward academic achievement.

At Cedar Shoals, teacher Brad Bailey and her husband Deryl Bailey, a UGA assistant professor, work with Gentlemen on the Move and Young Women Scholars, two programs for African-American students. The clubs help students rise above stereotypes and improve self image.

"We meet every Saturday for four hours. The first two hours are spent on academics," Deryl Bailey said, adding that teachers, other high school students, UGA professors and graduate students help the members with their studies.

At Clarke Central, students can participate in Project R.E.A.D.Y. (Reaching Academics Daily). Three days a week, the program offers homework help. On Wednesdays, the group has mini-workshops and seminars on things like time management and career choices.

Joe Jones, a substitute teacher and the program's volunteer coordinator, said volunteers from the UGA Honors Program, Black Affairs Council and African-American honor society Abeneefo Kuo will begin visiting the school this week to help with homework.

Bailey offered tips to parents on how to help their high school students with homework at home. He recommends setting aside time for studies in an uncluttered place without the distraction of television or music.

"Kids are easily distracted. They will tell you they can study with music, but that's not true," Bailey said.

He added that inexpensive computer software can help students master math skills at home that their parents may have forgotten from their own schooling.

Finally, parents must take an interest in their children's work.

"Don't buy that excuse that they have no homework," he said. "If you're not making straight A's, there's something you can be working on."

Getting help

Homework helps kids practice what they have learned at school and helps them learn to be responsible. While help is usually available at school, here are some ways parents can assist at home.

- ▶ Set a regular time and place for homework. Make sure to allow time for play and other activities. The study area should be quiet, comfortable and well-lit.

- ▶ Don't do your child's homework. Go over directions together, answer questions and make sure your child completes the assignment.

- ▶ Set a good example during homework time by reading a book or newspaper, writing a letter to a friend or balancing the checkbook.

- ▶ Turn off the television when it's time to study.

- ▶ Talk to your child's teacher to find out about homework rules and what is expected of your child.

Attend all parent-teacher conferences.

Source: Alps Road Elementary Parent Resource Center

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