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September 2007

After school ... Helping children in grade 1 with homework

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When a child enters grade school, a new routine often takes root: checking school assignments to find out what homework needs to be done. Indeed, even if a child uses his school's homework assistance service, families must still usually set aside time in their schedules, which often are already very full, for getting homework done. What happens during grade 1?

The data from the Québec Longitudinal Study of Child Development (QLSCD 1998-2010) make it possible to create a portrait of homework assistance given children born in Québec and enrolled in grade 1 in either public or private schools during the 2004-2005 school year. The study shows that the vast majority of children (85%) had homework to do every day. The others (14%) had some several times a week (11%) or several times a month (around 3%). Few were the children who never had any (about 1%). On days when they had schoolwork to do, about 9 children out of 10 (88%) devoted more than 15 minutes to it, whether at school or at home, and about half of those (43% of all children) spent more than 30 minutes on it (Figure 1).

Doing homework: With Dad or with Mom?

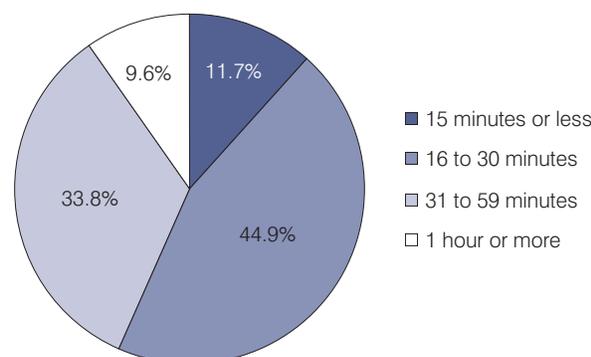
Almost all grade 1 children (99.5%) had someone at home who saw to it that they did their schoolwork. In general, only mothers (65%) helped children, whether by checking work or by helping children do it. In 30% of the cases, this task was shared by both parents, whereas nearly 5% of children were supervised by just their fathers. A majority of the children (86%) got help doing their homework every day at home. Three children out of four received help for more than 15 minutes, and one out of three for more than half an hour. The duration of the help, however, varied according to whether it was given by the father or the mother; children helped by their fathers were more likely to receive more than half an hour of help (53% as opposed to 32%; Figure 2).

In order for parents to be able to help their children with their schoolwork, parents must be able to understand exactly what is required. In this connection, the parents of nearly three children out of four (72%) always found the directions given by teachers adequate and clear.

Homework assistance at school: Who benefits?

To encourage pupils to complete their schoolwork, public grade schools may avail themselves of funding for improving or creating homework assistance services.¹ One of the objectives of this funding program is to enable schools to offer homework assistance services that target children with learning disabilities. Among

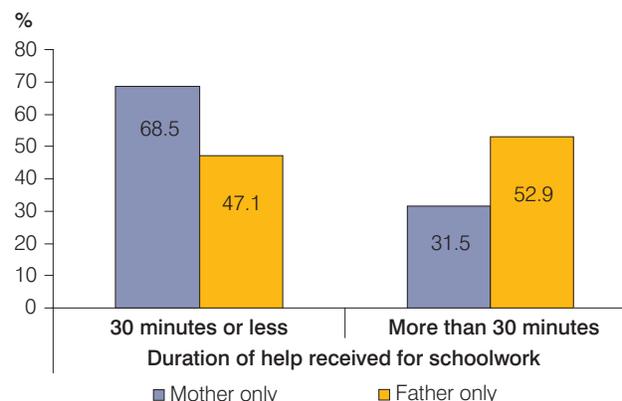
Figure 1
Distribution of grade 1 children¹ by time usually devoted each day to schoolwork², Québec, 2005



1. Children born in 1997-1998 in Québec.
2. At school or at home.

Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, QLSCD 1998-2010.

Figure 2
Distribution of grade 1 children¹ by source of help² and duration of help given for schoolwork, Québec, 2005



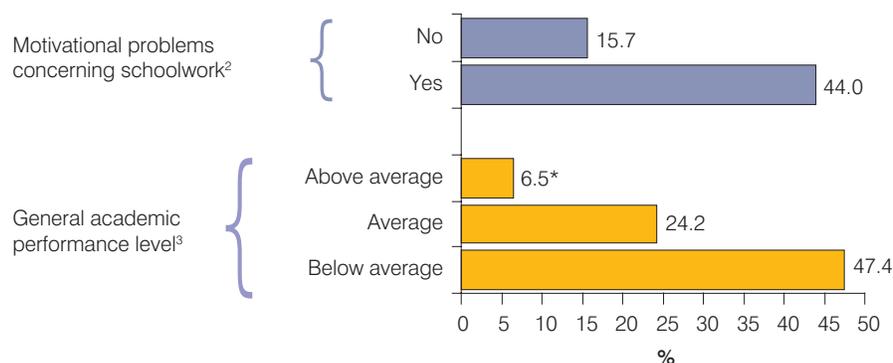
1. Children born in 1997-1998 in Québec.
2. Help given by the mother or the biological father, or by the spouse or partner of the biological parent.

Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, QLSCD 1998-2010.

1. For more details on this funding program, visit the site of the Québec Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport at: http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/lancement/prog_devoirs_ecoles/feuillelet_aideauxdevoirs_a.pdf.

grade 1 children enrolled in public schools (94% of the children covered by the QLSCD), 15% took part in the homework assistance service offered at their school. Children whose general academic performance was below the mean, according to their teachers, used homework assistance services more than those whose academic performance was above the mean (35% as opposed to about 9%). Another objective of this assistance program is to heighten motivation among pupils and thereby keep them interested in school. In this regard, the QLSCD data reveal that grade 1 children who experienced significant motivational problems concerning schoolwork were more likely to have used homework assistance services than those who did not experience such problems (24% as opposed to 13%).

Figure 3
Proportion of grade 1 children¹ who go to school at least occasionally without having finished their homework, by select characteristics, Québec, 2005



1. Children born in 1997-1998 in Québec.

2. According to the parent.

3. According to the teacher.

* Coefficient of variation between 15% and 25%; interpret with caution.

Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, QLSCD 1998-2010.

Homework: Not always completed on time

Whether for lack of time, because of difficulties, or for lack of interest, on occasion grade 1 pupils do not finish their homework on time. According to their teachers, about one child out of five came to school occasionally (14%) or frequently (7%) without having completed his or her homework. Children experiencing schoolwork motivational problems and those whose academic performance was below the mean were the ones most often affected by this situation (Figure 3).

Concluding Remarks

In Québec, the majority of children enrolled in grade 1 during the 2004-2005 school year received help with homework every day

from their parents. Concomitantly, the vast majority of schools offer homework assistance services that give priority to children with the highest risk of dropping out of school. Although children in grade 1 who experience significant schoolwork motivational problems or who demonstrate lower levels of academic performance use these services more often than others, it is no less true that a majority of them (76% and 65% respectively) do not use them.

To what extent is assistance given children at home and at school related to the characteristics of their home environment? Can homework assistance services bolster the academic performance of the children most at risk? These are a few of the questions that more in-depth analyses of the QLSCD data could help answer.

About the survey

The Québec Longitudinal Study of Child Development (QLSCD 1998-2010) is conducted by the Institut de la statistique du Québec (ISQ) in collaboration with various partners. The Study is financed by the ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, the ministère de la Famille et des Aînés, the Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon, and the ISQ. The main objective of this study is to understand pathways and to identify the factors that, during early childhood, contribute to social adjustment and the educational achievement of Québec children when they enter the school system.

More information about the survey may be found on the QLSCD web site, also known as "I am, I'll be", at www.jesuisjeterai.stat.gouv.qc.ca.

For access to the microdata file for the survey, contact the Research Data Access Centre of the ISQ (Centre d'accès aux données de recherche de l'ISQ - CADRISQ) at www.stat.gouv.qc.ca/cadrisq, or call 1 514 343-2299.

This fact sheet, translated by Robert Sullivan, is also available in French under the title « Quand la classe est finie... L'aide aux devoirs en première année du primaire ».

This bulletin was designed by Direction Santé Québec

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Legal deposit

Library and Archives Canada
 Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec
 3rd Quarter 2007

ISSN 1913-4851 (printed version)

ISSN 1913-486X (on-line version)

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 Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2007

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 de la statistique
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