

## Homework Guidelines

- **Homework purpose:** The primary purpose of homework should be to allow the student the opportunity for *independent practice* on learning standards mastered in class during guided practice and small-group discourse. Homework can also provide a chance for the student to practice mathematical tasks that relate to previous learning standards or tasks that reflect prerequisite learning standards for the next unit. Homework that provides review of previous work and helps to prepare students for future work leads to improved student achievement (Cooper, 2008a).
- **Homework length:** How much time should daily homework take students to complete? How many problems should it entail? Homework should not be lengthy (Cooper, 2008b), so teachers should take care about what they assign—no more than eight to ten carefully chosen problems per day. Take into account the cognitive demand of the tasks or problems you assign. Homework tasks as a general rule should not take more than thirty to thirty-five minutes (per course) of time outside of class.
- **Homework task selection:** The homework your school curriculum or textbook includes is not necessarily appropriate for your students without some adjustments with which your team agrees. Make sure that all tasks are necessary as part of independent practice, have *spaced* practice and not *massed* practice, and align to the stated learning standards of the unit.
- **Homework answers:** There are many advantages to providing students with homework answers before the unit of instruction begins. When you provide students with answers to the homework problems, they can check their solutions against the answers, and if their end results do not match the provided answers, they can rework the problem to find their errors. In other words, students receive immediate and formative self-assessed feedback of their work—like when playing an electronic game. Moreover, a compelling reason to provide students with the answers to the homework in advance of the assignment is to save time during the class period the next day. *No time* should be spent going over the answers or the actual homework problems. Remember, homework is *independent* practice, not *in-class* practice. Since the students know exactly what they know and what they do not understand, any in-class discussion time on homework can be limited to a brief few minutes and becomes more meaningful for the students.
- **Homework focus in class:** Once your collaborative team determines homework, focus on how to address homework in class, the type of feedback that teachers will give students, and what will occur if students do not complete the homework. If you spend most of the class time going over homework, you lose the impact of successful independent practice on student learning. Your students may be choosing to wait to do homework problems because they know they can write down the work when you go over the problems the next day. Since the purpose of homework is independent practice, limit the amount of time in class to grade, score, or go over the practice problems. If you spend most of the class time going over homework, your team must revisit the amount and content of what you assign. It could be that your team assigned too much homework or that students did not achieve an appropriate level of mastery prior to practice of the learning standard.