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## Homework Completion Program in Atlantic County, NJ: The First Five Years

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## Building Better Communities

- Two ways to build better communities in socioeconomically disadvantaged neighborhoods
  - Preparing children for a college education
  - Building trust between children and police officers
- Helping children with completing homework and enlisting local police officers to tutor the children has the potential to speak to both ways of building better communities
- The Homework Completion Program in Atlantic County, New Jersey utilized this exact innovative strategy

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## Homework Completion in Elementary School and College Preparation

- Homework completion provided the context for the development of self-regulation (Warton, 1997)
- Homework completion also has an important role to play in improving children's academic performance
  - Academic performance has been found to significantly predict later college attendance and bachelor's degree attainment among disadvantaged minority children (e.g., Ou & Reynolds, 2014)
  - The more children completed homework, the higher their reading achievement (e.g., Lee et al., 2017)

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## Strategies for Homework Completion

- Direct instruction on homework completion strategy to middle schoolers with learning disabilities increased their rate of homework completion and the quality of homework products (Hughes et al., 2002)
- Merriman et al. (2016) found that both the homework center and group coaching strategies were effective in reducing children's problems with homework completion
- A university-middle school mentoring program was found to improve children's completion of homework assignments (Russ, 1993)

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- Martin (2009) revealed a lopsided U-shaped developmental function in that elementary school students were the most motivated and engaged in schoolwork, followed by college students, with high school students being the least motivated and engaged
- The Homework Completion Program in Atlantic County, NJ benefited from elementary school students' high motivation and engagement with schoolwork

## Motivation for Homework Completion

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## Police Officer Tutors and Community Policing

- Community policing (Forman, 2004)
  - An organization strategy involving citizens at the neighborhood level to regularly meet with local police force to discuss crime problems and set priorities
  - Citizens at the neighborhood level are willing to take responsibility for helping to problem solve
  - Especially needed for young people in socioeconomically disadvantaged neighborhoods
- Police officers tutoring children with homework can be one tactic of community policing

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Police Officer and Community Trust Building (Thurman et al., 1993)

- Evaluated a community demonstration project called Community Opportunities Program for Youth (COPY Kids)
- Police officers interacted with at-risk children weekly in a non-threatening way for eight weeks
- Positive program outcomes for children, parent, and police officers

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### Police Visibility and Police Image (Salmi et al. 2000)

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- Compared police visibility through either police patrolling in cars or police patrolling on foot
- Police image was measured by friendliness (e.g., safe, not frightening) and closeness (e.g., familiar, not strange) ratings
- Seeing police patrolling on foot was positively correlated with police friendliness and closeness ratings
- Seeing police patrolling in cars was negatively correlated with police friendliness and closeness

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### Research Hypotheses

- Helping children with homework completion will improve children's academic performance and prepare them for later college education
- Police officers serving as tutors will build trust between children and officers

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### Children: N=640

Year	Stanley	Buzby	Police Athletic League	Pleasantville	Total
	Holmes	Homes	(PAL)		
2014-2015	63				63
2015-2016	52	59			111
2016-2017	53	56	80		189
2017-2018	71	68		15	154
2018-2019	41	56		26	123

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### Tutors: N=912

Year	Stanley	Buzby	Police Athletic League	Pleasantville	Total
	Holmes	Homes	(PAL)		
2014-2015	170 (23)				170 (23)
2015-2016	126 (7)	42 (3)			168 (10)
2016-2017	75 (9)	67 (6)	55 (1)		197 (16)
2017-2018	98 (8)	57 (5)		34 (7)	189 (20)
2018-2019	56 (12)	62 (9)		70 (7)	188 (28)

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### Program Organization

**Program staff**

- Students from Stockton University serving as tutors
- Police officer tutors were from Atlantic City or Pleasantville
- Stockton Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning (SCCESL) student fellows serving as leaders
- A Stockton University student analyzed data while supported by a criminal justice professor

**Training of staff**

- In the 4<sup>th</sup> year, two math professors from Stockton University presented to program staff on the best ways to provide support with math homework
- These strategies were applied promptly with the children

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### Enrichment Events

Year	Stanley Holmes	Buzby Homes	Pleasantville
2014-2015	Book Donation; Halloween Party; Keeping Your Cool Seminar; Photography Classes; Pillowcase Workshop; <i>Ratatouille</i> Movie		
2015-2016	Holiday Party; Marine Science Presentation; Why Poetry Matters	Book Donation; Holiday Party; Marine Science Presentation	
2016-2017	Graduation Party; Holiday Gifts; Why Poetry Matters	Graduation Party; Holiday Gifts; Why Poetry Matters	
2017-2018	Financial Literacy Workshop; Marine Science Presentation; School Necessities	Financial Literacy Workshop; Marine Science Presentation; School Necessities	Financial Literacy Workshop
2018-2019	Holiday Party & Gifts	Holiday Party & Gifts	Holiday Party & Gifts

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### Program Assessment Questionnaire

- How do you feel when you see a police officer?
- What does a police officer do?
- Who would you try to find if you needed help?
- What is the best part of coming to the MCP (Homework Completion Program) at ...?
- I love coming to the community room to ...

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### Results for Questions One, Three, and Four

- Children overwhelmingly chose completing homework as the best part about going to the Homework Completion Program
- They mostly reported feeling happy when seeing a police officer
- Most children chose to find police officers if they needed help

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### Results for Question Two

*Number of Children Who Completed Questionnaire and Their Answers to "What Does a Police Officer Do?" Question by Academic Year and Program Site (N=154)*

Year	Stanley Holmes	Buzby Homes	Pleasantville	Total
2014-2015	15 <sup>a</sup>			15
2015-2016	13 <sup>a</sup>	15 <sup>b</sup>		28
2016-2017	12 <sup>b</sup>	16 <sup>b</sup>		28
2017-2018	19 <sup>b</sup>	27 <sup>a</sup>	9 <sup>b</sup>	55
2018-2019	14 <sup>a</sup>	8 <sup>a</sup>	6 <sup>b</sup>	28

*Note.* <sup>a</sup>Children that year from that site mostly thought that police officers help people. <sup>b</sup>Most children that year from that site thought that police officers arrest people. <sup>ab</sup>In the 2018-2019 academic year, top choices for children at the Pleasantville program site were police officers help people (50%) and police officers arrest people (50%).

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### Homework Completion Program and Preparation for College Education

- Children overwhelmingly chose completing homework as the best part about going to the Homework Completion Program across all five years in all program sites with one exception
- For 2017-2018 at the Pleasantville site: Playing with friends was the most popular answer; the next year however, every child from the site chose completing homework as the best part about going to the Homework Completion Program
- Participating children recognized the importance and value of completing homework: Encouraging finding given Martin's (2009) research on how motivation promoted homework completion

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### Police Officer Tutors and Trust Building Between Children and Officers

- Children most often reported feeling happy when seeing a police officer, and they most often chose to find police officers if they needed help
- Since affection and trust often go hand in hand (Talley & Knight, 2005) and perceived helpfulness predicts a sense of trust (e.g., Rotenberg et al., 2005), children seemed to trust the police officers

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## Perception of What a Police Officer Does

Perception of police officer's main job duty fluctuated through the years at Stanley Holmes program site

At the Buzby Homes and Pleasantville program sites, children tended through the years to change their answer from police officers arresting people to police officers helping people

Given the motto of "protect and serve" (Akinlabi, 2017), children's changing perception of police officers was a positive change when it came to increasing trust in the police force

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- Homework Completion Program in Atlantic County, NJ has indeed started to prepare children for a college education
- Consistent with Salmi et al. (2000) and Thurman et al. (1993), police officers tutoring children in homework completion has helped to build trust
- Finally, children's consistent feedback about loving to go the community room of their Homework Completion Program site adds to the overall positive assessment of the Homework Completion Program in Atlantic County, NJ

General  
Conclusions

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