

# Increasing School Success Through OTMP Instruction

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Anyone involved in the field of education knows through first-hand experience that a student equipped with strong skills in organization, time management, and planning (OTMP) is better prepared to succeed academically. Students who know what their assignments are, can find their homework and materials when they need them, and can plan out time for work and studying are more likely to do well throughout their school careers. When elementary school students show up every day with all of the supplies they need, they are ready to focus on the day's tasks. When middle school students come home with a complete assignment list, they are able to get all of their homework done. And when high school students create plans for long-term assignments, they can leave themselves ample time to produce their best work.

With the latest research showing that students' OTMP skills can be significantly improved through direct instruction,\* many educational leaders see school-wide programming in OTMP skills as a concept that holds great potential value for their students. In a climate where there is ever-increasing pressure to concentrate on interventions that have a direct effect on performance in core subject areas, it can be difficult to envision where OTMP instruction fits into the picture. However, OTMP skills are a foundation that drives academic success in all subject areas. OTMP skills are not simply stand-alone competencies. They are the backbone of students' academic performance, facilitating learning and success in core subjects.

The most recent evidence suggests that OTMP instruction can have a wider-ranging impact on students' lives than one might expect – influencing outcomes that range from improved academic performance to a more peaceful home life. Following are 6 ways instruction in OTMP can increase school success rates.

1. **Students arrive better prepared to learn.** Students who do not write down assignments, leave necessary materials for homework at school, or leave everything until the last minute often fail to complete homework, which not only affects their grades, but also causes them to fall behind on the additional learning and practice they could have completed at home. These students show up to school in the morning unprepared to move on to new material, forcing teachers to choose whether to delay the entire class's progress by bringing them up to speed, or to leave these students behind. A school whose students have strong OTMP skills is better able to keep all students on the same path of steady progress.

2. **Teachers can spend their time teaching.** Subtract the minutes from any given classroom period spent waiting for students to borrow pens, dig through their bags to find assignments, make excuses for missing homework, and beg for extensions. Teachers who walk into classrooms where the students have all completed their assignments and have all the materials they need are able to devote their classes to instructional time. In pursuit of this goal, many teachers resort to developing their own ad hoc lessons in organization. Formal OTMP programs make this process more efficient. An OTMP program provides a common language across grade levels and lessons that build upon each other year by year, reducing the amount of time each teacher must spend in OTMP instruction.
3. **Academic performance improves.** Studies of formal OTMP interventions show that students not only improve in organizational skills, these skill improvements result in real academic change. Teachers rate students who have gone through OTMP instruction as having significantly stronger academic performance and being better able to meet teachers' academic expectations.\*
4. **Family functioning improves.** When parents have to spend time driving back to school to retrieve a forgotten book, telling their child to stop playing video games and start homework, or staying up all night with their child to help complete a project saved to the last minute, family tension often builds. Research on successful OTMP programs shows that students who participate experience significantly improved family functioning and a reduction in the amount of family conflict around OTMP issues.\* When schools can impart skills to students that help create a more peaceful home life, parents' motivation to connect and work with schools (and with their child) increases.
5. **Students are more college-ready.** Many of today's students arrive at college without adequate OTMP skills to meet the demands of higher education. Colleges are increasingly recognizing this skills gap, with many teaching remedial OTMP skills in first-year seminars. This is because administrators know that strong OTMP skills are essential to college success. Research has shown that time management skills are more predictive of GPA than even SAT scores. And poor time management is one of the top predictors for college dropout. Getting students college-ready means more than teaching math and writing – OTMP skills can make or break a college career.
6. **Students are better prepared for the job market.** In today's economy, schools are more concerned about educating students to become employable. Surveys

of employers find that OTMP skills rank among the top factors considered when making hiring decisions. OTMP skills are also named as some of the most important competencies necessary to succeed in the workforce once hired.

Instruction in OTMP offers students a leg up on the ladder to career success.

OTMP instruction is an intervention that takes relatively few resources, but has wide-ranging impact – strengthening academics, relieving teacher responsibilities and improving teaching effectiveness, helping families, and preparing students for successful futures.

\*These statements are based on research findings on the Organizational Skills Training (OST) Program, a comprehensive OTMP-training program that included individual clinic-based meetings with students as well as parent and teacher components. The InCommand program is based on the instructional elements of the OST Program. OST Program researchers Drs. Howard Abikoff and Richard Gallagher are Program Advisors for the InCommand Program.