

## Kids & look online for homework help

BY ROSEMARY BLACK

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Once 11-year-old Monica Reyes of Brooklyn reached junior high school, slogging through homework began taking its toll. On her mother.

"Math is the hardest," admits Elizabeth Reyes, who works full time and doesn't really "get" her daughter's math assignments. "It's like being in high school. She gets homework in five subjects a night."

Hiring a tutor was one option, but Elizabeth wasn't really comfortable leaving her daughter at home alone with a tutor. So she, like many other parents in this Internet-dominated era, looked into online tutoring. Now Monica gets tutored in whatever subjects she needs.

"It's worked out pretty good," says Reyes. "At first Monica was a little nervous but kids love computers and these tutors are highly interactive with the child. I don't have to

worry about being home. If Monica's ready to do homework and needs help before I get home, she can log onto the computer without me being there."

With the online tutoring, Monica can also opt for a 20-minute session rather than a 45 to 60-minute session. Often, that's all she needs - just a little help with a particular question. Mother and daughter are both happy with the arrangement and it means less tension once Elizabeth Reyes arrives home from work.

Tutoring is big business: it's a \$2.2 billion annual market. But the concept of the traditional tutor coming to the home is changing - these days, kids get help online.

"Traditional old-fashioned tutoring made a lot of sense until the age of the Internet,". "A tutor comes every week at a set time, and you save up all your questions. But that's not how kids learn on a daily basis. They get stuck all the time. They wind up falling behind and getting frustrated."

Besides instant messaging, the service uses whiteboard technology. "It's like a blackboard, and you can diagram or draw as an online classroom," Cigale says.

Online tutoring is about \$35 per hour, but the cost drops to as little as \$25 per hour if company provides flexible timings. Overall, online tutoring can be a less expensive alternative to private tutoring, which can run up to \$100 an hour. Online tutoring typically carries a monthly fee of \$35 to \$150.

Besides being cost efficient, online tutoring may help kids be more efficient about time. "Kids can be shy when a tutor arrives," Cigale says. "But when a kid connects with a tutor online, he's not focusing on what color the tutor's hair is or what he's wearing. You just go straight to the work."

Brittany Elias, 16, of Bayside, Queens is a good student and a busy one, as she is on the school's tennis team. When she starts her precalculus homework at night, she often needs some help.

whenever she has to prepare for a test she will work out the problems with the tutor online," says her mother, Janet, a computer teacher. "The tutor doesn't just give her the answer. They work through the problem by texting back and forth. With the white screen you can control the mouse to actually make shapes - triangles, circles, whatever.

The mouse becomes a piece of chalk."

There are certain drawbacks to online tutoring: you don't get the same feedback as with a traditional tutor, and there is limited monitoring and reporting on the child's progress. So parents may need to keep an eye on your kid so they stay on task.

"It's working for us," says Janet Elias. "It's pretty high tech, but my daughter likes it because a person helps her every step of the way."