

*A report from the*

# SCHOOL, FAMILY & COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS PROJECT

THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY  
CENTER ON FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES, SCHOOLS & CHILDREN'S LEARNING

# TEACHERS INVOLVE PARENTS IN SCHOOLWORK (TIPS)

## SERIES OF ARTICLES IN INSTRUCTOR MAGAZINE

Joyce L. Epstein

Co-Director, Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning

- September, 1993 **School and Family Partnerships. Introducing a new Instructor series. Sample TIPS HEALTH interactive homework.**  
Topic: Understanding self/ self concept.
- October, 1993 **Math Can Go Home! Sample TIPS MATH interactive homework.**  
Topic: Using graphs.
- November/  
December, 1993 **Send Science Skills Home. Sample TIPS SCIENCE interactive homework.**  
Topic: Classification.
- January, 1994 **Make Language Arts a Family Affair. Sample TIPS LANGUAGE ARTS interactive homework.**  
Topic: Writing skills/Interviewing skills
- March, 1994 **Help Families Talk About Health. Sample TIPS HEALTH interactive homework.**  
Topic: Central nervous system
- April, 1994 **I Mean It! Sample TIPS MATH interactive homework.**  
Topic: Finding averages or means.
- May/June, 1994 **Language Arts Cooks in the Kitchen. Sample TIPS LANGUAGE ARTS interactive homework.**  
Topic: Adjectives

TIPS Interactive Homework manuals for teachers and packets of **prototype activities** in math and science for the elementary grades, language arts, science/health, and math for the middle grades are available from the Center's publication office.

Write for a list of available publications, manuals, and packets of prototypes:  
Publication Office, Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning,  
Johns Hopkins University, 3505 North Charles Street, Baltimore MD 21218.  
FAX: 410-516-8890

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by Joyce Epstein

# SCHOOL AND FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

*Introducing a new INSTRUCTOR series designed to help you give parents a meaningful role in their children's education.*

Learning at home directly influences students' skills and achievements, according to recent studies. And most families want to help their children learn, studies also show—but they need guidance and information from schools.

Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) is an interactive homework process designed to help you involve parents in ways that benefit their children.

I developed the TIPS process in cooperation with my colleagues at The Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning at Johns Hopkins University. TIPS activities require students to talk with a family member about something they are learning in school. The activities in math, science, language arts, and health—all designed, implemented, and tested by teachers—give you a structure to follow in creating activities that give children and parents clearly defined roles in the interactive homework process.

This month, I'll describe the role TIPS can play in your parent-involvement program and present a TIPS activity for you to use with your students and their families. In future issues, you'll find more



challenging and engaging TIPS activities, strategies for understanding and using the TIPS process, and helpful information for overcoming obstacles.

## INTRODUCING TIPS TO PARENTS AND TEACHERS

Because TIPS activities involve your students *and* their parents, it's important to introduce the process to both. Talk with students in class about homework. Ask them to describe the kinds of assignments they like best. Invite them to share stories about how their parents help them learn at home. Explain that some of their homework assignments will ask them to work

with their parents on something you're studying in class.

In a letter, at back-to-school night, at a conference, or at an open house, share your goals for the TIPS interactive-homework process with parents. This way, you'll let parents know that they are important participants in the TIPS school and family partnership. Let them know that TIPS is designed to:

- increase parent awareness of their children's schoolwork;
- increase parent involvement in their children's learning activities at home that are linked to classwork;
- increase students' ability and

willingness to talk about schoolwork at home and to increase the frequency of those interactions:

- improve students' skills and their homework completion rate;
- enable teachers to design homework that encourages students to share their work with family;
- increase positive attitudes of parents, teachers, and children about homework.

Next, share a sample TIPS activity with both students and parents (or send the introductory letter home with the first assignment), such as the one included here.

#### TIPS FORMAT

Math, language arts, science, and health activities all have their own special components, but they share the following basic format.

**Letter to Parent or Guardian:** briefly states the topic and skills involved

**Objectives:** stated so that children can read them to parents

**List of Materials:** common and inexpensive, or supplied by the school

**Procedures:** guide children and parents through the activity

**Discussion:** encourages children to apply and analyze their skills

**Home-to-School Communications:** inviting parents to share observations, comments, and questions with you

**Parent Signature:** requested on each activity

#### TIPS FOR USING TIPS

Family interactions with children on homework may, if well-designed and effectively implemented, help them develop better attitudes toward schoolwork and boost their achievement. And who can argue with that? Still,

this type of involvement requires you to inform and involve your students' families in the work children are doing in class. And this may seem daunting. By using TIPS realistically and selectively, you can develop a homework plan that works for you. The following strategies can help you make the transition:

- Not every homework assignment has to reflect the TIPS process. You might, for example, start out by assigning TIPS homework in only one subject area, or by rotating subject areas—health this week, language arts next week, and so on. Ideally, you'll want to make assignments on a regular schedule to keep parents and children talking about the different subject areas regularly and to help keep parents aware of their children's work and progress.
- Assign TIPS on Fridays so families have more time to complete the activities.

- Print TIPS assignments on two sides of one sheet of paper, so there's only one piece of paper for parents and kids to keep track of.

- Use a particular color paper for TIPS activities. A parent in one school wrote, "When I see that yellow paper, I know this is important homework for my son to complete with me."

- Be aware that not all children will have an available parent for TIPS



involvement. Let them know that it's alright for grandparents, older siblings, or other caretakers to participate.

#### ADAPTING THE ACTIVITIES

Some of the sample activities offered in this series may be useful to you just as they are. But because homework for your students must match your classroom goals, you may need to adapt some or design your own. By using the sample activities as prototypes, you'll find you can easily create activities that correspond to your curriculum and your students' needs.

#### USING THE SAMPLE ACTIVITY

The sample assignment here was selected to increase students self-awareness; to give you a picture of your students' strengths, interests, and abilities; and to help parents and children communicate about the importance of self-concept.

While the activity may not match the skills or grade level you are teaching, you can easily adapt it to meet your needs. For example, with younger children, you might suggest that parents read the questions aloud and record their children's answers. When preparing this activity for duplication, include lines for answers next to sentences 1 to 10 and add space or answer lines for Discussion questions 1 to 3. →

#### IF YOU WANT TO KNOW MORE

For more information on TIPS, write to The Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning, Attention: Publications, Johns Hopkins University, 3505 North Charles St., Baltimore, MD 21218.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Health Education: All About Me

Dear Family:

My class is learning to identify factors that help shape the way I think about myself. This activity will help you help me learn more about self-concept. I will work alone to complete the All About Me section, then we will work together on the rest of the assignment. I hope you enjoy doing this activity with me. This assignment is due \_\_\_\_\_.

Sincerely, \_\_\_\_\_

Child's Signature

**OBJECTIVES:**

1. To develop a self-descriptive profile.
2. To analyze and discuss ways of changing parts of the profile.

**YOU WILL NEED:**

magazines, glue, scissors, paper

**BEFORE YOU START:**

Read and discuss the following definitions of self-concept with your child.

*Self-concept:* how you see yourself or feel about yourself

*Positive self-concept:* to feel good about yourself

*Negative self-concept:* to feel bad about yourself

## All About Me

Finish these sentences. Write the first thing you think of

- ( ) 1. I am a person who likes \_\_\_\_\_
- ( ) 2. I am a person who can \_\_\_\_\_
- ( ) 3. I am a person who has \_\_\_\_\_
- ( ) 4. I am a person who hates \_\_\_\_\_
- ( ) 5. I am a person who always \_\_\_\_\_
- ( ) 6. I am a person who never \_\_\_\_\_
- ( ) 7. I am a person who should \_\_\_\_\_
- ( ) 8. I am a person who wants \_\_\_\_\_
- ( ) 9. I am a person who wishes \_\_\_\_\_
- ( ) 10. I am a person who would rather \_\_\_\_\_

Put a check (✓) next to the three sentences that make you feel most proud. Put an (X) next to the sentences that you would most like to change.

**DISCUSSION**

Discuss the following questions with your family member. Write complete sentences.

Who is assisting you? \_\_\_\_\_

1. Of all the descriptions about yourself, which *one* makes you most proud?
2. Which *one* would you most like to change?
3. List at least three ways that you might change this. Write your own ideas or get some help from your family member.

**A.**

**B.**

**C.**

**NOW TRY THIS**

Make a collage by cutting pictures and words out of magazines and newspapers that describe YOU. Ask your family member to help you locate words or pictures. Paste them on a piece of paper for display in the classroom. Bring your collage in with this assignment when it is due.

**REMEMBER!**

Try to show things about yourself: likes, dislikes, hobbies, sports, etc.

**HOME-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION:**

Dear Parent,

Please give me your reactions to your child's work on this activity. Write YES or NO for each statement.

- \_\_\_\_ 1. My child understood the homework and was able to discuss it.
- \_\_\_\_ 2. My child and I enjoyed the activity.
- \_\_\_\_ 3. This assignment helped me know what my child is learning in health.

**ANY OTHER COMMENTS?**

Parent Signature \_\_\_\_\_

by Joyce Epstein

# Math Can Go Home!

*An interactive homework assignment with 2 reproducibles*

Teachers worry about involving parents in math. Parents worry that they might confuse their children. Children argue that their parents do math differently than their teachers. TIPS (Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork) math activities are designed to put teachers, parents, and students at ease with math at home by

- illustrating how skills are taught in class;
- allowing students to show, demonstrate, and celebrate new skills; and
- enabling parents to communicate with teachers about their observations, questions, and comments.

TIPS math activities cover a range of skills, including, for example, skip-counting, creating word problems, graphing, telling time, metric measure, and more than 20 others at the second-grade level. This month's TIPS activity focuses on graphing.

## TIPS MATH FORMAT

You can reproduce and use this TIPS math activity as is or modify it to meet your curriculum needs. You can also use it as a model when creating new interactive math assignments. TIPS math activ-

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ities share the following format:

1. *Look This Over* shows an example of a skill taught in class and allows the child to explain the skill to a parent. A solution is provided.
2. *Now Try This* gives another trial example for the child to solve. A child who needs help can ask a parent to go over the example. A child who understands can demonstrate that knowledge to parents.
3. *Practice* and *More Practice* give additional examples to reinforce the skill. *Let's Find Out* reinforces the skill's application at home.
4. *Home to School Communication* invites parents to comment on their child's understanding of the skill.

## GRAPHING FOR EVERY GRADE

Graphing makes for fun interactive homework at all grade levels. Children of any age can show their

families that they can read, understand, and create graphs about things in and around their own homes.

Graphing is a skill that grows in difficulty as children progress in grade levels. You can easily adapt the grade 2 activity here for older or younger students. For example, the TIPS graphing activities for Grade 5 use bar and line graphs. With first graders, you might simplify the graphing concepts.

Follow up on children's work in class by extending the graphing concepts presented. For example, create a new shape graph (see *Look This Over*) showing the number of each shape that children can identify in the classroom. Take *Now Try This* further by taking a class survey on how children get to school (by bicycle, bus, car, and so on). Compile students' graphs from *Let's Find Out* (showing family eye color), discuss, and draw conclusions.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on TIPS write to The Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning, Attn Publications, Johns Hopkins University, 3505 North Charles St., Baltimore, MD 21218. →

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Math: Using Graphs

Dear Family:

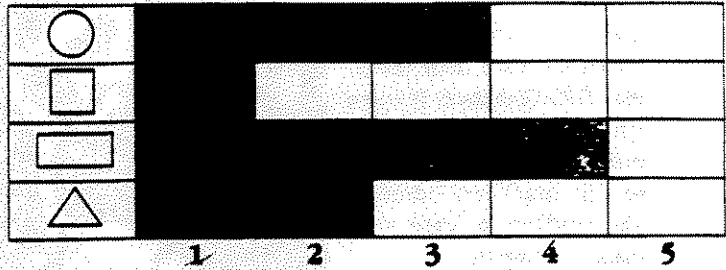
My class is learning how to read, understand, and create graphs. This activity will let me show you what I know about graphing. We can talk about why graphs are important. This assignment is due \_\_\_\_\_.

Sincerely, \_\_\_\_\_

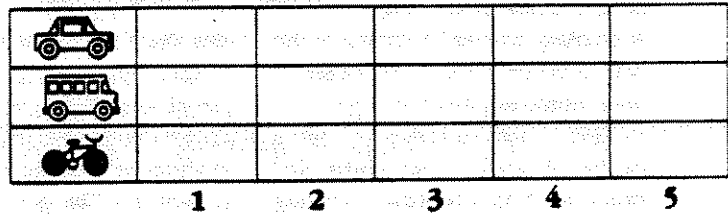
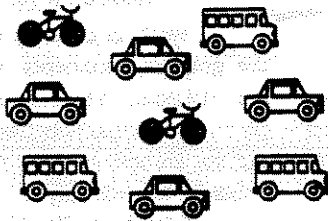
Student's signature

## LOOK THIS OVER Study the graph. Explain the answers to a parent.

- How many circles? (3)
- How many squares? (1)
- How many triangles? (4)
- How many rectangles? (2)



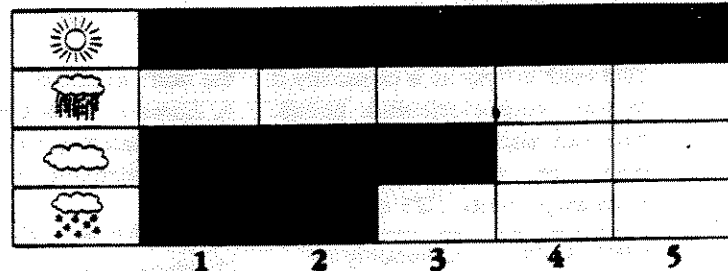
## NOW TRY THIS Color the graph to show how many examples there are of each object. Show a parent how you do this.



If you need some help, ask a parent to go over the examples with you. When you understand, explain to your parent what you did.

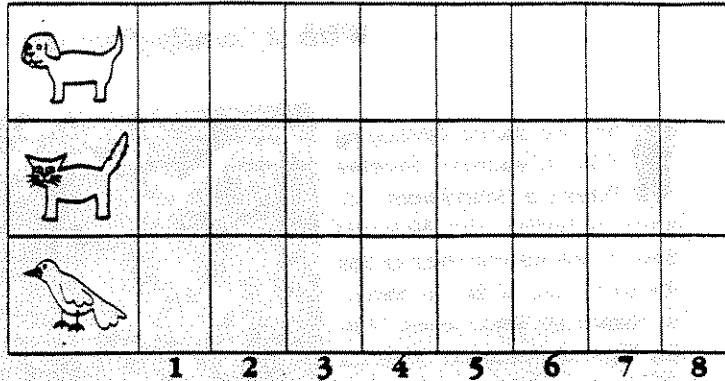
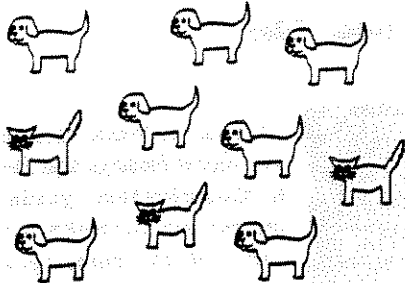
## PRACTICE SECTION Study the graph and answer the questions.

1. How many sunny days? \_\_\_\_\_
2. How many rainy days? \_\_\_\_\_
3. How many cloudy days? \_\_\_\_\_
4. How many snowy days? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Snowy + cloudy = \_\_\_\_\_



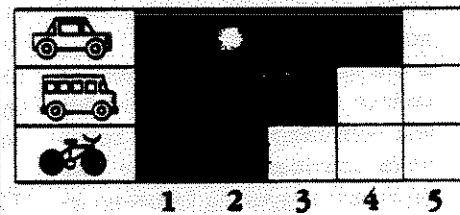


**MORE PRACTICE** Fill in the graph and answer the questions.



1. How many birds? \_\_\_\_\_
2. How many dogs? \_\_\_\_\_
3. How many cats? \_\_\_\_\_
4. How many more dogs than cats? \_\_\_\_\_

**ANSWER TO NOW TRY THIS:**



**LET'S FIND OUT**

**DISCUSS:** Why do you think graphs are important?

**MY IDEA:** \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**MY FAMILY MEMBER'S IDEA:** \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**HOME TO SCHOOL COMMUNICATION: PARENT OBSERVATION**

How well do you think your child understands this skill?

- \_\_\_ 1. Child seems to understand this skill.
- \_\_\_ 2. Please check work. Child needed some help on this but seems to understand.
- \_\_\_ 3. Please help. Child still needs instruction on this skill.
- \_\_\_ 4. Please note (other comments below):

Parent's signature \_\_\_\_\_

# Send Science Skills Home

*With 2 family-friendly reproducibles*

**W**hen we started developing TIPS (Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork) science activities, the National Science Foundation was calling for 30 minutes a day in science at elementary grade levels. Now the National Education Goals call for the United States to be "first" in science by the year 2000.

TIPS-Science, an interactive homework process, helps you accomplish your instructional goals in science by:

- encouraging you to introduce science topics in class, providing you with sample interactive homework activities to reinforce concepts, and suggesting follow-up in-class activities;
- allowing students to demonstrate, discuss, and enjoy science activities at home; and
- enabling parents to be informed on a regular basis about their child's science work and progress, and to communicate with you about their observations and questions.

TIPS-Science gives students at all grade levels experiences in building science skills, such as classifying, collecting data, making decisions, designing models, drawing conclusions, experimenting, graphing, hypothesizing, identifying patterns and relationships, inferring, interpreting data, mea-



suring, predicting, and solving problems. For example, simple charts or lists in the early elementary grades may lead to long-term, systematic collections of data in upper grades.

## USING TIPS-SCIENCE ACTIVITIES

The assignment *Grouping ABC's and Animals* is ready to reproduce. For a more challenging activity, you might ask students to classify items that require making more complex distinctions, such as rocks or leaves. For a simpler activity, you might provide a classification system and ask students to group items accordingly. To create new activities, follow the TIPS-Science format:

- 1. Letter to parent or guardian:** explains the topic and specific skills involved in the activity.
- 2. Objectives:** briefly tells the purpose of the activity.
- 3. Materials:** common, inexpensive, and easily obtainable at home (some are even provided).
- 4. Procedure:** guides students step by step through a hands-on activity.
- 5. Lab report or data chart:** allows

students to work as scientists and report findings and ideas.

**6. Conclusion:** guides the interaction between the student and the parent/guardian through questions, summaries, or interviews that encourage enjoyable exchanges about science.

**7. Home-to-school communications:** invites parents/guardians to share comments and observations with the teacher.

**8. Parent/guardian's signature:** requested on each activity.

## TEACHER TIP

The days that you typically don't assign homework—over the weekend, for instance—may be the best time for a TIPS assignment. In fact, more than 90 percent of parents surveyed say they can find time over the weekend to work with their children on homework. Allowing a few days for students and their families to complete TIPS-Science activities helps keep interactive assignments "family friendly."

## FOLLOW-UP

After students complete *Grouping ABC's and Animals*, you might invite them to share their classification systems and their families' responses and reactions. Look for the most common ways to classify, and the more unusual. Brainstorm classification systems in real life (for example, names in a phone book, students in a school, food in a grocery store, and so on). ■

JOYCE EPSTEIN is codirector of the Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning at Johns Hopkins University.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Grouping ABC's and Animals

Dear Parent/Guardian:

In science we are learning about systems of classification. This activity asks me to develop a classification system. I hope that you enjoy completing this activity with me. This assignment is due: \_\_\_\_\_

Sincerely, \_\_\_\_\_ (student's signature)

## PROCEDURE

1. Print the entire alphabet in capital letters here:
2. Make up a rule for separating all the letters of the alphabet into three groups. Write your rule here:
3. Below, give each group a title, then list the letters in each group under the title.

Group 1: _____	Group 2: _____	Group 3: _____

## FAMILY INTERVIEW Who are you interviewing? \_\_\_\_\_

Explain your system of alphabet classification to a family member, then ask: Can you think of a different rule to make three groups out of all the letters of the alphabet?

Group 1: _____	Group 2: _____	Group 3: _____

## TRY THIS!

You are a scientist who has been asked to classify a dog, a cat, a fish, a butterfly, a moth, and a turtle. Would you put them all in the same group or in different groups?

1. Explain your classification system for these animals.

I would group these animals into \_\_\_\_\_ (how many?) groups called:

My reasons are:

2. Use the following chart to show which group each animal belongs to and explain why the animal is in that group.



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**SCHOOL-HOME CONNECTION**

	Group	Reason
dog		
cat		
fish		
butterfly		
moth		
turtle		

**FAMILY INTERVIEW** Who are you interviewing? \_\_\_\_\_

Ask your family member to name six other animals. Will the animals work in the classification system you used above or do you need new categories? Fill in the chart to show your answer.

Animal	Group	Reason

**HOME-TO-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION**

Dear Family Member:

Please record your reactions to your child's work with this activity. Write *yes* or *no* for each statement:

- \_\_\_\_\_ My child understood the assignment and was able to discuss it.
- \_\_\_\_\_ My child and I enjoyed the activity.
- \_\_\_\_\_ This assignment helped me know what my child is learning in science.

Other comments:

\_\_\_\_\_ (parent/guardian's signature)

# Make Language Arts a Family Affair

*Interactive homework that goes to parents' heads!*

**M**om, did your parents like your hairstyle when you were my age?" When students and their families talk about the way things were, they're not just sharing memories. These kinds of interactions promote interest, enjoyment, and positive attitudes about writing at home and give students opportunities to increase a wide range of writing skills—from gathering ideas to learning to edit and revise.

Interactive language arts homework following the TIPS (Teachers Involving Parents in Schoolwork) model may focus on writing skills, as does this month's example, or on skills in reading, speaking, thinking, and listening. Language arts topics make excellent *interactors*. Families like to read what their children write, help them practice speeches, and so on. And children love to ask questions, gather ideas, and share their work. Parents and children come together on activities they enjoy.

## HAIRY TALES AND MORE

The assignment *Hairy Tales* is ready for you to reproduce and send home with your students.

When families have completed the homework, try this activity. Invite students to use information from their interviews to create a



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*Hairy Tales* time line. Let students arrange pictures of their parents' childhood hairstyles in chronological order. Compare and contrast the hairstyles. If students were children when their parents were, which hairstyles would they choose?

## MAKE YOUR OWN ASSIGNMENTS

You can create your own interactive language arts assignments by following the TIPS format. Include:

1. **letter to parent or guardian** from the student that explains the type of writing and the due date;
2. **objectives**, if not clear from the title and letter;
3. **list of special materials**, if more than pencil and paper;
4. **prewriting space** for students to think and plan; for example, by outlining, brainstorming, listing, webbing;
5. **writing space** for a first draft;
6. **suggestions for family interactions** such as discussions, read-alouds, checklists for editing, interviews, and reactions; and
7. **home-to-school communications** for parents to share comments

and observations about the assignment.

## TIPS FOR USING TIPS

To maintain a flow of information and interaction with families, try sending home interactive assignments every week or two. Following are additional guidelines for a successful program.

**1. Link homework assignments to curriculum and class lessons.** While some

existing TIPS assignments will be useful to you, you may have to adapt or design others that support your instructional goals.

**2. Give students and their families enough time to complete interactive assignments.** You might assign TIPS homework over a weekend, when parents have more time to talk with their children about schoolwork.

**3. Follow up homework in class** with activities that let children share their work.

**4. Let parents and children know you appreciate the time they spend together on learning activities.** You might award certificates after students and families complete a certain number of activities.

*Continued on page 22*

## FOR MORE TIPS

To request TIPS manuals and prototype homework activities, write to the Publications Office, Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning, Johns Hopkins University, 3505 North Charles St., Baltimore, MD 21218.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Hairy Tales

Dear Parent/Guardian:

In language arts I am working on using information we gather from others to write explanations. For this assignment, I am comparing today's hairstyles with those of the past. I hope that you enjoy completing this activity with me. This assignment is due: \_\_\_\_\_

Sincerely, \_\_\_\_\_ (student's signature)

## FAMILY INTERVIEW

Find a family member to interview.

Who is it? \_\_\_\_\_

**Ask:**

1. In what decade were you born? (1950's, 1960's, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

2. What types of hairstyles were popular when you were my age?

For boys: \_\_\_\_\_

For girls: \_\_\_\_\_

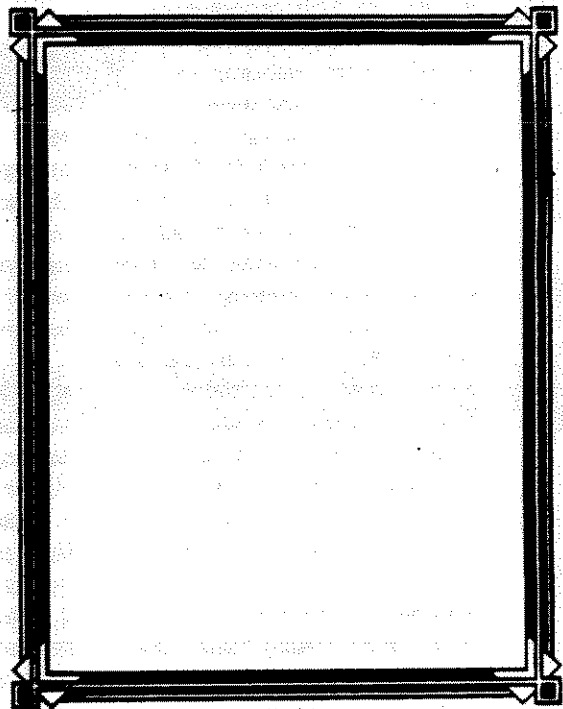
3. What hairstyle did you have when you were my age? \_\_\_\_\_

4. Did your family agree with your choice of hairstyle? \_\_\_\_\_

5. What is your favorite current hairstyle and why? \_\_\_\_\_

6. What is your least favorite current hairstyle and why? \_\_\_\_\_

Ask your family member to show you a picture of a hairstyle from the past. Draw a picture of the hairstyle here.



## FIRST DRAFT

Use the information from your interview to write a paragraph about hairstyles. Remember to:

- Give your paragraph a title
- Be sure all of your sentences relate to your topic.
- Use descriptive words to help explain the ideas.
- If you compare hairstyles, tell how they are alike and how they are different.

Use the space on the other side of this page for your paragraph.



Write your paragraph here.

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

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Read your paragraph aloud to your family member. Revise or add sentences if you need to.

.....  
**EXTENSION ACTIVITY**

Select another topic for comparison—for example, clothing styles, ways to have fun, or rules at home and school. What topic did you choose? \_\_\_\_\_

Next to each Q line, write a *question* about this topic. Use your questions to interview your family member. Write the family member's *answer* next to each A line.

1. Q: \_\_\_\_\_  
A: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Q: \_\_\_\_\_  
A: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Q: \_\_\_\_\_  
A: \_\_\_\_\_

.....  
**HOME-TO-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION**

Dear Parent: Your comments about your child's work in this activity are important. Please write yes or no for each statement:

- \_\_\_ My child understood the homework and was able to discuss it.
- \_\_\_ My child and I enjoyed this activity.
- \_\_\_ This assignment helps me understand what my child is learning in language arts.

Other comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Parent signature: \_\_\_\_\_

# Help Families Talk About Health

*Start with this activity for kids and parents to do together*

**P**arents have much to say about their children's health and development. But sometimes parents aren't sure exactly how to begin discussions with kids about sensitive topics such as sexual development, AIDS, and drug abuse.

Interactive homework activities, like "Test Your Nerves" which appears on pages 28 and 30, give students and parents a chance to start some of these important conversations as they communicate about schoolwork and connect as people. "Test Your Nerves" was developed by TIPS (Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork) for you to reproduce or adapt to support your curriculum and to meet your students' needs. (See box at right for more information on TIPS.)

## INTRODUCE THE ACTIVITY

"Test Your Nerves" is designed to help children explore the way the nervous system works through interesting activities they try with members of their families. As with all interactive assignments, it's helpful to introduce this activity to children before sending it home by:

- explaining the parts students



will share with family members,

- reinforcing the importance of students' interactions with family members; and
- answering any questions about the assignment.

Our evaluations show that teachers who spend a few minutes on these introductory steps get better results—more of their students complete the assignment and do it well.

## FOLLOW UP IN CLASS

It's also helpful to follow up on "Test Your Nerves" with classroom discussions, demonstrations, and enrichment activities. This demonstrates the importance of completing the homework and gives students opportunities to share their family interactions. After using "Test Your Nerves," have students compile their data into one class chart. Did every-

one experience the same kinds of responses? Discuss any differences and retry activities if necessary. Brainstorm and investigate other actions that are controlled by the autonomic nervous system. How does this function contribute to our bodies' health?

## MAKE YOUR OWN ACTIVITY

You can follow the TIPS model to make your own take-home health activities. The TIPS format includes: a short **letter** to parent or guardian; **statement of the purpose** of the activity if not clear from the title or letter; a list of common and inexpensive **materials**, if necessary; **discussion questions** that invite interaction and higher order thinking; and **home-to-school communications** to give families an opportunity to comment on the experience.

*Reproducibles on pages 28 and 30*

## For More TIPS

Interactive homework samples are available from TIPS on a range of topics, such as changes in early adolescence, emotional development, drug awareness, AIDS, the organ systems, and decision-making. To request TIPS manuals and prototype homework activities, write to the Publications Office, Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning, Johns Hopkins University, 3505 North Charles St., Baltimore, MD 21218. For a TIPS activity on self-esteem, see *INSTRUCTOR* September 1993.



JOYCE EPSTEIN is codirector of the Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning at Johns Hopkins University.



Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Test Your Nerves

Dear Parent/Guardian:

In class we are studying how our bodies nervous system works. In this assignment we will measure each other's reactions to some activities and discuss what we observe. I hope you enjoy completing this with me. This assignment is due: \_\_\_\_\_

Sincerely, \_\_\_\_\_ (student's signature)

## PURPOSE

The central nervous system lets us act on information our senses receive. The autonomic nervous system controls actions that are involuntary or *automatic*. The following activities explore voluntary and involuntary responses and help children understand the body's dependence on automatic responses.

For these activities you will need a **flashlight**, a **ruler**, and a **dollar bill**.

## PROCEDURE

1. Write the name of the family member working with you: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Read the following definitions with a family member.

**stimulus:** anything that causes an action

**response:** any action caused by a stimulus

**automatic response:** a response that you can't control, even if you try

**voluntary response:** a response that you can control

3. Complete the activities on the next page with your family member. First, observe your family member's reactions. Record your observations on the Data Chart in the column marked Family Member's Reactions. Next, ask your family member to do the same for you.

## HOME-TO-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION

Please fill in after completing activities on the next page.

Dear Parent: Your comments about your child's work in these activities are important. Please write yes or no for each statement:

\_\_\_\_\_ My child understood the homework and was able to discuss it.

\_\_\_\_\_ My child and I enjoyed these activities.

\_\_\_\_\_ This assignment helps me understand what my child is learning in language arts.

Other comments: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent signature: \_\_\_\_\_

**Activity 1: Eye blink**

Move your hand slowly toward the person's eyes. Watch his or her eyelids. What happens?

**Activity 2: Pupil gaze**

Have the person stare straight ahead. Look at the pupil (dark center) of one of his or her eyes. Shine a flashlight into that eye for two seconds. What happens?

**Activity 3: Dollar drop**

Have the person stand with one arm extended. Dangle a dollar bill just above his or her hand. Release the dollar bill for the other person to catch. What happens?

**Activity 4: Breathing**

Have the other person hold his or her breath while you count seconds. What happens?

**Activity 5: Achilles' heel**

Have the other person kneel on a chair. With a ruler, gently tap the back of the ankle just above the heel. Watch the foot. What happens?

.....

**DATA CHART**

Activity	Stimuli	Family Member's Reaction	Your Reaction	Automatic or Voluntary?
1. eye blink				
2. pupil gaze				
3. dollar drop				
4. breathing				
5. Achilles' heel				

**DRAWING CONCLUSIONS**

After you have observed and recorded each other's reactions, discuss your responses. Decide if the response for each activity was automatic or voluntary. Write your answers in the last column of the Data Chart. For each automatic response, tell why you think your body responded the way it did:

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# Family Math That's Above Average

*Take-home activities for kids and their parents*

Everyday activities of family life are actually opportunities to develop the math skills you're teaching in the classroom. Averages, for example, work their way into the real world at home in lots of ways. Families budgeting for something special might find themselves calculating their average monthly expenses and the average amount they can save.

By sharing an interactive homework assignment such as the one featured here, you can help parents understand what their children are learning about averages and how they can reinforce this at home.

## USING "I MEAN IT!"

The take-home reproducible called **I Mean It!** (see next page) is an example of Teachers Involving Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) interactive math homework: it provides a model you can follow to create your own math take-homes. The TIPS-MATH format asks students



- **In the Real World** enables students and parents working together to apply the skill to everyday situations.

- **Home-to-School Communication** lets parents share their thoughts with you.

## FOLLOW-UP FUN

Reinforce the importance of the assignment by planning a follow-up activity that lets students share and discuss their results. For example, use students' data from "In the Real World" to draw conclusions about the amount of time most people spend working or sleeping. Integrate the activity with other areas of your curriculum by investigating the amount of sleep experts recommend children get and researching other animals' sleep habits.

and families to do several things:

- **Look This Over** asks students to explain the skill—here, finding averages—to a family member.

- **Now Try This** gives students another opportunity to demonstrate their understanding.

- **A Practice Section** reinforces the skill with problems students solve and explain.

*Reproducibles on pages 18 and 22*



JOYCE EPSTEIN is codirector of the Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning at Johns Hopkins University. To

request TIPS manuals and prototype activities, write: Publications Office, Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning, Johns Hopkins University, 3505 North Charles St., Baltimore, MD 21218.

**Plan Interactive Homework for Next Year**

Research shows that one of the best ways to promote student success is to involve parents. Interactive homework like the TIPS activities featured here helps do that. Following are some suggestions for getting a head start on putting an interactive homework program in place for your class next year:

1. List your major curriculum objectives in one (or more) subjects for the year.
2. For each objective, identify one skill that you believe will lend itself to enjoyable and useful interactions between students and their family members.

3. Using the TIPS samples printed in this column throughout the year or others available from the center, select, adapt, or design homework activities that support each lesson you identified.
4. Work with a grade-level colleague or teachers from several grades to develop activities you can share.
5. If possible, obtain school or district funds to support a three- or four-week summer curriculum development project. Use this time to design interactive homework to use throughout the year (and in years to come).

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# I Mean It!

Dear Parent Guardian:

In math I am learning about averages or means. With this activity I will show you how I find a mean or average. Then we will explore how this skill is used in real life. This assignment is due: \_\_\_\_\_

Sincerely, \_\_\_\_\_ (student's signature)

## LOOK THIS OVER

Talk with a family member about the ways you hear people use the word *average*, for example: earned run averages in baseball or average height for a child your age.

Now read this example with a family member: A group of children wanted to find out how many blocks they could stack before the blocks fell. They made five towers of 9, 7, 11, 8, and 15 blocks before the blocks fell each time. What's the average number of blocks they can stack before the tower tumbles?

One way to find the answer is:

- Add the data:  $9+7+11+8+15=50$ .
- Divide by the number of items in the set:  $50\div5=10$

Another way to find the answer is to make piles of blocks (or other objects) to show each tower. Rearrange the blocks so that each tower has as close to the same number of blocks as possible. (You'll stack an average of 10 blocks before the tower tumbles.)

## NOW TRY THIS

Show a family member how you can do this example: Seven children wrote down the number of times they had watched their favorite movies: 7, 13, 23, 3, 17, 9, and 12. What's the average number of times? \_\_\_\_ Explain how you found the average.

See page 22 for answer.

Adapted from *Math 1 (Grade 4-5)*, Teachers' Guide, Parents in Schoolsbook House, Inc. © 1994. Teachers' Guide, Parents in Schoolsbook House, Inc. © 1994. Teachers' Guide, Parents in Schoolsbook House, Inc. © 1994.

## SCHOOL-HOME CONNECTION

### PRACTICE

Try solving these problems. Explain your answers to a family member.

1. List the number of cereal pieces (or grapes, marbles, or any other item) each family member can hold in his or her hand. Find the average.

Data: \_\_\_\_\_ Average = \_\_\_\_\_  
 Is your number close to the average? Explain. \_\_\_\_\_

2. Find the average shoe size for your family. Round half-sizes up.

Data: \_\_\_\_\_ Average = \_\_\_\_\_  
 Is your shoe size bigger or smaller than the average? \_\_\_\_\_

### IN THE REAL WORLD

People use averages to report results of surveys. Poll four family members or friends. Try to include at least one family member. **ASK:** How many hours each day do you work (or go to school)? How many hours each day do you sleep? Use the back of this page if you need more room for calculations. Now fill in this chart:

Names of people surveyed	Hours at work (or school)/day	Hours of sleep/day	Calculations

Average = \_\_\_\_\_      Average = \_\_\_\_\_

Explain your results to a family member. **DISCUSS:** Would I find the same results if I surveyed only people my own age? \_\_\_\_\_

*Answer to Now Try This: 12. Add  $7 + 13 + 23 + 3 + 17 + 9 + 12$  (84), divide by 7 (12). Children watched their favorite movies an average of 12 times.*

### HOME-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION

Dear Parent:

Please share your reactions to this activity. Write *yes* or *no* for each statement.

\_\_\_\_\_ My child understood the homework and was able to complete it.

\_\_\_\_\_ My child and I enjoyed this activity.

\_\_\_\_\_ This assignment helped me understand what my child is learning in math.

Other comments: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

# Language Arts Cooks in the Kitchen

*This ready-to-use take-home activity spices up writing practice!*

**H**ere's a do-at-home project that lets parents help their children master nouns and adjectives in the comfort of their own kitchens.

As the interactive assignment *A Kitchen of Words* (see reproducibles, pages 21 and 22) shows, families' everyday activities are full of opportunities to encourage children to effectively express themselves. Like *A Kitchen of Words*, TIPS (Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork) Language Arts activities help students and their families focus on writing, reading, speaking, thinking, and listening skills.

## USING "A KITCHEN OF WORDS"

**Tailor homework for your students:** This activity on nouns and adjectives is ready to reproduce and use as is—or you can easily adapt it to meet the needs of your students. For younger students, you might want to provide more direction in selecting adjectives: for example, after having children list people, places, and things they find in the kitchen, have them ask about each, "What does it look (or feel, or smell, or taste) like?" Older students might connect two or more adjectives to describe their nouns.



**Schedule for maximum involvement:** Because the goal of interactive homework is to involve parents in schoolwork, be sure to leave

adequate time for families to complete *A Kitchen of Words*. Generally, weekend assignments help make TIPS activities "family friendly."

**Plan follow-up activities:** To reinforce the value of completing TIPS assignments, plan in-class activities that allow students to share their work. For example, after completing *A Kitchen of Words*, invite students to compile a class list of kitchen nouns. Where are most of the "nouns" in a kitchen? Have students look at adjectives they listed for the same nouns. How many different ways did students describe an apple? Milk? The sink?

Reproducibles on pages 21 and 22

## MAKING THE MOST OF TIPS

You can use *A Kitchen of Words* as a model for your own interactive language arts homework activities. Just be sure to include:

- a letter to parents/guardians that explains the language arts activity
- the objective (if not obvious);
- a list of special materials (if more than paper and pencil);
- a prewriting activity with space for students to plan;
- space for a first draft;
- an interactive component such as a discussion, exchange of ideas, or interview;
- a home-to-school communication section for parents to provide observations and comments; and
- space for parent signature.

For TIPS manuals, more prototype homework activities (in language arts, math, and science), and information on developing an interactive homework program that supports your curriculum, write: Publications Office, Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning, Johns Hopkins University, 3505 North Charles St., Baltimore, MD 21218



JOYCE EPSTEIN is codirector of the Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning at Johns Hopkins University.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# A Kitchen of Words

Dear Parent Guardian:

We are learning about the ways we use nouns and adjectives in our writing. I hope you enjoy doing this activity with me. This assignment is due: \_\_\_\_\_

Sincerely, \_\_\_\_\_ (student's signature)



## THINGS TO REMEMBER

A **noun** is a word that names a person, place, or thing.

An **adjective** is a word that describes a noun.

Examples: *cold milk, crunchy cookies, soapy water, and wrinkled orange*

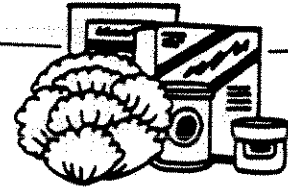
## PROCEDURE

Who is the family member working with you? \_\_\_\_\_

1. Look around your kitchen for something that interests you. Search for people, places, and things, such as soup, chairs, sister, or shelf. Write the name of each item in the *Nouns* column.
2. Read each noun in your list to your family member. Think of an adjective for each noun and record these words in the *My Adjectives* column. Ask your family member to suggest a different adjective for each noun. Write these words in the *Family Member's Adjectives* column.

Nouns	My Adjectives	Family Member's Adjectives

Adapted from *Nouns and Adjectives—In the Kitchen* © 1992 Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS), J. Epstein, V. Jackson, K. Salinas, and WPS Teachers, Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning at Johns Hopkins



**DISCUSSION**

As you complete the following activities, discuss them with your family member.

1. List categories of nouns you found in your kitchen (for example, fruit and beverages):

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2. Choose three nouns and their adjectives from your list and use them in a story about your kitchen:

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**HOME-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION**

Dear Parent:

Please share your reactions to this activity. Write *yes* or *no* for each statement.

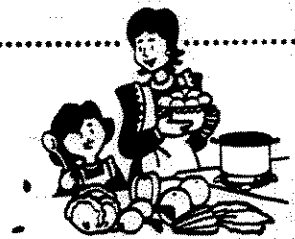
\_\_\_\_\_ My child understood the homework and was able to complete it.

\_\_\_\_\_ My child and I enjoyed this activity.

\_\_\_\_\_ This assignment helped me understand what my child is learning in language arts.

Other comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

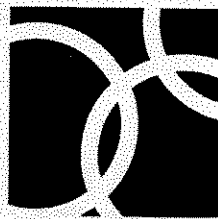
Parent signature: \_\_\_\_\_





# PROMISING PARTNERSHIP PRACTICES — 1998 —

An annual collection from members of the  
**National Network of Partnership Schools**



*Johns Hopkins University*

**Edited by Karen Clark Salinas, Laurel A. Clark  
Beth S. Simon & Frances Van Voorhis**

# **National Network of Partnership Schools**

Joyce L. Epstein, Director

Mavis G. Sanders, Assistant Director

## **MEMBER BENEFITS**

**Handbook to guide the work of Action Teams**

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## The National Network of Partnership Schools

Established by researchers at Johns Hopkins University in 1996, the National Network of Partnership Schools brings together schools, districts, and state departments of education that are committed to developing and maintaining strong programs of school-family-community partnerships. Each Partnership School strengthens its program by addressing six types of involvement and by using an Action Team approach. Districts and states support schools' efforts to build excellent partnership programs. Members of the National Network of Partnership Schools are encouraged, informed, recognized, and supported in their efforts to improve and maintain school, family, and community connections.

One way that the Network supports school-family-community partnerships is to collect and share promising partnership practices. Each year, school, district, and state members of the National Network of Partnership Schools are invited to share their promising partnership practices and effective leadership activities.

*Promising Partnership Practices 1998* includes thirty-seven activities selected from those submitted by Network members. Best practices in this collection cover each type of involvement for elementary, middle, and high schools. Some activities include multiple types of involvement. The partnership practices should be useful to those starting new programs and those improving their partnership programs. We greatly appreciate the hard work of the school Action Teams and district and state leadership teams who shared their school-family-community partnership practices.

For more information about the National Network of Partnership Schools, please contact Karen Clark Salinas at Johns Hopkins University, 3003 North Charles Street, Suite 200, Baltimore, MD 21218; tel: 410-516-8818; fax: 410-516-8890; e-mail: [nnps@csos.jhu.edu](mailto:nnps@csos.jhu.edu). Or, visit the Network's website at [www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000](http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000).

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## **TYPE I PARENTING**

Assist families with parenting and child-rearing skills, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions that support children as students at each age and grade level. Assist schools in understanding families.

# KINDER'S FAMILY ROOM

Kinder Elementary School  
Miamisburg, Ohio

Our partnership activity is a family resource center located at the school. It helps increase our parent involvement and awareness of school activities and functions. Information on community services and various parenting resources are also available for parents to use.

An action team made up of teachers, parents, and school officials saw the need for increased parental involvement in our students' education. This team attended workshops and seminars for ideas on how to increase our parent involvement. We decided our school needed a non-threatening, family-friendly environment to assist in bringing families into the school. This resulted in the recommendation of a "Family Resource Center" on the school premises.

We first applied for a \$500.00 "Goals 2000" grant. These funds from the Ohio State Department of Education were awarded to us late in the 1996-1997 school year. We decided to name our family resource center "The Kinder Family Room." Parent volunteers and our Action Team donated their time to get the family room off to a great start. A parent volunteer designed a "Logo" for our family room. We used the grant to purchase resources and equipment to establish the family room. We purchased various parenting books and magazines to start our library. We wanted to make our family room as comfortable and relaxing as a family room is at home, so we purchased coffee pots and items for parents to eat and enjoy as they come to relax in our family-friendly environment and learn what is happening in our school. We have a Kinder Swap Board where parents can post personal items they may want to sell, or if they have any services they would like to offer to other parents (such as child care, ride sharing, notary etc.)

We then applied for an implementation grant from the Ohio Office of Family and School Partnerships. The funds from this grant are being used to pay for two parent coordinators who operate "The Kinder Family Room". The parent coordinators contacted our "Partners in Education," which consist of local businesses, for donations.

Parent coordinators plan parenting workshops monthly during the school year. A few topics of workshops include the following: stress management, discipline, and good reading practices for children. Our funds are limited, so speakers volunteered their time and services to us. Monthly social gatherings are held for any relative or parent to come and relax and introduce themselves to our family room. They are personally invited by the parent coordinators, and these social gatherings have been well attended. The parent coordinators communicated with all teachers in our

school to implement a classroom information center. Parents can find weekly spelling tests, homework assignments, and any classroom information in this center. Teachers are responsible for updating this classroom information to the coordinators for parental access. Parent coordinators write and distribute a monthly newsletter for parents, to help keep them informed on school activities.

The on-going challenge is for us to continue to increase parental involvement in our school. Our friendly and family-oriented environment enables our parents to become more comfortable and welcome in our school. As barriers diminish, our hopes are that all parents will be involved with their children's education.

In our 1998-1999 school year, we have hopes to expand our resources in all areas in "The Kinder Family Room." We hope to increase community involvement by using other resources.

We are proud to say that our parent involvement has increased and this has been shown by parents visiting and enjoying time spent in "The Kinder Family Room."

Activities from the family room have been based on Joyce Epstein's Six Types of Involvement. All of our practices follow the six types of her framework.

**Ann Neiss, Teacher**  
**(937) 865-5339**



## **"LEARN AND GROW" PARENT EDUCATION SERIES**

**Barrett Academy  
Akron, Ohio**

After assessing the needs of families, the Barrett Academy Action Team decided they wanted parents to have practical instruction from school/community staff (Type 1: Parenting). They developed the 'Learn and Grow' Parent Education Series.

This partnership activity offers instruction and discussion to parents in crucial areas of family well-being. Subjects included in the school's spring schedule were Stress Management, Co-Dependency, Women's Issues, Family/Child Relationships, and Fighting Fair for Families. Meals were provided at each meeting, and parents received useful printed materials to take home. The majority of presenters were staff who work in the school building as agency therapists or parent volunteers.

The Principal at Barrett Academy provided consistent dedication to improve contact with parents and the community and to wisely use community personnel resources. In addition, the custodial staff helped to make these events possible as well as a local business partner who contributed money toward the expense of food and child care during the activity. Parent volunteers received training in "Fighting Fair for Families" so that they could instruct other parents.

Rather than establishing one general evening time for all the topics, the Action Team worked to reach as many parents possible by hosting three of the topics during lunch and the other three during the evening with dinner.

No results are available yet, but the Action Team plans to continue the series in the fall because they believe the total school community would benefit all through the year from what will be learned at these events.

Carolyn Collins, Counselor  
(330) 773-1227

## PARENT RESOURCE CENTER

Max Leuchter School  
Vineland, New Jersey

The purpose of this partnership program is to increase parental involvement and to improve student achievement in mathematics. Our district moved from a traditional instructional mathematics program to a hands-on manipulative program. Test results indicated that although we were meeting the minimal level of proficiency required by the state, math was the area where we received the lowest scores.

The School Improvement Team decided to open a Parent Resource Center to increase parent involvement and improve student achievement in mathematics. The Center was designed so that it would serve parents, students, and staff as a lending library of hands-on learning materials.

The Parent Resource Center opened on Tuesday, November 5, 1996. The specific goal of the Center is to provide students and their families with the necessary materials and support so that all students can learn and experience success. The Parent Resource Center has provided students and their parents with a wide array of materials and support to enable students and their parents to demonstrate their increased knowledge and to raise ESPA scores. The types of involvement used in our Parent Resource Center are communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community.

Our Parent Resource Center provides service for 520 students in grades pre-school through four. Our center is staffed by 10 teachers and provides materials and support to 300 families. The center is open on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from 4:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.; two teachers are always available to assist parents with any questions as well as with the selection of materials.

In order for our Parent Resource Center to open, we had to build and furnish a room. The building construction and furniture cost \$4,477.31. To operate the center, we needed to purchase a computer, bar code scanner and a printer at the cost of \$1,725.00. To introduce our resource center to our school families and the community, our school hosted an open house and provided dinner and refreshments for a cost of \$1,490.00. Our Parent Resource Center is stocked with a very generous array of educational materials. The cost for purchasing materials was \$2,000.00. Our center is staffed by two elementary school teachers each evening and the cost of salaries is \$19,000.00 for a one year period. During our first year of operation, we did incur some hidden costs. We had to replace batteries in many of our learning games, buy extra labels and ziploc bags for a cost of \$83.24. The Parent Resource Center has been a very successful undertaking for our school. The funding was provided by our School Information Team as part of our sight based planning.

In order to operate our Parent Resource Center effectively, we had to train the teachers who staff the center on how to use the operating software. As software changes occur, additional staff development is provided.

As evident through surveys, interviews, and attendance at workshops and open house activities, this project has proven to be worthwhile. The Parent Resource Center has increased parental involvement, improved student attitudes and improved trust, understanding and cooperation among teachers. The first step in planning our Resource Center was sending a memo to parents and staff members to gather input as to the items they would like to see in the Parent Resource Center. Then a survey of pre and post attitudes was conducted with the students. Responses indicated a more positive attitude toward math after the implementation of the Resource Center. The center is open three nights a week and has averaged approximately 18 parents per night. We surveyed parents in June, 1996, and responses were most favorable. We also conducted interviews with parents, staff and students about the resource center. Some responses suggested areas of improvement such as providing morning hours for parents who work shift work, opening the center Monday through Friday rather than 3 days per week.

Each time a parent utilizes the Parent Resource Center it is considered a transaction. Transactions from September, 1996 through January, 1997 totaled 57 in September, 66 in October, 99 in November, 96 in December and 128 in January indicating that an average of 33% of our parents use the Parent Resource Center each month. It is our belief that such increases will continue and that the Parent Resource Center is a viable asset to our school community.

Mary Gruccio, Principal  
(609) 794-6922

## **TYPE 2 COMMUNICATING**

Communicate with families about school programs and student progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications.

# DUNDALK HIGH SCHOOL'S TRANSITION PROGRAM

Dundalk High School  
Baltimore, Maryland

Dundalk High School is located in the southeastern area of Baltimore County and borders Baltimore City to the east. It is a small blue-collar community whose economic growth is dependent upon the steel mill, the shipyard, the Chevrolet plant, and other manufacturing companies. The school is a comprehensive high school with a student population of just around 1300 students. The students' ethnic composition is approximately 16% African American, 83% Caucasian, and less than 1% of other ethnic backgrounds. Historically, the area has suffered economically, and Dundalk High School's statistics have reflected that downward spiral. The number of students eligible for free or reduced lunches hovers around 40+%, daily attendance is in the 90% to 92% range, and the number of students taking the SAT is nominal. Family finances are such that many students need to work once they turn sixteen, thereby putting the importance of education secondary to a job. Added to these other facts, the transient rate is in the area of 40%. The suspension rate is one of the highest in Baltimore County, and students often leave with the good intention of attending night school and pursuing the G. E. D.

In trying to combat all of the negative societal variables that affect the performance of Dundalk High School's students, the Action Team instituted an 8th Grade Transition Program. The objective of the program was to make the high school experience a cooperative effort that would include the parents, the students, the middle school, and the high school. In order to successfully pull all facets of the students' lives together, the Action Team, teachers, parents, school staff, and students have put into place a comprehensive package of activities that have impressed the parents and the community.

Initially, contact with students begins during their eighth grade year with a series of cooperative sporting and musical activities with the middle and high schools. Eighth grade students are encouraged to audition and perform in the high school's musicals and plays, and the athletic department schedules meets and games at the middle school. In addition, we give tickets to the high school's basketball, football, and baseball events to the middle school as performance incentives throughout the school year. In the spring of their eighth grade year, students come to the high school for an orientation program and tours of the building.

Additionally, since we are in constant competition with the magnet schools, an open house is held in the fall of the eighth grade year. Teacher volunteers telephone the homes of all incoming ninth graders and invite their families to attend the open house. This evening event in the school's auditorium includes a video of the

comprehensive high school program, the technical programs offered at the vocational school, and the historical growth of Dundalk High School and the Dundalk community. Our slogan, "Your Community School," is prevalent throughout the presentation, and banners with the slogan hang in each of the main entrance ways.

At the conclusion of the presentation, parents and students travel to the cafeteria where each of the high school's academic and elective departments and extra-curricular organizations have displays, videos, and student representatives describing either their curricula or activities. The N.J.R.O.T.C. cadets take families and students on a tour of the building. Throughout, there is entertainment provided by the school's choral groups and bands. The P.T.A. and the Alumni Association are represented, and refreshments flow freely throughout the evening. The community participation is phenomenal. Throughout the evening, nostalgia is quite evident as our incoming students' family members, many of whom are alumni of the school, stop to share their memories and experiences or comment on how the building has changed over the years since they walked the "hallowed halls" of Dundalk High School.

Around the winter break, we host a mixer for the faculties of our feeder schools at a local restaurant. This is done in hopes that teachers will see each level of education as part of a continuum and not a segregated stage of student development. We have also hosted a middle school/high school planning session so we can share with our middle schools the specific skills that students need to succeed on the high school level.

At the end of students' eighth grade year, we begin our Summer Home Visit Program. The high school's teachers and support staff volunteer to telephone and visit each home of the incoming ninth graders over the course of the summer. In its fourth year, this program has become quite talked about and welcomed by the community. In fact, as early as May, the school begins receiving telephone calls from middle school parents inquiring as to when someone will contact them to visit their homes.

After the initial telephone contact, appointments are arranged. At the prescheduled appointment time, teachers in teams of two visit with the families. A packet has been developed which includes important information about the school: telephone numbers, counselors, administrators, functional testing dates, community health agencies, everything and anything that will help parents to see that we are trying to help them educate their children. Each of the information packets is enclosed in a Dundalk High School pocket folder, and a DHS pencil and key ring or bumper sticker are included. During each meeting, teachers invite parents and students to attend an ice cream social, which is held the week before school starts. Again, parents and students are given a tour, and faculty, administrators, and other school personnel are on hand to dip the ice cream and socialize with families.

## BRIDGING THE GAP

Once school is in session, we hold our annual Back-to-School Night for all of our families and students. This meeting is two-fold in that there is an administrative agenda as well as programs showing all of the activities in which students can become involved. We hope to entice students to take advantage of the opportunities available throughout their tenure at Dundalk High School, and to elicit support and encouragement from their families.

The administrators, faculty, and staff at Dundalk High School work diligently to overcome those forces not in our control by "bridging the gap" between the middle school and the high school experience. Over the past four years, we have shown improvement in our statistics: attendance is up from 89% to 92%; students passing the functional tests is approximately 96% across the board by grade 10; the number of students retained is down; the number of students dropping out of school has decreased. We are having an impact although it is a hard, uphill battle. Yet, all of us know that even the slightest of positive indicators means that one fewer student has fallen by the wayside -- and perhaps in this day and age that is the best for which we can hope.

Patricia Zavetz, Action Team Chair

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# BACK TO SCHOOL PICNIC

## Landstuhl Elementary/Middle School Germany

Landstuhl Elementary/Middle School held its first Back to School Picnic the Friday before school started in August. Its purpose was to bring students, parents and staff together in an informal setting. This Type 2 (Communicating) activity provided teachers and parents an opportunity to become familiar with one another, and it was designed to decrease tension associated with the first day of school. In addition, class lists were posted to notify students and parents of all students' teachers and classmates.

The event was held from 3:30-6:00 on the redtop in front of the school. The Action Team recruited volunteers to shop for food, cook on the grills, and serve food.

Action team members raised the funds for the picnic, which totaled \$1000. Seven hundred people attended the event, and because of this success, the Back to School Picnic will become an annual activity.

Some improvements for next year's picnic concern the posting of the class lists; each list included the following statement: "Absolutely no classroom switches will be discussed." Though not intended, the tone of the sentence gave the perception of a parent/staff threat. In addition, the lists were posted before the event, and school staff was nervous that this might create unnecessary tension. The Action Team will work to improve some of the picnic activities for next year.

Laurie Kline, Action Team Chair  
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# C.C.N.—CENTRAL'S CURRENT NEWS

Central Elementary School  
Shelby, Ohio

We, the Action Team at Central Elementary, worked very hard during the 1997-98 school year to improve the communication between our families and the school. We developed three practices to keep parents informed about school activities and events.

In the fall of 1997, we were able to begin broadcasting our school's "messages of the month" thanks to a donation of air time from our local cable TV company. Items that air include dates and times of events like parent/teacher conferences, student musical programs, guest speakers at the school, and report cards.

Another practice we have found to be useful is our newsletter trivia quiz. This newsletter, prepared by our administrators with input from staff, is sent home on the first day of the month and serves as an important source of information and news about our school. Each newsletter has a three question quiz with answers provided in the body of the newsletter. Families are encouraged to read the newsletter together, answer the quiz, and return the quiz to school staff. The name of each family who correctly answers the quiz questions is placed in a box for a drawing. One winner is drawn each month, and the winning family is awarded a gift certificate to a local pizzeria. This has proven to be successful as fifty families returned quiz answers for the February newsletter! In addition, we have seen an increase in readership of at least five families each month since we started sending out the newsletter, and staff have reported that the number of phone calls from parents asking for school information has decreased.

A third form of school/family communication implemented in the spring of 1998 is the refrigerator calendar. This monthly calendar printed on lime paper includes school activities at Central Elementary.

These services are made possible by donations, grants, and monies from the Board of Education. Plans for new forms of home/school communication include the development of a parent resource book (a handbook that includes a list of various local and national agencies relevant to family needs), a web site for the school, and a parent lending library.

Marti Kyle, Action Team Chair  
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National Network of Partnership Schools at Johns Hopkins University  
Promising Partnership Practices 1998

## **CHAT WITH THE PRINCIPAL OVER COFFEE AND DONUTS**

**Williamston Elementary School  
Williamston, Michigan**

The coffee was hot and the donuts were fresh! What a great way to start a new tradition at Williamston Elementary School -- the "Principal's Coffee." This informal gathering brought together parents; principal, Dr. Chris Jencka; assistant principal, Mrs. Jill Hilla; and parent & community involvement coordinator, Jean M. Smith. The "Principal's Coffee" provided parents with an opportunity to share compliments, comments, and concerns.

The idea stemmed from conversations with parents who were unable to attend regularly scheduled PTA meetings who wanted an opportunity to talk with the school's principal and assistant principal. Not only did this gathering open up a new communication link between school and home (Type II Involvement), but it also encouraged a feeling of partnership in education.

An important part of the program was to reach as many parents as possible. For that reason, two sessions were scheduled -- one in the morning before school started and the second in the afternoon before school was dismissed. An invitation was extended to all parents through the school newsletter. The agenda was left open to provide parents the opportunity to discuss the issues with which they were most concerned.

Because this was a new idea and no one was asked to R.S.V.P.; whether or not anyone would accept the invitation was a mystery. We were happy that parents did show up for both sessions! While the numbers in attendance were not huge, there was enough participation to decide to have another "Principal's Coffee" later in the spring.

One thing that we will do differently at the next session will be to have a place where parents can write down the topic or topics they would like to discuss. This will permit better management of time, and all issues will be identified and addressed.

Parents who attended were able to get immediate feedback on the topics raised, and if further action or discussion was needed, that was arranged. A bonus that arose from the first session was a parent's unsolicited offer to facilitate interaction and communication between a class or classes from our rural area school with a class or classes from a more urban area. This idea fits perfectly with the diversity theme in our school improvement plan.

Though we conducted no formal evaluation, parents were asked if they felt that the "Principal's Coffee" was helpful. The response was a resounding "YES." Parents were also asked if they felt that another coffee should be planned, and again the answer was "YES." Even though Dr. Jencka and Mrs. Hilla make themselves available for meetings with parents, sometimes a little extra effort is needed to bring everyone together.

A "Principal's Coffee" is very easy and inexpensive to implement. The only cost is for coffee, donuts, and time. The time commitment from the principal pays off by showing parents that their opinions are valued and that they are valued as partners in student success. The "Coffee" concept is not a gigantic undertaking, but quite often, little things have the greatest impact!

Jean Smith, Parent and Community Involvement Coordinator  
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## DAILY NOTEBOOKS

Mary K. Vollmer Elementary School  
West Henrietta, New York

"Daily Notebooks" began at Vollmer Elementary School in fall of 1996 when the school opened. They provide daily, on-going communication between home and school and school and home. Every teacher has been sending home daily communications through the notebooks for the past two school years.

Although telephone calls and meetings with parents will always be necessary (and desired), the notebook practice allows parents and teachers to get to know one another, to exchange ideas, and to work together for the benefit of the child. Parents know when their child learned something new, made a new friend, or had a hard day. Teachers know when children come to school without enough sleep, with a worry from home, or with a terrific experience to share in school. Kids know that their parents and teachers really care about them, are working together, and that it's not parent against teacher.

While this practice costs little (just the price of a spiral notebook per child), it reaps big returns. It's a perfect example of how communication can truly be effective.

Some challenges may include the following: children misplacing notebooks; children forgetting notebooks at home; substitutes not following the practice. Currently, Vollmer School has only about 50 students. The teacher/child ratios are excellent, but in a "regular" school with a "regular" grade level, the ratio may be 1:25 students. This would be extremely time-consuming to complete 25 notebooks daily.

When Vollmer becomes a full elementary school in the 1999-2000 school year, it may be necessary to modify the plan by sending home a limited number of notebooks on specified days.

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## FRIENDSHIP BREAKFASTS FOR PARENTS AND TEACHERS

Barrett Academy  
Akron, Ohio

To improve family-school communication (Type 2), teachers, parents, and staff at Barrett Academy started "Friendship Breakfasts for Parents and Teachers." Parents are invited to come for a friendship breakfast with their child's teacher. This breakfast was developed in response to the needs of parents who expressed interest in a special time to become better acquainted with their children's teachers, and to parents who felt uncomfortable in their relations with school staff.

Many people including—volunteer parents, students, teachers, administrative and custodial staff—assisted in the planning and hosting of the breakfasts. Volunteer parents made invitations for each breakfast, and the counselors sent the invitations home and compiled RSVPs. Custodial staff set up the area, and the school counselor trained 5<sup>th</sup> grade students as greeters and servers. Teachers prepared classroom students for the special presentation they would make to parents in the classroom following breakfast. Support staff such as counselors, tutors, and specialists covered the classrooms during breakfast when the teachers were with parents. The community was also involved as a local medical group donated individual student books designed for drug prevention. These were distributed to parents and children at each breakfast event.

When parents arrived at the "Friendship Breakfast," students greeted them and ushered them to a table hosted by their child's teacher. After a welcome by administrative staff, parents and teachers were served a buffet breakfast by students. The teachers worked to channel conversation toward getting acquainted with the parents, and they invited them to reserve academic issues to parent/teacher conferencing. At the end of the breakfast, parents visited their child's classroom for a planned presentation by students.

Both parents and teachers expressed appreciation for the opportunity to casually interact with one another. Attendance was high with seventy percent who called in to RSVP attending the event compared with fifty percent of parents attending other school events. Though they do not have a baseline comparison, teachers reported that incidents of angry parents seemed to be smaller in number after the breakfasts.

Carolyn Collins, the primary contact person at Barrett Academy, recommends this practice for elementary students in any community. Financial resources for the breakfasts came from schoolwide parent involvement monies.

Carolyn Collins, Counselor  
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