

## Involving families in homework pays off

**H**OMEWORK is an everyday part of school life. Studies show that middle and high school students who spend more time on homework and complete their assignments tend to earn higher grades. Despite this, all parties involved express concerns. Students complain that they have too much homework. Parents report that they want to help their children with homework, but feel unprepared to do so and need more guidance. Teachers say that many students don't complete homework assignments.

Working with CRESPAR researchers, science teachers at Pikesville Middle School in Baltimore County, Maryland, developed weekly science TIPS (Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork) assignments to address these concerns. TIPS differs from traditional homework because assignments require students to conduct interviews and experiments and have conversations with a family member.

In a study published in the *Journal of Educational Research*, Dr. Frances Van Voorhis reported on a quasi-experimental study of the effects of interactive homework, conducted for CRESPAR's Program of School, Family, and Community Partnerships. Six classes received weekly TIPS activities with specific guidelines for students to interact with family partners; four classes received the same weekly homework, but without guidelines for family involvement.

Eighty percent of the TIPS students reported that families were sometimes, frequently, or always involved in science homework, while about 80% of the comparison group reported that families were never, rarely, or sometimes involved. Students in both groups who more regularly involved family partners completed more assignments. TIPS students also earned higher science report card grades, even after taking into account students' prior science abilities,

family background, and the amount of homework completed.

These findings support the hypothesis that TIPS positively affects family involvement in homework, science attitudes, and student achievement in the middle grades. For example, more than 85% of TIPS students and families surveyed reported that TIPS homework helped parents see what students were learning in science, and that students were able to talk about their work with a family member. "They are a great way for us to work together and stay informed about what is going on in science class," said one family member. Q

*For information on the TIPS study, contact Dr. Frances Van Voorhis at [franvan@bellsouth.net](mailto:franvan@bellsouth.net).*

*For information on TIPS materials, visit [www.partnershipschoools.org](http://www.partnershipschoools.org) or contact, at CRESPAR, Dr. Joyce L. Epstein ([jepstein@csos.jhu.edu](mailto:jepstein@csos.jhu.edu))*