

TIPS

Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork

MANUAL FOR TEACHERS

INTERACTIVE HOMEWORK IN THE ELEMENTARY GRADES

Early Literacy, K-3

Selected sections of the *TIPS Manual for Teachers*
for Colorado Department of Education (CDE)
for use in Colorado.

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TIPS-Literacy K-3

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NOTE ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

This document includes sections of the full *TIPS Manual for Teachers* (Elementary Grades). The information and guidelines in this document apply to TIPS-Literacy K-3 (Colorado Series).

Specific information about math and science materials for the elementary grades, and all materials for the middle grades have been excluded.

Information on all TIPS materials and training workshops are available from the author or on the website of the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS), www.partnershipschools.org, in the section on TIPS.

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Summary

Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS)

Literacy K-3, Math, and Science in the Elementary Grades

Educators are increasingly aware of the importance of involving parents in the education of their children. Research shows that parent involvement improves student achievement. When parents are engaged, children do better in school. Parental encouragement and assistance contribute to students' higher achievement, report card grades, better attitudes, and higher aspirations.

Some parents already are partners with their children's teachers and encourage their children to work hard as students. However, most say that they need more and better information from teachers to know how to help their children at home. As children move from one grade to the next, parents need clear and timely information and assistance to know how to talk with, monitor, encourage, and guide their children as students.

Teachers play a critical role in whether and how families are involved in their children's education each year. By providing ideas on how to help at home, teachers can encourage all parents to talk with and work with their children. When parents are assisted in this way, they become more aware of their child's school program, interact with their child in positive ways, and reinforce teachers' goals for student learning. When parents are knowledgeable partners, students see that their teachers and parents are communicating about schoolwork. They become more aware of their parents' interest in their ideas, work, and progress.

Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS). Researchers worked with teachers to design, implement, and test a teacher-parent partnership process called *Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS)*. With TIPS, any teacher can enable all families to stay informed and involved in their children's learning activities at home. This should help all students complete their homework, which should promote greater success in school.

TIPS activities require students to talk with someone at home about something interesting that they are learning in class. TIPS homework is the students' responsibility and requires positive interactions with a family partner. TIPS helps solve some important problems with homework:

- TIPS helps all parents to become involved, not just the few who are comfortable with school subjects.
- TIPS does not ask parents to "teach" subjects or skills. In the younger grades parents are guided to conduct positive conversations and activities with their children. Starting in grade 2, students are guided to conduct the activities and positive conversations with a parent or family partner.
- TIPS asks students to share their work, ideas, and progress with their families.
- TIPS enables parents to comment on their interactions with their children and ask questions of teachers in a section for home-to-school communications.

With TIPS, homework becomes a three-way partnership of students, teachers, and parents or other family partners. Studies show that, overwhelmingly, parents recognize and appreciate the efforts of teachers to keep them informed and involved. TIPS activities keep school on the agenda at home so that children know that their families believe schoolwork is important and worth talking about. Over time, as TIPS is used each year, students get the idea that their teachers want their families to know what they are learning in class and to participate in conversations about homework.

Prototype TIPS activities in early literacy (K-3), math (grades K-5) and science (grade 3) are available, along with a manual that outlines the responsibilities of teachers, students, and parents to implement the TIPS process. A CD includes over 80 TIPS-Literacy K-3 activities and more than 200 TIPS Math K-5 and sample TIPS Science (grade 3) activities in WORD and in pdf form. Also see prototype materials for language arts, science/health, and math for the middle grades (6, 7, and 8).

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TEACHERS INVOLVE PARENTS IN SCHOOLWORK (TIPS)

Literacy K-3, Math, and Science Interactive Homework in the Elementary Grades

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If enough studies show the same result, you begin to believe it. That is how it is with school and family partnerships. Hundreds of studies confirm that parent involvement improves student achievement, attitudes, homework completion, report card grades, and aspirations. Surveys of parents show that most families want to talk with, monitor, encourage, and guide their children as students, but say they need more information from the schools about how to help their children at home at each grade level.

Studies also show that when teachers guide involvement and interactions, more parents become involved in ways that benefit their children. For example, when teachers frequently use practices to involve families in reading, students gain more in reading than do similar students whose teachers do not involve families. This suggests an important connection between parent involvement in particular subjects and student success in those subjects. It also shows the important roles teachers play in helping families become involved in schoolwork at home.

There are other benefits to school and family partnerships. When parents are assisted by the schools, they become more knowledgeable about their children's education and they interact more with their children. Children see that their parents and teachers are communicating. They become aware that they can talk to someone at home about schoolwork and school decisions.

Based on research that links teachers' practices of involving families with more success for students, we developed a process that enables teachers to do this easily— *Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS)*. See research summary in Appendix C.

This manual describes the TIPS process for engaging families with children on literacy learning in grades K, 1, 2, and 3.

TIPS INTERACTIVE HOMEWORK

Of all types of involvement, the one that most parents want to know about is: How do I help my own child at home? This request is at the top of every parent's wish list, but this type of involvement often is difficult for schools to organize. It requires every teacher at every grade level to communicate with families about how to work and interact with their children on learning activities at home

To meet this need, researchers worked with teachers to design, implement, and test a process called *Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS)* interactive homework. With TIPS, any teacher can help all families stay informed and involved in their children's education with grade-specific learning activities at home. With TIPS, students complete their homework, which should promote their success in school.

TIPS homework assignments require students to talk with someone at home about something interesting that they are learning in class. The activities solve some important problems with homework.

- TIPS helps all parents to become involved, not just the few who are comfortable with school subjects.
- TIPS does not ask parents to “teach” subjects or skills that they are not prepared to teach. In the younger grades parents are guided to conduct activities and positive conversations with their children. Starting in grade 2, students are guided to conduct activities and positive conversations with a parent or family partner.
- TIPS asks students to share their work, ideas, and progress with their families.
- TIPS enables parents to comment on their interactions with their children and ask questions of teachers in a section for home-to-school communications.

With TIPS, homework becomes a three-way partnership of students, teachers, and parents or other family partners.

Overcoming Obstacles

Jump hurdle 1: Homework should NOT always be done alone. Some teachers believe that all homework should be completed in a quiet place, away from the family or other people. This type of homework allows students to practice what was taught in class, to study for a quiz, and complete other work on their own. Although SOME homework serves these purposes, OTHER homework should fulfill other goals. TIPS homework—once a week or twice a month—is designed specifically to keep students and their families talking about schoolwork at home.

Jump hurdle 2: Just any homework won’t do. Some homework is boring. It requires students’ time, but not much thinking. TIPS activities must be challenging and engaging so that students will want to show and share it with a parent or family partner. TIPS helps students practice basic skills and build higher-level thinking skills, as they interact with others. The activities encourage students to think, write, gather information, collect suggestions, explain, demonstrate, draw, sketch or construct things, or interact with a parent or family member in other ways.

TIPS Goals

TIPS Interactive Homework sets clear goals for students, parents, and teachers.

Goals for STUDENTS

INCREASE students’ ability and willingness to talk about schoolwork at home.

INCREASE students’ knowledge of how school skills are used in the real world.

IMPROVE students’ homework completion, skills, and test scores.

Goals for PARENTS

INCREASE parents' awareness of what their children are learning in class.

INCREASE parents' confidence in talking with their children about homework.

INCREASE parents' involvement with their children on learning activities at home.

Goals for TEACHERS

ENABLE teachers to design homework that guides students to share their ideas and work with a parent or other family partner.

IMPROVE the quality of homework to help students master skills in specific subjects and see the application of schoolwork in everyday life.

INCREASE teachers' positive attitudes about families' interest in their children's schoolwork.

Goals for ALL Partners

INCREASE positive attitudes about homework.

INCREASE opportunities to celebrate progress in learning.

INCREASE everyone's awareness of parents' and other family members' "funds of knowledge."

TIPS Activities

TIPS-Literacy K-3 provides a way for teachers to communicate with parents about early reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills that they can conduct with their child at home. The activities encourage students to show a parent or family partner what they are learning in class. Many activities encourage conversations between parent and child about their ideas and experiences.

All TIPS activities include a section for Home-to-School Communications. Parents are invited to give the teacher feedback on the activity, their child's work, and to provide comments or questions. The parent signs this section to document the child's completion of the assignment and the parent's engagement.

TIPS prototype activities on the TIPS CD are *examples* that teachers can use or adapt. Every homework assignment must support specific learning objectives that are set for students and taught in class. Some prototype activities may be used just as they are in pdf form on the TIPS CD. Others must be revised to meet local standards, preferred vocabulary, or needed adaptations for students (use the WORD form on The TIPS CD).

A blank TIPS template is provided for teachers and curriculum leaders to develop their own TIPS materials. (See guidelines for developing new TIPS activities, pp. 12-13.)

Orienting Parents

TIPS activities are homework assignments that include interactions and communications with families. They are regularly scheduled activities (e.g., weekly or every two weeks) so that students and families become familiar with the TIPS process and so that information about schoolwork continues to flow throughout the school year.

Parents may receive information about TIPS in several ways:

- The principal and/or teachers may send a letter to parents during the summer or at the start of the school year about the TIPS process.
- Teachers may orient parents at grade level meetings that are held at the beginning of the year, including the first “open house” or “back to school” meeting.
- Parents may be shown TIPS activities on screen and offered ideas about how to interact with their children to build students’ confidence and positive attitudes toward homework and schoolwork.

Parents must be helped to understand that they are not expected to “teach” their children specific skills. Rather, TIPS will enable them to support their child’s work, discuss ideas, and share ideas about the use of school skills in the real world.

Throughout the school year, teachers may send communications in various forms to inform and remind parents about TIPS activities and to thank them for participating.

See Appendix B for an orientation session and sample letter for parents.

Students’ Key Roles

Students are responsible for completing their homework and for guiding the interactions with a parent or family partner on each assignment. Students will do their part only if teachers prepare them for the added responsibility of communicating with a family member about homework.

Students must be oriented to interactive homework just as parents learn about the new design for some homework activities. The teacher should go over each TIPS activity in class so that all students fully understand the activity. This includes explaining how a parent or family partner will be involved in specific sections of the activity.

Students need to hear that their teacher wants them to exchange information with a parent, grandparent, or older sibling and to talk about what they are learning in class. They also need to know that it is important that they complete their homework.

Involving Families with Children on Literacy

Research and fieldwork reveal that just about all parents want to help their children improve early reading and literacy skills. Regardless of family background characteristics, parents can have fun with and help boost students' love of rhymes, stories, and family histories. Parent and child exchanges increase students' abilities to talk with adults and other children, share ideas, write their own poems and stories, and—in grades K-3—learn to read (Van Voorhis, Maier, Epstein, & Lloyd, 2013).

All teachers know that reading, writing, and other literacy skills are required for students' success in all subjects. A common state, district, and school goal is for all students to read on grade level by the end of grade 3. Students move, then, from “learning to read” to “reading to learn,” as they tackle more difficult comprehension skills in literature and in other subjects. Reading skills are developed step by step and, with good designs for interactive homework, all parents can help their children improve literacy skills at every grade level.

TIPS Literacy K-3 activities put parents at ease about helping their children with homework. The activities focus on basic reading and literacy skills and encourage parent-child discussions. Many activities ask parents to share favorite stories or memories of when they were in school. Some activities focus on simple skills, such as learning sounds and letters, writing simple captions or sentences. Other activities are about talking and listening. Still others encourage students to think individually and to decide what to draw, discuss with a parent, or write about in a story of their own. For many activities, there are no “right” answers. Students ideas and parent-child conversations help build communications skills.

In the section for home-to-school communications, parents let teachers know whether they learned something about what their child is learning in class. They may insert comments or questions. In this way, parents do not have to come often to the school building for meetings about the curriculum.

TIPS-LITERACY, K-3

Activities on the TIPS CD

Link to Curriculum

TIPS Literacy K-3 helps student in the primary grades practice skills to attain important standards in early reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The activities strengthen skills taught in class, and create interest, enjoyment, and positive attitudes about learning to read.

TIPS Literacy K-3 activities address the following four major standards in reading, writing, and communicating by the end of grade 3. These skills that students should know and be able to do are consistent with state standards, Common Core standards, and grade level literacy competencies in most states, districts, and schools across the country.

Standard 1–Oral Expression and Listening. TIPS activities enable students to strengthen oral expression and listening skills by using these skills in discussions and exchanges with a parent or family partner at home.

Standard 2 – Reading for All Purposes. TIPS activities guide students and parents to work together on enjoyable topics to strengthen early reading skills and to connect reading with family experiences in everyday life.

Standard 3 –Writing and Composition. TIPS activities enable students and parents to enjoy writing from simple labels in kindergarten to stories in Grade 3. By reading their writing aloud to a family partner, students begin to edit their work as they notice missing content and errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar.

Standard 4 – Research and Reasoning. TIPS activities enable students and parents to see how a topic of interest can be read for understanding and can prompt discussions of different points of view.

(See Appendix A for details on the standards, lists of TIPS-Literacy activities at each grade level, sample TIPS-Literacy activities, and a blank TIPS-Literacy template.)

COMPONENTS OF TIPS LITERACY K-3

Each TIPS-Literacy, K-3 activity includes the following sections.

Letter to Parent briefly states the objective and specific skill for each activity.

In grades K-1, the letter is directed to the parent by the teacher. The teacher may fill in the due date and sign the master copy of the activity before it is reproduced for students to take home.

In grades 2-3, the letter is from the student to the parent. The student should fill in their name, due date, and sign the letter.

Let’s Do This starts the interactions of parent and child about a specific literacy skill. This will help a student show what they are working on in class. The conversation may start with a drawing or demonstrating a reading, spelling, writing, speaking, or listening skill.

Let’s Find Out guides parent-child conversations further with additional questions, challenges, games, or discussions about the student’s ideas, parent’s experiences, or other interaction to encourage speaking and listening.

Home-to-School Communication invites parents to give reactions and comments to teachers about the activity including whether their child understood the homework, whether they enjoyed the activity, whether they learned about what the child is learning in class, and if they have any questions.

Parent Signature is requested on each TIPS Literacy K-3 activity.

Other Sections. Some activities include a section, **Remember**, which reminds students of information from a class lesson that will be useful in the TIPS activity. A few activities identify **Materials**. These are items that are not common supplies at home and that must be provided to all students by the teacher. All other activities use paper, pencil, crayons, markers, or other common materials, which teachers may need to provide to some children on a case-by-case basis.

IMPLEMENTING TIPS INTERACTIVE HOMEWORK

All partners in children's education have roles to play in the successful implementation of TIPS Interactive Homework. Once the TIPS materials for a particular subject have been produced, the following introductions and explanations will help teachers use TIPS effectively, prepare parents to support their children on homework, and ensure that more students have positive conversations with a parent or family partner about their work and progress.

What the Teacher Does

- Use this manual to prepare to implement TIPS-Literacy, K-3 to engage parents with students weekly or every other week on reading, writing, speaking, and listening activities.
- Attend an orientation session or workshop for guidelines on how to implement TIPS effectively. This may be provided by a district leader, principal, or other educator who may serve as a TIPS advisor or facilitator.
- Conduct an orientation meeting for parents. This may be a special meeting or part of an open-house or back-to school night. Distribute a letter about TIPS to all parents whether they attend a meeting at school or not. (See Appendix B.)
- Orient students to the TIPS process prior to the first TIPS assignment. Students need to know that teachers want them to show and share ideas and work with a parent or family partner. Many students believe that the only way to do homework is alone. They need to know that there are different purposes and designs for homework, including TIPS.
- Plan and select which TIPS homework will be used each week (or every other week) on a regular schedule to reinforce specific literacy skills taught in class. This maintains a flow of information between school and home, and interactions about literacy between child and parent.

TIPS-Literacy, K-3 activities may be reordered, as needed, to match a teacher's scope and sequence on reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

The standard section on home-to-school communications can be translated into other languages and inserted in (or attached to) all activities.

- Consider the TIPS-Literacy activities that are on the TIPS CD in WORD and pdf formats. The pdf forms may be used as is. The WORD documents may be carefully changed to customize assignments to meet students' needs. Teachers may assign only some sections of the activity for all students, shorten activities for those who need simpler tasks, or extend the activities for extra credit.

- Print activities for distribution to students.

Each TIPS activity is designed to fit on the front and back of one page. This makes it easy for teachers to print assignments for students and to collect completed activities.

TIPS activities should be printed on the same light colored paper each week so that students and parents look for the TIPS assignments that guide student-parent interactions.

- Distribute the assignment to students.
- Take five minutes of class time when TIPS activities are **assigned** to:
 - Clarify directions for conducting the TIPS assignment. Note sections that require students to conduct interactions with a parent or other family member.
 - Address students' questions about procedures or vocabulary.
 - Emphasize the importance of “involving family members in schoolwork.
 - Tell students when the homework is due. K-1 teachers insert due date; 2-3 students write in due date in the letter to parents.

- Take five minutes of class time when TIPS activities are **due** to:
 - Discuss key parts of the TIPS assignment so that students share their work and discuss family reactions and ideas.

Follow-up activities reinforce the importance of homework and the importance of family engagement in discussions about letters, words, ideas, and stories—fact and fiction.

- Maintain records of student homework, including TIPS activities.
 - Treat TIPS Literacy K-3 assignments the same as all other reading, writing, and spelling homework. That includes collecting, grading, and recording the homework. This will help students see that TIPS homework is as important as all other homework.
- Communicate with families to address questions raised by parents in the section of Home-to-School Communication. All communications must be in languages understandable to families so that they can support their children's learning.
- Monitor students' work on TIPS activities and parents' responses to TIPS to gather information on enjoyable activities to use again, activities that need to be improved, or new activities that must be developed to fit changes in the curriculum.

What the Student Does

- Understand that the teacher wants them to talk about their work with a parent or other family partner.
- Look over the TIPS homework assignment. Ask the teacher any questions about directions or vocabulary that are not clear.
- Starting in grade 2, fill in the date the assignment is due and sign the short letter to parents at the top of the activity.
- Take the TIPS assignment home.
- Gather needed materials.
- Ask a parent or other family partner to work with them for about 20 minutes at a convenient time.
- Talk with a parent or family member as directed in the assignment to show what they are learning in class.
- Discuss interesting questions, and complete the homework. Have fun with homework.
- Ask a parent or family partner to respond to the Home-to-School Communication and sign the activity.
- Return the assignment to class on the due date. Participate in class by sharing their own and their family partner's responses and questions about the activity.

What the Parent (Family Partner) Does

- Read a letter provided by the teacher to know how to participate when their child brings a TIPS home. Attend an orientation meeting about TIPS if one is scheduled.
- Participate in positive conversations with their child on all TIPS activities. Make TIPS-Literacy activities a good time to talk with their child and exchange ideas.
- Assist their child (if necessary) to gather materials for the activities.
 - In kindergarten and grade 1, parents take the lead in helping the child complete the activities. Guide the conversations and the work that the students do. Assist the child, as needed, in learning to write letters, words, captions, sentences. This may be done in the language of the home.

- Starting in grade 2, students take the lead in conducting TIPS discussions, conversations, interviews, reading aloud, and other work to complete the TIPS activity. Parents participate activity by encouraging students to demonstrate skills and share ideas on each activity.
- Make the time on homework enjoyable.
- Motivate child to do his or her best each day in school and on each homework assignment.
- Clarify that the family believes that school and learning are important, and are interested in the students' progress.
- Monitor the completion of TIPS and other homework so that the student knows that the parent cares about what he or she is learning in school.
- Complete the Home-to-School Communication. Add a comment or question for the teacher, if desired, and sign each TIPS activity.

What the School Principal Does

- Discuss the school (and/or district) homework policy with teachers and how TIPS Interactive Homework fits into the overall homework process.
- With the teacher, send a letter to parents in their home language explaining the TIPS process and their important roles in interacting with their student about specific skills.
- Support teachers, students, and parents on the use of TIPS, its purposes, and its systematic implementation in a particular subject or grade level.
 - Provide time for the orientation of teachers to use TIPS Interactive Homework.
 - Provide time during meetings with parents (e.g., Open House, Family Nights) for teachers to inform and remind parents about their roles in TIPS Interactive Homework.
 - Monitor the success of the TIPS. Recognize teachers who organize and conduct effective TIPS schedules and activities.
- Identify a teacher-leader or coach/facilitator to help all teachers who are implementing TIPS to do so effectively. The leader may collect samples of students' work periodically to assess whether and how students and families are conducting their interactions. The leader also may collect data to improve TIPS activities or to create new interactive homework as the curriculum changes.

EVALUATING TIPS INTERACTIVE HOMEWORK

There are three main goals for TIPS Interactive Homework.

- Encourage students to complete their homework, practice and master specific skills, and improve their achievement and attitudes about homework.
- Create useful two-way communications about schoolwork and homework between teachers and parents without parents having to come to meetings at the school building.
- Promote positive interactions at home between students and parents (or family partners) about homework and schoolwork.

When educators implement TIPS, they want to know whether and how well the process is working to reach these goals for family engagement and student learning.

TIPS comes with two “built in” evaluations.

- First, students complete TIPS activities just as they do all homework. Teachers collect, mark, and discuss TIPS to learn whether the activities are helping students practice and master literacy skills.
- Second, every TIPS activity includes a section for Home-to-School Communication. Parents provide ratings and reactions to the activities and to their children’s work.
 - Parents rate whether their child understood and was able to complete the homework, which tells teachers if the child needs more help in school.
 - They rate whether they and the child enjoyed the activity, which tells the teacher if this was a good activity to use again in the next school year.
 - They rate whether they learned something about what is being taught in class, which tells the teacher whether homework is serving as a good “connector” between school and home.
 - They may add a comment or question, which teachers answer to continue good communications.
- Teachers may decide to conduct a quick review of the first TIPS activity that is assigned. They may contact families whose children did not do the homework to reinforce the importance of TIPS and all homework for student success in school. They may ask parents if they have any questions about homework that they want to discuss.

Formal studies of the results of TIPS with case and comparison (TIPS and non-TIPS) classrooms have been conducted (see the list of references). Site-specific evaluations may be designed and conducted in cooperation with district or external researchers.

DEVELOPING A TIPS HOMEWORK PROJECT

A TIPS project proceeds in three steps:

1. Teachers work together to design or select and develop TIPS interactive homework assignments to match their own curricula and learning objectives.

- If existing TIPS prototypes are used or adapted, teachers must match weekly curricular objectives with a TIPS activities for students.

TIPS is not a “canned” program. The activities must match the school’s curricular objectives and standards for student learning and success in specific subjects and grade levels. The prototype activities were developed with various teachers. They may or may not match every curriculum or every student’s needs. Educators at the school or district level may use the TIPS prototypes, adapt them, or create their own activities.

- If new activities must be developed, a small group of teachers may work together in the summer to create the materials for specific grade levels and subjects that can be used by many teachers during the school year.

It takes a short time to link existing TIPS activities to the scope and sequence for a particular subject and grade level.

It takes longer to write new TIPS activities. At least two teachers may work together for 2-4 weeks to write, edit, and test at least 20 TIPS activities matching the scope and sequence of one subject and grade level for use during one school year. They may continue to work for 2-4 more weeks to finalize, polish, format, and computerize the activities for use by other teachers. The team of TIPS writers may include teachers, district curriculum leaders, principals, researchers, and others.

Creating TIPS homework activities is more than cutting and pasting ideas from other homework. TIPS assignments are not “worksheets.” Rather, they are family-friendly, easy-to-follow, enjoyable activities that promote positive interactions of parent and child in talking about students’ work and ideas. Depending on the subject and targeted skill, students and parents may interview each other, play a game, collect data, record reactions or suggestions, discuss how a school skill is used in a real life situation, or work and talk together in some other way.

2. Teachers assign TIPS weekly or every other week throughout the school year.

Homework must have a clear purpose and connect with classroom lessons or projects. Valid purposes of homework include practicing, creating, developing, and communicating skills and ideas (Epstein, et al., 2009). Homework also responds to parents’ requests to know what their children are learning and how to help at home. Good assignments encourage children and parents to communicate about schoolwork.

3. Teachers make revisions to activities based on feedback from students and parents, and based on their review of the effectiveness of activities to reinforce students’ skills.

TIPS development requires a relatively small investment that can benefit many teachers, students, and parents, over time. The major costs are for teacher and administrator time to design and produce interactive homework activities for each subject and grade level for use over one school year. There are costs for professional development for teachers to use TIPS effectively, and for paper to print activities for students to take home. Minor costs include letters to introduce parents to the TIPS process and optional surveys to evaluate parent, student, and teacher reactions to TIPS.

COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT TIPS INTERACTIVE HOMEWORK

Here are a few common questions that teachers and parents ask about TIPS Interactive Homework.

1. How are “regular” homework and TIPS interactive homework different?

“Regular” homework is designed for students to do on their own. These assignments help students learn to work independently and learn to study.

TIPS activities are designed to be purposely interactive. The assignments enable students to talk with a parent or family partner about their ideas, work, and progress.

Most parents are unfamiliar with the specific skills that are taught at each grade level. In countless surveys with diverse populations, researchers report that parents ask for more and better guidance on “how to help my child at home.” TIPS guides students and parents—step-by-step—to discuss skills that students are learning in class. With TIPS, more parents become confident about helping students at home and more students complete their assignments spurred by the positive interactions.

2. What if a parent is not able to interact with the student on a particular night?

It is recommended, based on data from parents, that teachers assign TIPS interactive homework over two or three days (e.g., assigned Tuesday, due Thursday or Friday, or assigned over the weekend). Research shows consistently that most parents (over 90 percent on several surveys) say they have time over the weekend to talk and work with their children on homework. This is the very time that some schools do not give homework. It might be a good time for TIPS Interactive Homework.

If a parent is unavailable, students should may share their work with another family partner (e.g., older sibling, grandparent, other relative, child care provider, neighbor, or friend). Most parents will be available for about 20 minutes some time during a 2-3 day assignment period.

If the TIPS schedule is family-friendly, most students and families will find the 20 minutes or so needed to enjoy and complete the activity.

3. What if a parent does not read English well?

All homework is the *student's responsibility*. Except in Kindergarten and Grade 1, where parents' guidance is needed, parents do not have to read or write English to talk with their children or to listen to their children talk about schoolwork. Teachers will remind students that they will complete their work in English, just as they do all homework assignments. They should be alerted that it is OK—indeed, a valued resource—for them to talk about a TIPS activity and their work (e.g., reading what they wrote, questions to discuss) in the language they use at home.

Students often serve as “interpreters” for a parent on the memos or notices that are sent home from school. In some schools, teachers or district leaders translate the *letter to parents* and *home-to-school-communication* section of TIPS to one or more of the languages spoken by large numbers of families served by the school.

4. Can you give the same TIPS activity to students who are slower learners and to those who have advanced skills?

TIPS activities are prototypes—not a curriculum—in literacy, math, and science in the elementary grades. They may be used or adapted by teachers to match the actual curricula and the specific skills that are taught in class to groups of students.

Like other homework, TIPS activities must match students' levels of ability. If homework is too hard, it will be frustrating and will not be completed. If homework is too easy, it will be boring and students may disengage. TIPS activities may be assigned as a common assignment to all students in a group or class. Or, teachers may assign struggling students some or all sections of an assignment. Advanced students may be assigned extra sections or sections for extra credit. Or, groups within classes may be assigned different TIPS activities from different grade-level packets to match the skills they are taught in class.

TIPS activities are provided on a disk in WORD and pdf form. Adaptations can be made using the WORD assignments. Teachers may design their own TIPS assignments using the blank template for each subject that is on the disk.

5. Why does the TIPS process work?

TIPS has been thoughtfully designed to address problems identified in research on homework and on family engagement with students on learning activities. TIPS offers a winning combination—activities that promote more and better communication between teacher and parent via homework and between parent and child in focused interactions.

The TIPS process...

- Can be used with any text or curriculum.
- Involves the child as an active learner and guides students to share ideas and show parents what they are learning in class.
- Emphasizes mastery of basic and advanced skills.
- Helps teachers organize homework into manageable, focused segments.

- Emphasizes periodic connections between school and home about the curriculum that do not require frequent meetings at school.
- Connects students' homework to real-world experiences of children and families.
- Provides families with the information they request on how to help at home in specific subjects.

Schools may be caught in a swirl of calls for more homework or less homework. TIPS focuses on *better* homework with active work for students as they interact with parents.

6. How soon will teachers see results of their efforts to involve parents?

Results come only if a program is well implemented. TIPS activities must be used on a regular schedule (weekly or every other week) to have an impact on the students, parents, and teachers. They are not a “novelty” activity. They are as important as all other homework.

Studies indicate that the most immediate results are parents' reactions to TIPS. They are immediately grateful to teachers for involving them in positive and helpful ways with their children on homework. Teachers see the immediate results in parents' attitudes and questions in Home-to-School Communications. Recent studies show quick improvements in students' and parents' attitudes and emotions about doing homework (Van Voorhis, 2011).

Results on student achievement take longer, as students gain confidence and mastery of skills. At first, the completion of homework should help improve students' report card grades and class tests in a particular subject. Over time, stronger skills should have measurable results on subject-specific standardized test scores.

APPENDICES

A: TIPS-LITERACY, K-3

Lists of Activities

Sample Activities

Blank Template

B: ORIENTATION FOR PARENTS TO INTERACTIVE HOMEWORK

C: SUMMARY OF RESEARCH ON TIPS

REFERENCES

APPENDIX A

Literacy K-3

Standards for Early Reading¹

In the primary grades K-3, students build literacy skills in Reading, Writing, and Communicating. Teachers help students master skills to meet four main standards, listed below. TIPS activities at each grade level reinforce the skills that students are taught in class to help them meet these standards.

Standard 1–Oral Expression and Listening. Oral communication skills are developed in a language-rich environment in class and at home. The overarching goal is to use language appropriate for different purposes and audiences. Students develop phonemic awareness as they learn to hear, identify, and use the individual sounds that make up words. They build verbal and non-verbal skills for more effective communication. These skills are strengthened as students learn new ways to expand their vocabulary and express and receive information. They learn listening and speaking skills to help gather information, convey their ideas, understand others' points of view. These skills in oral expression and listening contribute to more successful individual, partner, and group work in school.

TIPS activities enable students to strengthen oral expression and listening skills by using these skills in discussions and exchanges with a parent or family partner at home.

Standard 2 – Reading for All Purposes. Students gain a solid understanding that they can read print in many forms of literary texts and decode words using knowledge of the alphabet and letter sounds. One goal is for all students to learn to read fluently and with comprehension. Activities help students decode words using letter sounds and combinations, understand word families, word structures, and word relationships, increase vocabulary, and enjoy reading. Over time, students learn ways to approach different literary genres including types of fiction and non-fiction.

TIPS activities guide students and parents to work together on enjoyable topics to strengthen early reading skills and to connect reading with family experiences in everyday life.

Standard 3 –Writing and Composition. Students develop skills in writing words, sentences, and paragraphs for many purposes. In labels, descriptions, stories, letters, and other kinds of summaries, students learn that the words they write are used to communicate their ideas. They use the writing process to plan and draft their ideas for a variety of literacy genres. They improve spelling, punctuation, and grammar in their writing.

TIPS activities enable students and parents to enjoy writing, from simple labels in kindergarten, to sentences, and stories in Grade 3. By reading their writing aloud to a family partner, students begin to edit their work. They may notice missing content and errors in spelling, punctuation, and grammar.

Standard 4 – Research and Reasoning. Students exchange ideas with others and explore a variety of ways and places to find information that answers questions of interest. They learn that the quality of questions helps determine the quality of thinking, writing, and knowledge. They learn to use a variety of references and resources to answer questions of interest in early research activities. They also learn that research is often done with others who have different knowledge and points of view.

TIPS activities enable students and parents to see how a topic of interest can be read for understanding and can prompt discussions of different points of view.

¹ This list of standards for literacy learning are summarized from the grade level standards of the Colorado Department of Education. The standards for reading, writing, and communicating, grades K-3, are consistent with Common Core State Standards and the literacy standards of other states and districts.

See CDE standards by grade level at <https://www.cde.state.co.us/standardsandinstruction/gradelevelbooks> and the [Family and Community Guides to the Colorado Academic Standards](#).

TIPS Literacy K-3

List of Activities

Kindergarten

	Title	Skill Building
K #1	My Tool Box	Picture Clues
K #2	I Am in Kindergarten!	Communication
K #3	My Community	Drawing & Labeling
K #4	Oh, The Places We Can Go!	Writing a List
K #5	School Rules and Home Rules	Retelling & Communication
K #6	This Is What Happened	Informational Text & Comprehension
K #7	Fall Fun!	Informational Text & Comprehension
K #8	My Favorite Holiday	Environmental Words
K #9	Letter Game	Beginning Sounds & Letter Sounds
K #10	First, Second, Third	Draw in Sequence
K #11	Go Fish	Letter Recognition
K #12	Put the Alphabet in Order	Alphabetical Order
K #13	What's Cooking?	"How To" Writing
K #14	Get Moving!	Conversation
K #15	We Love Rhyme Time	Rhyming Words
K #16	All in the Word Family	Decoding Words in Print
K #17	Brrr...Baby It's Cold Outside	Descriptive Sentences
K #18	The Mouse and the Clock	Literary Text & Comprehension
K #19	Feelings	Communication & Nonverbal Skills
K #20	Beginning and End	Decoding Grade Level Text
K #21	In My World	Decoding Environmental Print
K #22	Do You Want It or Need It?	Persuasive Writing
K #23	Pack the Bags!	Communication
K #24	All About Me	Autobiography

TIPS Literacy K-3

List of Activities

Grade 1

	Title	Skill Building
1 #1	Words Tell the Story	Comprehension
1 #2	Word Groups	Develop Vocabulary
1 #3	Can You Hear Me?	Identifying Phonemes (Sounds) in a Word
1 #4	Sound It Out	Identifying Sounds in Spoken Words
1 #5	Good Partners	Conversations
1 #6	What a Character!	Character Traits
1 #7	Express Yourself	Reading Fluency
1 #8	What's Your Story?	Using Pictures to Tell about Story Events
1 #9	Ship Shape Sounds	"Sh" Diagraph
1 #10	Put An End To It	Inflectional Endings
1 #11	Silent "e" Follows a Rule	Silent "e"
1 #12	Compound Words	Compound Words
1 #13	Words Have Families	Word Families
1 #14	What's The Big Idea?	Main Idea
1 #15	1,2,3	Beginning, Middle, and End—Sequencing
1 #16	Put It All Together	Using a Bubble Map
1 #17	Start and Finish	Sentence Conventions
1#18	Upper Case Letters	Capitalization
1 #19	Picture My Story	Text Features
1 #20	Getting to Know You	Asking Questions
1 #21	How To Do It	Tell "How To"
1 #22	Make a Word Picture	Adjectives

TIPS Literacy K-3

List of Activities

Grade 2

	Title	Skill Building
2 #1	What Did You Say?	Different Ways of Communicating
2 #2	What's Happening?	Making Inferences
2 #3	How Does This Sound?	Vowel Sounds & Syllables
2 #4	What is YOUR Point of View?	Different Perspectives
2 #5	Superhero	Communication Skills
2 #6	Picture This	Importance of Illustrations
2 #7	HELP!	Character Traits
2 #8	Sum It Up in a Caption	Text Features-Captions
2 #9	Helping Hands	Sentence Structure
2 #10	Family Traditions	Writing about a Family Tradition
2 #11	Reading Aloud	Reading Fluency
2 #12	Zoo Mix-Up	Syllables
2 #13	Guess the Invention	Context Clues
2 #14	Tricky Words	Irregular Sight Words
2 #15	Step by Step	Sequencing
2 #16	Use the Clues	Picture Clues
2 #17	Listen for Clues	Active Listening
2 #18	A Frog's Life Cycle	Sequential Order
2 #19	The Prefix Builder	Prefixes
2 #20	I'm in Hot Water!	Figurative Language
2 #21	A Pair of Pears	Homonyms

TIPS Literacy K-3

List of Activities

Grade 3

	Title	Skill Building
3 #1	In My Own Words	Paraphrasing
3 #2	Follow the Leader	Interact with Others
3 #3	Poems Rhyme or Not	Comparing Poems on the Same Topic
3 #4	Why Do You Want THAT?	Persuasive Writing
3 #5	Guess What?	Using Descriptive Words
3 #6	What Caused That?	Cause & Effect
3 #7	It Was a Good Day	Beginning, Middle & End
3 #8	Total Recall	Point Of View
3 #9	Contrasting Characters	Compare And Contrast Characters
3 #10	Using Antonyms and Synonyms	Antonyms & Synonyms
3 #11	Mystery Postcard	Drawing Conclusions
3 #12	What Happens Next?	Sequence
3 #13	What Do You Recommend?	Supporting An Opinion
3 #14	New Words from Old	Prefixes
3 #15	It All Adds Up	Summary Plan
3 #16	Speak a Summary	Summarizing A Story
3 #17	Spooky Adjectives	Adjectives
3 #18	Now Featuring...	Text Features
3 #19	Tell Me How to Do That	How To Writing
3 #20	What's the Big Idea	Main Ideas
3 #21	Come On, Comma!	Punctuation

Student Name _____ Date _____

School Rules and Home Rules

Dear Parent,
We are learning about rules in school and comparing them to rules at home. I hope you enjoy this activity with your child. This assignment is due _____.
Thank you!

LET'S DO THIS

1. Tell your child: I know that you have rules to follow in school.

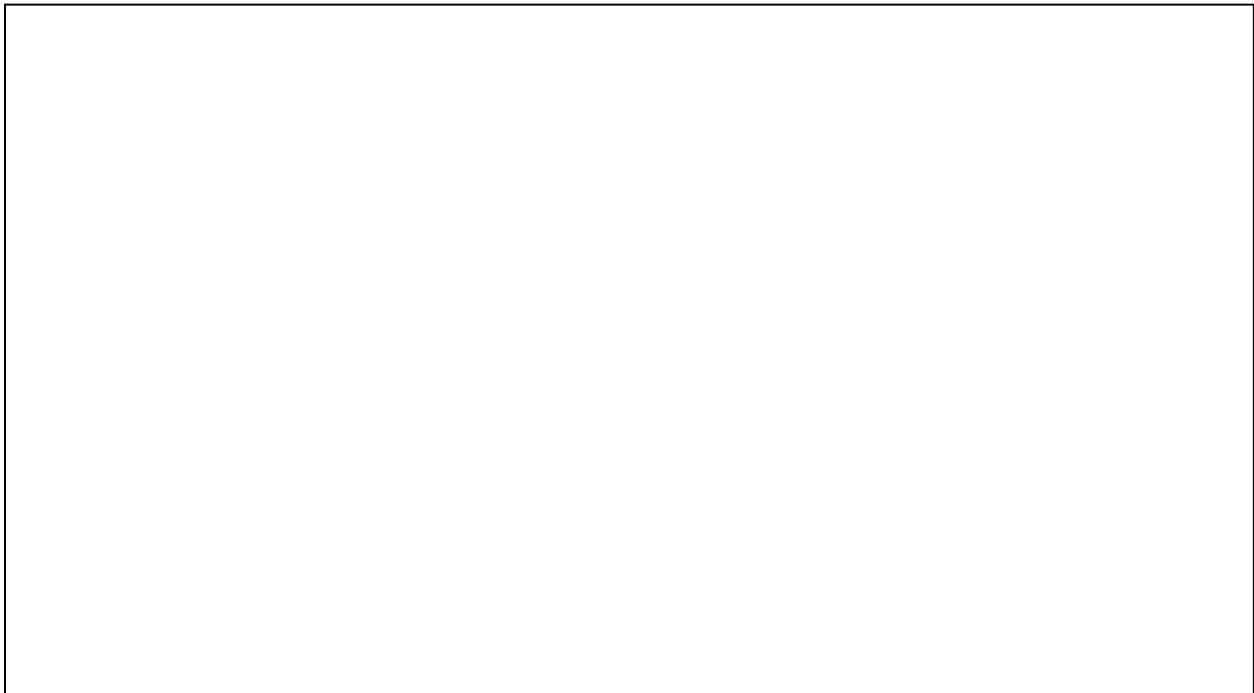
Ask your child: What are 3 school rules that you must follow.

2. Talk with your child: We also have rules to follow at home.

Let's discuss 3 rules at home.

3. Ask your child: Draw a picture of how you follow a rule at school **or** at home.

Here is a rule that I follow.



4. Ask your child: Let's label this rule. _____

Discuss with your child: Why is this rule important?

LET'S FIND OUT

1. Read each rule below to your child.

Ask your child: Is this a rule for school? for home? or for BOTH places?

Ask your child: I will read the rule. You draw a line to show where each rule is followed—at school, at home, or in both places. The first one is done for you.

Go to bed on time.

Be a good citizen.

Raise your hand to speak.

Listen to your teacher.

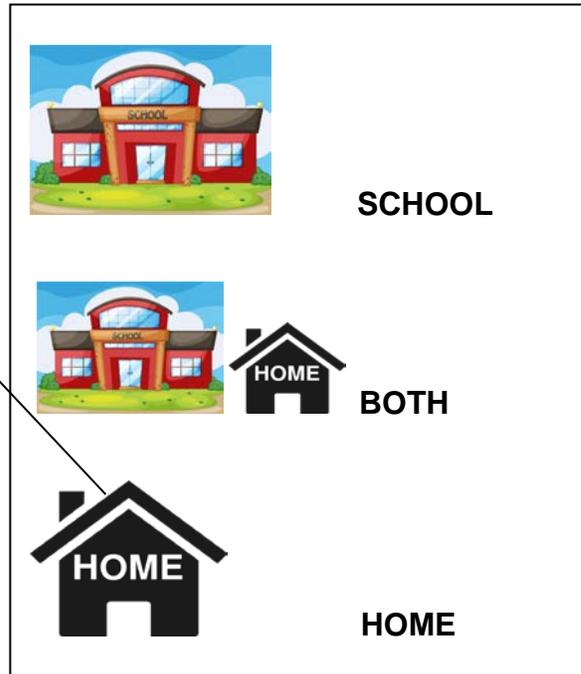
Clean up your toys.

Share your things.

Eat all of your dinner.

Be kind to your friend.

Do your best.



2. Ask your child: What is one more rule that you follow?
Please write the rule that your child tells you.

Discuss with your child: Is this a rule for school, for home, or for both?

Why is this rule important?

HOME-TO-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION

Dear Parent,

Please give 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 complete it.
_____ 2. My child and I enjoyed the activity.
_____ 3. This assignment helped me know what my child is learning in class.

Comment _____

Parent Signature _____

Student Name _____

Date _____

1, 2, 3

Dear Parent,
 We are learning about the beginning, middle, and end of a story. I hope you enjoy this activity with your child. This assignment is due _____. Thank you!

LET'S DO THIS

1. Ask your child: Look at the pictures.
 Put them in order to show the beginning, middle, and end.
 Write **1** next to the beginning, **2** next to the middle, and **3** next to the end.

Tell each story in 1-2-3 order.

Example:



3



1



2













2. Please read these sentences to your child.



- ___ We stayed in the house.
- ___ It rained all day.
- ___ We played many games.

Ask your child: Now, read the sentences to me. Point to each word.
 Number the sentences 1, 2, and 3 to tell a story with a beginning, middle, and end.

LET'S FIND OUT

1. With your child: Talk about a fun activity that you did together.

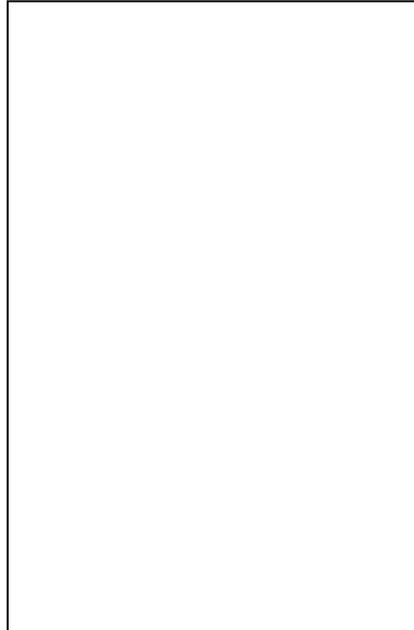
Talk about the beginning, middle, and end of the activity.

2. Ask your child: Draw a picture in each box to show the beginning, middle, and end of the activity.

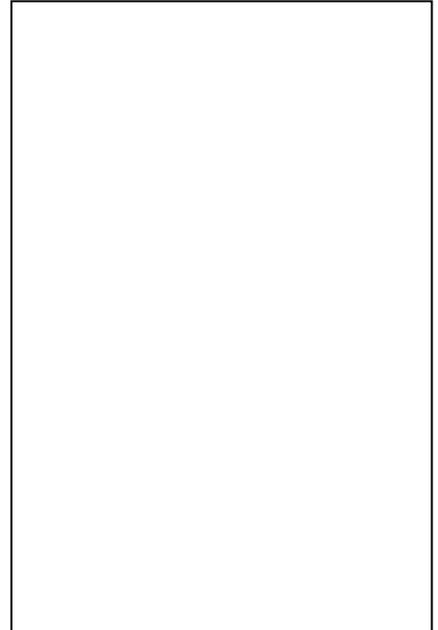
1



2



3



3. Ask your child: What is the title of this activity?
Please help your child write the title, as needed.

HOME-TO-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION

Dear Parent,

Please give 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 complete it.

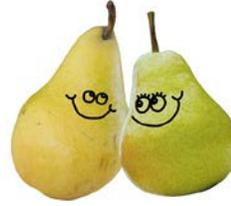
_____ 2. My child and I enjoyed the activity.

_____ 3. This assignment helped me know what my child is learning in class.

Comment _____

Parent Signature _____

Student Name _____ Date _____



A PAIR of PEARS

Dear Parent,

We are learning about words that sound the same but are spelled differently. They are called **homophones**. I hope you enjoy this activity with me. This assignment is due _____.

Sincerely,

Student Signature

REMEMBER

Homophones are words that sound the same but are spelled differently and have different meanings.

LET'S DO THIS

1. Work with a family partner. Who is working with you? _____
2. Read the two homophones before each sentence to your family partner. Tell your family partner the meaning of each word.

Choose and write the correct homophones in each sentence.
Read the sentences to your family partner.

(sea, see) I _____ a boat in the _____.

(eight, ate) I was so hungry I _____ _____ cookies.

(write, right) I will _____ the _____ name on my paper.

3. Draw a line from the word in the 1st column to its homophone in 2nd column. Tell your family partner the meaning of each word.

for

board

tail

won

one

four

bored

whole

hole

tale

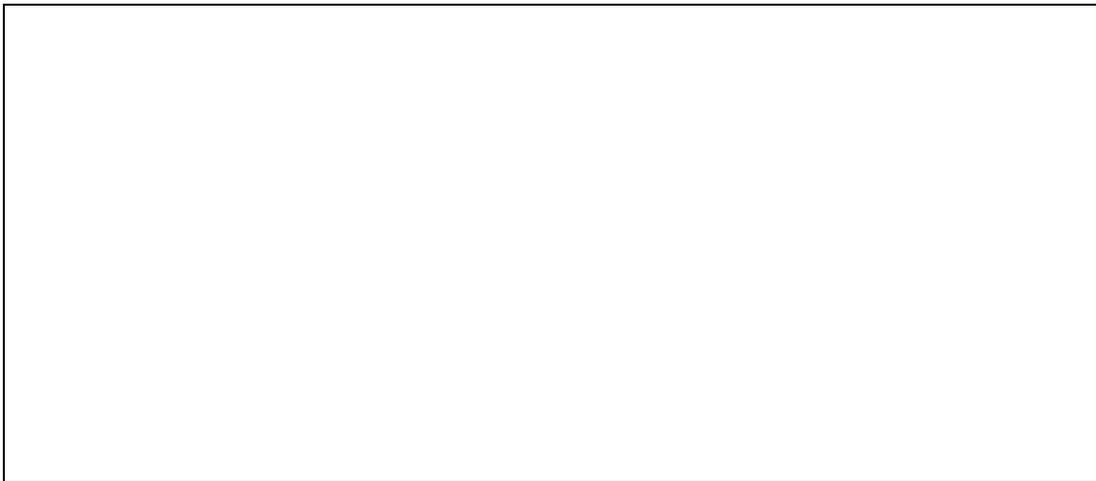
LET'S FIND OUT

With your family partner choose two pairs of homophones from the list above.
Write a silly sentence for each pair of words.

1. _____
_____.

2. _____
_____.

3. Choose one of the silly sentences and draw a picture to illustrate it.



HOME-TO-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION

Dear Parent,

Please give 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 complete it.
_____ 2. My child and I enjoyed the activity.
_____ 3. This assignment helped me know what my child is learning in class.

Comment _____

Parent Signature _____

Student Name _____ Date _____

It Was a Good Day

Dear Parent,

We are learning to identify key events at the beginning, middle, and end of a story. I hope you enjoy this activity with me. This assignment is due _____.

Sincerely,

Student Signature

LET'S DO THIS

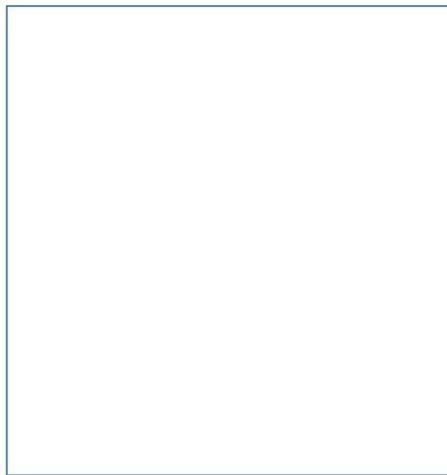
Work with a family partner. Who is working with you? _____

Ask your family partner to think of a fun day they had as a child and tell you about it.

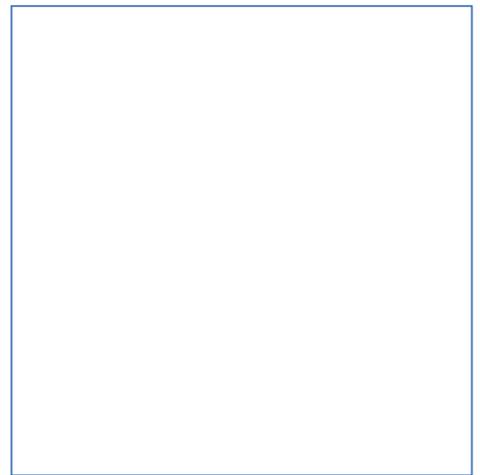
YOU draw 3 key events at the beginning, middle, and end of that story.



Beginning Key Event



Middle Key Event



End Key Event

LET'S FIND OUT

Using your pictures as a guide, write a short story about your family partner's fun day on the back of this page.

Start with a good topic sentence. Be sure your details are in order with a beginning, middle, and end. Include details to help the reader understand and enjoy your story.

Give the story your own title.

Title _____

2. Read the story to your family partner.

3. With your family partner, discuss any questions you have about what happened on the day of the story.

HOME-TO-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION

Dear Parent,

Please give 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 complete it.

_____ 2. My child and I enjoyed the activity.

_____ 3. This assignment helped me know what my child is learning in class.

Comment _____

Parent Signature _____

Blank Template TIPS- Literacy K-3

Student Name _____ Date _____

Title

Dear Parent,

Letter to parent/family partner about the activity.
 We are learning I hope you enjoy this activity with me. This assignment is due
 _____.

Sincerely,

 Student Signature

THINGS TO REMEMBER

- A few important guidelines
- For parent and student to conduct the activity

MATERIALS

Include a section for materials only if unusual items are needed or
If specific items will be provided to all student by the teacher.

LET'S DO THIS

Initial Activities – Number as needed

- 1.
- 2.

Include a friendly,
 appropriate graphic,
 if possible.

Student drawing may
 take the place of a
 graphic.

Leave enough room for young children to write.

BACK OF PAGE

LET'S FIND OUT

Next set of activities to build the specific skill.

Number as needed

- 1.
- 2.

Leave enough room for young children to write.

Include a friendly, appropriate graphic, if possible.

Student drawing may take the place of a graphic.

Include on all TIPS Activities -Bottom of Page 2

HOME-TO-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION

Dear Parent or Family Partner:

Please give 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 complete it.
- _____ 2. My child and I enjoyed the activity.
- _____ 3. This assignment helped me know what my child is learning in class.

Comment _____

Parent Signature _____

Authors of the activity.

APPENDIX B

AN ORIENTATION FOR PARENTS TO TIPS INTERACTIVE HOMEWORK

Schedule an orientation meeting.

At the start of each year, teachers should introduce parents to TIPS Interactive Homework and give examples of the activities that will be sent home over the year. There are two main ways to conduct this orientation.

Regular open-house/visiting night. Most parents come to school to meet their children's teachers on the first visiting night early in the school year. This meeting is a prime time for teachers to talk with the largest number of parents with a short, well-prepared presentation on how TIPS will help them interact with their children on homework in a specific subject. A typical TIPS-Literacy interactive homework activity can be shown on a screen or distributed and discussed. Parents can try an activity and ask questions.

Grade level meeting for parents. Some open house nights do not permit attention to special projects. In that case, a grade level meeting may be conducted with parents to discuss and demonstrate TIPS.

The early contacts establish a base for parents and teachers to build other communications throughout the school year.

Sample Agenda for an Orientation Meeting on TIPS

- Welcome
- Importance of parents and family support for children's success in school
- Homework policy
- How to monitor and support all homework
- TIPS Interactive Homework
 - Teacher-parent communications
 - Parent-child conversations about what we learn in class.
 - Role of parents with TIPS in grades K-1 and in grades 2-5
 - Role of students with TIPS in grades K-1 and in grades 2-5
 - TIPS schedule and expectations
 - Home-to-School Communication
- Demonstration of a TIPS activity
- Parents' Questions

This kind of brief but clear exchange at an orientation meeting will set the tone for parent involvement in homework for the year.

Letter to parents

At the orientation session, a letter to parents should be distributed that explains the TIPS process and the procedures that the teacher will follow to implement TIPS throughout the year. This letter also must be distributed to all parents who did not attend the orientation session. A letter should include information on:

- a. **The TIPS process**
- b. **Schedule for assignments (weekly or every other week)**
- c. **Paper color for TIPS activities—what parents should look for**
- d. **Parent or family partner's role in the TIPS process**
- e. **Explanation of the how homework is collected and graded**
- f. **Importance of home-to-school communications**
- g. **Teacher's contact information**
- h. **Other information that the teacher elects to include.**

SAMPLE LETTER TO PARENTS: Orientation to TIPS-Literacy, K-3

Edit as needed on letterhead, website, other communications.

Insert the specific subject for TIPS Interactive Homework, the assignment schedule, and other aspects of TIPS for your class (see underlined spaces to edit).

**ANY SCHOOL
100 Educate Road
Learning, State 00000
Phone: (555) 555-5555**

Date

Dear Parent,

I am pleased to have your child in my class. We are looking forward to a wonderful school year!

You are an important partner in your child's education. That is why we are using an exciting homework design this year.

As a part of our reading and literacy curriculum, I will assign one homework activity each week called *TIPS Interactive Homework*. TIPS stands for *Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork*. The activities, which take about 20 minutes, enable your child to show and talk with you about something interesting we are learning in class.

TIPS assignments will be made on Thursday and will be due on Monday to make it easy to find time to chat with your child. The assignments will be printed on both sides of one sheet of YELLOW paper.

As with all homework, TIPS activities are linked to specific learning objectives. Of course, all homework is the STUDENT'S responsibility to complete. You are not asked to teach skills to your child—just enjoy the interactions. Each assignment includes a section called *Home-to-School Communication* for you to send questions and comments to me. I will respond to your questions within a few days and will use your comments to improve future homework activities.

TIPS activities are not the only homework assignments that your child will receive, but these interactive experiences will keep you informed your child's work and progress. By doing homework, your student will be a more successful student.

Please contact me if you have any questions about the TIPS activities or any homework.

Sincerely,

Ms. Ima Teacher
iteacher@email.address

APPENDIX C

SUMMARY OF TIPS RESEARCH

Summary of Results

TIPS Language Arts*

- ▶ Students who completed more TIPS homework assignments had higher language arts report card grades and state achievement test scores.
- ▶ These students improved ratings of the quality of their writing from fall to winter and from winter to spring.
- ▶ Students whose parents were involved on more TIPS activities had higher writing scores in the winter and spring.
- ▶ Parents who participated liked the TIPS process and recommended that it be continued.

(Epstein, Simon, & Salinas, 1997; Van Voorhis, 2009, 2011b)

*These studies were conducted in the middle grades. We expect similar results at the elementary level.

TIPS MATH

- ▶ Students who were assigned TIPS had higher levels of parental involvement in math homework than did similar students who were not assigned TIPS.
- ▶ From grade 3 to grade 4, compared to a control group, TIPS classes had:
 - More positive student and family emotions during homework time.
 - More positive student and family attitudes about math homework.
 - Higher student standardized math achievement test scores.

(Van Voorhis, 2009, 2011a, b)

TIPS SCIENCE

- ▶ Students who were assigned TIPS had higher levels of parental involvement in science homework than did similar students who were not assigned TIPS.
- ▶ Students who completed TIPS activities had higher science report card grades than non-TIPS students.
- ▶ Students who completed their homework (TIPS or control) earned higher science report card grades.

(Van Voorhis, 2003, 2011b)

TIPS ALL SUBJECTS

- ▶ With TIPS Interactive Homework, more and different parents were engaged with their children on homework, regardless of family background or child's starting skills.
- ▶ More students and parents expressed positive emotions during homework time and more positive attitudes about homework.
- ▶ When TIPS was consistently implemented in a specific subject, students improved skills, had higher report card grades, and had higher achievement test scores in that subject than similar students in comparison groups.

(Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001; 2012)

Summary of TIPS Research

For over three decades, colleagues and I have been studying the nature and effects of school, family, and community partnerships, including homework. We want to understand the essential elements for effective and equitable programs and practices of family and community involvement. We need to know whether and how various approaches and interventions benefit students, parents, and teachers.

Homework

Hundreds of studies conducted by many researchers since the mid-1970s confirm that large majorities of teachers, parents, and students believe that homework is a valuable instructional tool that helps students proceed successfully from the elementary grades through high school. Longitudinal studies and meta-analyses of scores of studies indicate that, regardless of their starting points, students at all ability levels benefit from doing homework compared to similar students who do not do their assignments.

Family Engagement in Homework

Many studies explored the impact of parental engagement on homework. Among many findings, when parents and students connected in positive conversations and interactions on homework, students were more motivated about learning, did better in school, increased their attention to classwork, improved homework time management, completed assignments, and increased their knowledge and skills. The studies suggest that parent-child discussions about schoolwork at home had strong effects on students' math and reading achievement and significantly reduced the impact of family SES on achievement.

Challenge for Homework

Despite the wide agreement that homework can boost students' skills and success in school, teachers, parents, and students also report that a major problem with homework is the uneven quality of assignments. Some activities may be valid and valuable. Other homework may be too hard (frustrating), too easy (busy work), or of little interest or use to the student. The design and purposes of homework require serious attention to improve the homework process.

Teachers acknowledge the need for homework reform. They identified the need for time to prepare better assignments linked to class lessons, establish clearer homework policies, provide students with feedback on homework in class, share best homework practices with other teachers, and communicate with parents about homework (MetLife, 2007).

Center Studies of Family Engagement on Homework

Early studies by researchers at Johns Hopkins explored teachers' practices to engage families with children on homework in typical elementary classrooms. There were interesting findings for teachers, parents, and students.

Teachers who frequently engaged parents and community partners reported greater understanding of and appreciation for parents' contributions to student learning and development, regardless of family background. Teachers who engaged parents with children on homework were more likely to say that all parents can help children practice specific skills at home. They described parents as allies—interested in what is taught in school, how students are progressing, and how to increase their child's positive attitudes and confidence about homework and schoolwork.

Of all types of involvement, most **parents** (over 90%) want to know “How do I help my child at home?” When given this information, more parents become involved, including those who were not involved before. They become more positive about the school, the teacher, and their continuing roles in their children’s education.

Parents who are regularly engaged with students on clear, family-friendly interactive homework activities said that they knew more about the school program, appreciated teachers’ efforts, gained ideas about how to help at home, and rated teachers higher in interpersonal skills and overall teaching quality. They reported enjoying homework time with their children on interactive assignments in language arts, math, and science.

Student achievement improved from fall to spring when teachers used goal-linked, subject-specific parental engagement activities. Early studies at the elementary and middle level also showed that when teachers frequently engaged parents in learning activities at home, students talked with their parents about their work and ideas, had more positive attitudes about school, and saw home and school as more “similar” compared to students whose teachers did not regularly engage parents in homework.

The early studies revealed important subject-specific connections between teacher practices, principal influence, parent responses, and student achievement. For example:

- 2/3 of elementary teachers and over 90% of first grade teachers involved parents in reading activities with their children at home.
- About 75% of elementary school principals said they encouraged teachers to involve parents in reading activities at home.

Over half of all parents and over 70% of parents of children in classrooms of teachers who were leaders in the use of parent involvement, conducted reading or reading-related activities at home with their children. Students in these teachers’ classrooms improved reading skills more than did students in other teachers’ classrooms.

Recent Research on TIPS Interactive Homework

Three longitudinal studies of TIPS interactive homework followed students in randomly assigned teachers’ classes using TIPS interactive homework or not (Van Voorhis, 2009, 2011 a, b). Students were followed in math from grade 3 to 4, in language arts from grade 7 to 8, and in science from grade 6 to 7. The studies were conducted in racially diverse communities where at least 60 percent of students received free or reduced-price meals.

Results indicated that large percentages of students at all grade levels completed the TIPS activities, large numbers of parents were involved and completed the home-to-school communications. With grade level, students’ prior achievement, and other background variables statistically controlled, TIPS students had higher standardized test scores in the TIPS subjects than did control students. Effect sizes of these and other TIPS studies ranged from $d=.23$ to $d=.49$, indicating small to medium effects of TIPS on student achievement, especially for students who were in TIPS classes for two years (Van Voorhis, 2011b).

The three studies also measured students’ and families’ attitudes and emotions. Results showed that students and families rated their emotions about homework significantly more positively in the TIPS than in non-TIPS classrooms. Compared to controls, TIPS students reported more positive interactions with a family partner, and TIPS families reported more positive exchanges with their children on homework. More than 80 percent of students and families evaluated TIPS as more enjoyable than “regular” homework and recommended using TIPS in the next school year (Van Voorhis, 2009).

Research to Practice: TIPS Interactive Homework

The results of many studies suggested that involvement with children on homework is largely an organizational problem for teachers. Almost all teachers believe parent involvement is important, but say that it is difficult to engage all parents on goal-linked learning activities without clear, quick, and reliable structures and processes to:

- (a) distribute homework that students can share with a family partner and complete at home;
- (b) receive and process messages and questions from parents to ensure 2-way communications from school-to-home and home-to-school; and
- (c) evaluate the results of assignments for students.

TIPS Interactive Homework was designed to address these requests from teachers.

- TIPS activities, developed with teachers in literacy, math, and science in the elementary grades can be aligned with any curriculum and with local learning objectives.
- Subject-specific TIPS activities are focused, one-page (2-sides), weekly homework assignments that require students to interact with a family partner (e.g., parent, older sibling, grandparent) on a skill they are studying in class.
- Except in the youngest grades, *students* are responsible for showing and discussing their work and ideas in math, science, and language arts with a family partner. This relieves parents from feeling frustrated if they think they are expected to “teach” all subjects and skills to their children. (Epstein, et al., 2009).
- The activities can be assigned by teachers, conducted by students with a family partner, and discussed and collected in class.
- Every activity includes a place for communications from home-to-school, and built in evaluations that show teachers the accuracy of student work and the reactions of parents to the assignment.

In sum, early and recent TIPS studies confirm that if teachers *designed* homework as seriously as they *assigned* homework, more students at all ability levels would be engaged in and complete their assignments, more parents would be involved with their children on homework in positive ways, and more students would improve their achievement and other school-linked behaviors.

See list of references on TIPS and related studies.

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- For more information on TIPS Interactive Homework for the elementary and middle grades, visit the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS), www.partnershipschoools.org. Click on TIPS. Also see the TIPS Resource/Order form.