

## **BioPREP TIPS teacher and her students bring home prizes, honors and grants to rural Alaska**

This past spring students from the small fishing village of Petersburg, Alaska did a lot of traveling and brought back more than just souvenirs. Joni Johnson, biology teacher at Petersburg High School (PHS) and 3<sup>rd</sup> year TIPS program teacher, brought her genetics class to both the 2013 Southeast Alaska Regional Science Fair in Juneau and the Alaska Statewide High School Science Symposium (ASHSSS) in Fairbanks.



Students in the Genetics Class at Petersburg High School prepare samples for independent research projects later presented at the Alaska Statewide High School Science Symposium. (Photo by Joni Johnson).

In all, six students from PHS brought back ribbons. “While the science is important, the increased self-confidence of several students was even more of a reward than the final standings in the competition”, Johnson said. “This type of experience is critical for students in rural communities, as they become both aware of what their peers are doing and of what they themselves are capable of.”

And, it is not just students that are being awarded for their efforts. Mrs. Johnson received special recognition as the 2013 ASHSSS Science Teacher of the Year. Additionally, the PHS genetics course that she started with the support of BioPREP TIPS independently secured a Petersburg Community Foundation grant to support the purchase of a MixerMill 400 homogenizer for DNA extractions. This year’s cohort of students are already grinding samples as diverse as Chantrelle mushroom sporocarps and stomach contents of various populations of Pacific herring. There are certainly exciting journeys ahead for these students as they work to make new discoveries from the samples they are investigating.