

Parent-Teacher Conferences: A Tip Sheet for Teachers

Parent-teacher conferences are an important component of ongoing home-school communication and family involvement in your classroom. Did you also know that home-school communication predicts positive outcomes for students and for schools? Although you may already be working hard to engage parents in their children's education, this tip sheet is designed to build on your own experiences and provide you with additional information to help make your parent-teacher conferences productive and effective.

Before the conference:

- **Send invitations.** Include information about the time and goals of the conferences, as well as alternative scheduling options.
- **Review student work.** Be prepared to go over student data, assignments, and assessments during the conferences.
- **Prepare thoughts and materials.** Create an agenda or list of key issues you want to discuss about each student's progress and growth.
- **Send reminders.** Prior to conference, send home a reminder for when and where the conferences will be held.
- **Create a welcoming environment.**

During the conference:

- **Discuss progress and growth.** Starting with the positive, let families know about their child's ability level in different subjects and in relationship to his or her peers.
- **Use examples.** Walk parents through the assignments that demonstrate student's progress and abilities.
- **Ask questions and listen actively.** Solicit family input into student strengths, needs, and learning styles.
- **Share ideas for supporting learning.** Provide suggestions for activities families can use at home to help their child learn.
- **Seek solutions collaboratively.** Avoid judgments about what "they" should do and instead emphasize how "we" can work together to resolve any problems.
- **Make an action plan.** Spend the last few minutes discussing how you and the family will support the student.
- **Establish lines of communication.** Describe how you will communicate with families and they can contact you.

These tip sheets are based on the following resources:

- Henderson, A., Mapp, K. L., Johnson, V., & Davies, D. (2007). Beyond the bake sale: The essential guide to family-school partnerships.
- Lawrence-Lightfoot, S. (2003). The essential conversation: What parents and teachers can learn from each other. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Pappano, L. (2007). Meeting of the minds. Harvard Education Letter, 23(4), 1-3.

Approaching Parent-Teacher Conferences

- ✓ **A two-way conversation.** It is a time for parents to learn from you, but also for you to learn from them.
- ✓ **Emphasis on learning.** Keep bringing communication back to strategies to support student learning.
- ✓ **Opportunities and challenges.** Parents need to hear their child's strengths and challenges.

Be Heard

Keep these principles in mind for a great parent-teacher conference.

Best intentions assumed
Emphasis on learning
Home-school collaboration
Examples and evidence
Active Listening
Respect for all
Dedication to follow-up

Ideas after the conference:

- **Follow up with families.** If practical, contact parents who attended the conference and thank them for doing so.
- **Communicate regularly.** Communicate on an ongoing basis with families, with positive news as well as updates on student progress and challenges. Also let families know about other opportunities for them to be involved.
- **Connect in-class activities.** Create responsive instructional practices based on what you learned about family cultures, home learning environments, and student strengths and needs.

Resources:

- **Parent-Teacher Conference Resources**
<http://tinyurl.com/y4eagwqr>
- **Parent-Teacher Conference Tip Sheets**
<http://tinyurl.com/y5bpzf4j>

Harvard Family Research Project: Harvard Graduate School of Education, <http://tinyurl.com/y5bpzf4j>

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