

Parent-Teacher Conferences: A Tip Sheet for Principals

Parent-teacher conferences are an important component of ongoing home-school communication and family involvement in your school. Years of research demonstrate that family involvement in education can lead to positive benefits for children and youth, such as increased school attendance, higher academic performance, and improved attitudes about school. As principal, your leadership will ensure that these conferences achieve their maximum potential. This tip sheet offers some suggestions to support you as you lead the effort to improve the attendance and effectiveness of parent-teacher conferences at your school.

Before the conference:

- **Send the message.** Communicate the importance of conferences to the whole school.
- **Share guidelines.** Let both families and teachers know about goals and logistics of parent-teacher conferences.
- **Publicize.** Disseminate information about parent-teacher conferences in the broader community.
- **Provide professional development.** Train teachers about best practices in conducting effective P-T conferences.
- **Make student data accessible.** Let families know that this information is meant to support student learning.
- **Create a welcoming environment.** Ensure that ALL families feel welcome. Have translators available and school information in multiple languages.

Approaching Parent-Teacher Conferences

- ✓ **A two-way conversation.** The P-T conference is an opportunity for parents to learn about their child's academic progress and for teachers to gain insight into the student's home.
- ✓ **Emphasis on learning.** Research shows that family involvement is most effective when it is "linked to learning."
- ✓ **Opportunities and challenges.** The tone of parent-teacher conferences should be balanced so that all involved understand what the student is doing well and what he or she can improve upon.

During the conference:

- **Be available.** Starting with the positive, let families know about their child's ability level in different subjects and in relationship to his or her peers.
- **Be visible.** Walk through the school building and introduce yourself to parents. Communicate your school's appreciation for families who have taken the time to attend conferences.
- **Provide information.** Use parent-teacher conferences as an entry point for additional family involvement. Share information with parents about the roles they can play in the school, from volunteering to decision making.

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:

- **Get feedback from teachers and parents.** There are many ways you can get feedback about what did and did not work well during parent-teacher conferences. Surveys and focus groups are helpful to assess both teacher and parent experiences leading up to and during the conferences, but informal feedback can be just as important.
- **Provide leadership on family involvement.** Ensure that ongoing home-school communication continues by encouraging teachers to reach out to families to discuss their child's progress. Provide meaningful opportunities for families to get involved that are well publicized and responsive to the needs and interests of families in your school community.

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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