

I-6: Respectfully inform, involve and invest students' influencers

How to Get the Most Out of School Conferences

In-school parent-teacher conferences represent a great opportunity for two-way communication between teachers and parents.

<p>Meet early in the year before the official "report card day"</p>	<p>Lay a firm foundation for successful teacher-parent collaboration with a parent-teacher meeting early on (late September, early October) before the official "report card day," which usually takes place sometime in November. While the report card may serve as a valuable tool for discussing a child's academic and social performance, the focus on grades may distract parents from a more productive discussion.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage parents to do much of the talking while the teacher listens to what the parents have to say on a variety of issues. Here are important areas to cover and some sample questions educators might ask during such a meeting: • The parents' views of their child's strengths and weaknesses (e.g., Which academic area does your child like most? Which does he/she tend to avoid?). • The parents' goals for and expectations of their child (e.g., What are your goals for your child this year?). • The nature and extent of parents' involvement in their child's learning (e.g., How do you help your child with homework at home? How often do you read to your child?). • Diversity and uniqueness of the child's family heritage (e.g., What is your family routine at home before and after school?). <p>The information obtained from a positive initial conference can enable teachers to be more proactive, responsive, and successful in working with students and their parents throughout the school year.</p>
<p>Plan for conferences/meetings</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Send home a note that invites parents to meet with you and states the purpose of the meeting. Call parents who might need extra encouragement to attend. • Send a reminder the day before the meeting. Have students decorate the reminders. This will ensure that parents see your communication. Parents can be supplied with a simple worksheet to help them prepare for a report card pick-up meeting or conference. • Tell parents you would like to talk to them for 10-15 minutes at report card pick-up. Let them know they might have to wait a few minutes if they arrive at the same time as other parents. Have interesting materials for parents while they wait. • Collect samples of student work and identify areas that need improvement. • Prepare a summary for each child of issues/problems you want to cover at the meeting. Are there materials or techniques you could suggest to help parents with their child? • Make sure students feel part of the conference. Have students choose something they have done that they especially want to share with a parent or have them complete the student worksheet.

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<p>Communicate sensitively and strategically during the meeting</p>	<p>Make sure to comment on at least one positive thing about each child. Focus on one or two areas for improvement. Some children have many problems, but don't overwhelm parents with them. Be specific. Successful communication is not vague or general.</p> <p>Examples: General: "Crystal is doing poorly in math." Specific: "Crystal remembers her 2's times table but is having trouble remembering her 3's."</p> <p>General: "Kenya is a good student." Specific: "Kenya learns new material easily in all the subject areas. He is interested in learning more about..."</p>
<p>Ask parents if they'd be willing to help</p>	<p>Suggest some specific steps that parents can take that will help their child be successful. Provide materials (e.g., written instructions, sticker charts) to help parents carry out the task at home. Establish a follow-up plan so that everyone knows when the goal is being accomplished. Let parents know what you will do in the classroom to address the issue. Ask parents to share with their child what you talked about.</p>
<p>Beyond the meeting</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Send a note home thanking parents for coming and reminding them of the plan that was agreed upon. • Let parents know how things are going after a week or two. • Let the student know that you enjoyed talking to her/her parents. If there is a plan of action, tell the child.
<p>Ask parents for their views</p>	<p>Asking parents for their views will help them feel included in their child's schooling and comfortable as partners in the education process. In addition, teachers can gain valuable information about a child's home environment and family dynamics, and set a positive tone in home-school communications.</p>

Adapted from materials from the Laboratory for Student Success, by Eva Patrikakou, Roger Weissberg, Mary Hancock, Michelle Rubenstein, and Jennifer Zeisz.