



## Keys to Successful Parent-Teacher Conferences

The purpose of the parent-teacher conference is to form a partnership between the home and the school so your child can be a successful learner. It's a time for you to ask questions about learning expectations for your child and how your child is progressing. It's a time for you and the teacher to work together to find ways you both can help your son or daughter. Here are some suggestions as to how to make the most out of parent-teacher conferences.

### Before the conference

- Ask your child what you should talk about with the teacher. Find out which subjects he or she likes the best, and which ones the least. Ask why. Ask if your child feels safe at school.
- Don't let language differences stop you from attending the conference. If your school does not have a translator available for you, take along a trusted neighbor or family member who speaks English and can translate for you.
- If you are not able to attend the conference at the time assigned to you, call the teacher and ask for a time that is convenient for both of you.
- Write a list of questions about your student's progress. Some examples might be:
  - What are my child's strongest and weakest subjects?
  - How can I help my child at home?
  - Is my child working up to his or her ability? If not, what can we do to change that?
  - Does my child finish the work that is assigned?
  - Does my child participate in class discussions and activities?
- Make notes about issues you want to know more about such as:
  - The teacher's homework policy;
  - Concerns you may have about school programs or policies;
  - What is the best way to communicate with the teacher after the conference?
  - If my child doesn't understand the homework assignment, how can he or she get help?
  - What resources are available to my child beyond the classroom?

### During the conference

- Refer to the notes you made before the conference so you can be sure to ask the questions that are most important to you.
- If the teacher tells you that your child is not achieving to their potential, stay calm. This is the time to work with the teacher to develop a plan on how to improve your child's performance. Ask the teacher what the school is doing to help your



student improve and ask what you can do to support schoolwork at home. Find out if there is tutoring or extra help available.

- If the teacher tells you that your child is excelling, ask what the school is doing to provide challenging work; ask what you can do to support that effort at home. It's just as important to boost your child's strengths as it is to strengthen his or her weak areas.
- Discuss areas in your child's school life that are not easily measured by grades. Does your child have friends? Does your child work cooperatively with other students and the teacher? How your child gets along with other people will make a big difference in every part of his or her life.
- Make the most of your time. Arrive on time. Ask the most important questions first. Listen carefully to what the teacher tells you. Conferences are usually scheduled for 30 minutes. You want every minute to count. If possible, avoid bringing babies or younger children to the meeting as they can be distracting and you want to be able to give your full attention to talking with the teacher. If it is necessary to bring younger children to the conference, notify the teacher ahead of time. In most cases, the teacher will set-up a desk where you can sit the child down with books or activities to keep their attention, allowing you to focus on the conference with the teacher.
- Share information about your child such as any special needs, changes in the family such as divorce or separation, the birth of a new baby or death of a loved one.
- If any problems are raised about your child's academic progress or social adjustment, make sure you work out a plan with the teacher to change the situation.
- Take notes during the conference so you can remember what the teacher said. After the meeting, review your notes. If something is unclear, you will want to contact the teacher to clarify. Notes are also good if you want to share the results of the conference with a family member who wasn't able to attend.

### **After the conference**

- Discuss with your child what was said during the conference; emphasize the teacher's positive comments. Use this as an opportunity to praise your child and to show your true interest in their school life.
- Talk to your child about ways to improve their school work and study habits. Start right now on any action plan you and the teacher developed. Discuss the plan with your child making sure he or she understands that the purpose of the plan is to help the child succeed.
- Make sure the plan is working; carefully observe your child's behavior, class assignments and homework; let the teacher know how your student is progressing.