

REPORT to PARENTS

RP 31:4

Having Successful Parent-Teacher Conferences

It doesn't matter if you're the student, the teacher, or the parent, parent-teacher conferences are bound to cause some anxiety. Yet these one-on-one meetings are priceless opportunities for families to get a better understanding of their children. By preparing well for your meetings with teachers and following up with both your children and their teachers afterward, you can strengthen your children's school success.

Before the Conference:

Listen. Any time you hear your child talking about something he or she is doing really well in or is having trouble with—either with school-work or with classmates—make a note of it. When it's time for the conference with the teacher, you'll have a ready-made list of things to discuss.

Ask. When it's time to schedule the conference with the teacher, sit down with your child and ask him or her what you should discuss with the teacher. Encourage your children to open up and tell you what it's like for them in the classroom. Do they feel like they're falling behind academically? Or are they bored because they understand the material that the rest of the class is struggling with? Are there any troubling issues with any of their classmates? One thing that's guaranteed to get your children to open up is asking them what they think their teacher is going to tell you about them.

Bring notes and papers. Write down questions you want to address with the teacher. Bring copies of any assignments you have questions about. Think ahead of time how to be tactful and kind in wording concerns you have about the teacher or the class.

During the Conference:

Be on time. Schools tightly schedule parent-teacher conferences because there's only so much time available and dozens of families to see. Show up at least a few minutes early, so you know you'll be set to begin when it's your turn.

Hire a babysitter. It's important to make sure that the

time you have with the teacher is as productive as possible. Having other children in the room is distracting. Either hire a babysitter or trade off with another parent so that your children don't tag along.

Take notes. In addition to presenting the questions and concerns you brought to the meeting, make sure to take notes about what the teacher is telling you about your child. Be sure to address these important areas: strengths, weaknesses, and social skills.

Keep emotions out of it. It is always difficult to hear that your "angel" or "young Einstein" isn't exactly the person you thought he or she was in the classroom. Keep your cool and bear in mind that the teacher is offering constructive criticism.

After the Conference:

Talk to your child. Sit down with your child and tell him or her what you and the teacher discussed. Emphasize the positive things the teacher said. Remember that it's important for your child to feel positive about learning, the teacher, and the school.

Follow up. If there were important issues that need to be dealt with, such as finding a tutor or getting counseling for your child, make sure to follow up in writing with the teacher soon after the conference. Specify exactly what you discussed with the teacher, what steps will be taken, what your responsibilities and the school's responsibilities will be, and what the timetable is for action.

Remember the principal. If, after meeting with your child's teacher, you still feel like you have serious issues that weren't adequately addressed, set up a time to talk to the guidance counselor or principal to see what other options are available.

Follow through. Once you know what you can do at home to help your child succeed in school, make sure to actually do it. It's understandable that finding the time might be difficult, but remember—your child needs you.



NAESP

Report to Parents, written to serve elementary and middle-level principals, may be reproduced by National Association of Elementary School Principals members without permission. Current year back issues are available to members at www.naesp.org.

