



Tips for Increasing Parent and Family Engagement

BCSD Title I Family Engagement Program

Nov/Dec 2016

Parent-Teacher Conferences: Tips for Parents

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.

Approaching Parent-Teacher Conferences

- **A two-way conversation.** The parent-teacher conference is not only an opportunity for parents to learn from you, but for you to learn from them. Nobody knows your students better than their families. Their insights into their child's strengths and needs, learning styles, and nonschool learning opportunities can help you improve your instructional methods. Your efforts to better understand their aspirations and perspectives make parents feel respected and build trust with them.
- **Emphasis on learning.** You can make the most of parent-teacher conferences, and other forms of family involvement, by "linking them to learning." This means bringing events and communication back to a discussion of strategies to support student learning. You can arm parents with knowledge and suggestions for how to help their children learn.
- **Opportunities and challenges.** We all need praise and constructive criticism to grow. All parents are proud of their children and need to hear about their strengths as well as their challenges from you. This helps show parents that you value the unique strengths of their



Ideas for during the conferences

- **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. Help families understand student data to demonstrate progress against learning goals and to identify areas that need to be addressed.
- **Use examples.** Walk parents through the assignments and assessments that are particularly demonstrative of the student's progress and abilities.
- **Ask questions and listen actively.** Solicit family input into student strengths and needs, learning styles, and non-school learning opportunities. Ask parents about their hopes and dreams for their child.
- **Share ideas for supporting learning.** Provide suggestions for activities and strategies families can use at home to help their child learn and grow.

Ideas for during the conferences (cont.)

- **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. Be specific about the kinds of things you will do, for how long you will do them, and how you will check in with one another about progress.
- **Establish lines of communication.** Describe how you will communicate with families (i.e., through notes home, phone calls, email etc.) and they can contact you. Schedule a way to follow up on your conference in the next few months.

Ideas for after the conferences



- **Follow up with families.** If practical, contact parents (either by phone or in a note) who attended the conference and thank them for doing so. Ask if they have further questions or concerns and send home materials that can help them support learning at home. Contact parents who did not attend, as well, and offer alternative ways to communicate about their child.
- **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.



“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

These tips 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*. New York: The New Press.
- 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.