

# Making Parent-Teacher Conferences Work for Your Child

## It's Conference Time!

Parents and teachers meet from time to time to discuss how to help students do their best in school. Children develop in different ways. They have their own individual personalities, and their own listening and work habits. When the adults have a unified strategy to work with a child, chances are that child will succeed in school.

## Parent's input is important

To help their students learn, teachers must know as much as they can about each child. No one knows more about your child than you, the parent. And no one has more influence over your child than you. This is why teachers need your help to do a first-class job. Working together, you and the teacher can help your child have a successful school year.

## Getting ready . . .

- **Be there on time.** Start the conference right: Be there on time, and plan not to run over the short amount of time that has been set aside.
- **Work together.** The best conferences are those in which both teachers and parents stay calm and try hard to work together for one purpose and one purpose only: to help your child do well.
- **Talk to your children.** Talk to your child before the conference. Find out what they think are their best subjects, and what subjects they like the least. Find out why. Also, ask your children if there is anything they would like you to talk about with their teachers.
- **Reschedule, if necessary.** Notify the teacher ahead of time if you cannot attend, and reschedule. If you are a working parent who can't arrange to meet during regular hours, make this clear to the teacher and try to set up a time that is good for both of you.
- **Come prepared.** Teachers will be prepared, perhaps with samples of your child's work. And they will have ideas to help your child do even better in school. You should get ready for each conference, too. Write down questions you want to ask.

- **Write notes to yourself:**
  - Things about your child's life at home, personality, problems, habits, and hobbies you feel it's important for the teacher to know.
  - Your concerns about the school's programs or policies, as they affect your child and family.
  - Questions about your child's progress.
  - How you and your school can work as partners to help your child.
  - Include the concerns and questions of other family members who may not be able to attend the conference.

## At the Conference . . .

- **Get right to the point.** It's a good idea to ask your most important questions first, just in case time runs out before you and the teacher have a chance to discuss them all.
- **Ask good questions.** Here are a few good questions to ask your child's teacher at conference time:
  - What are the children studying this year?
  - What are the children doing in specific subject areas?
  - What do you include in social studies? What kind of mathematics will the children learn? How do you teach reading and spelling?
  - I see equipment with which I am unfamiliar (computer, video, etc.). What is it used for?
  - How is the class organized? When are children taught in groups rather than as a class? How much learning do you require be done independently? What do you do to accommodate the individual differences among children?
  - How do you evaluate the children's progress? What tests are used? What do your grades mean?
  - What are the school rules and your classroom rules? How much homework do you give? What kind of discipline do you use?
  - What can I do at home to reinforce what you are teaching at school? What materials do you suggest I keep at home to enrich my child's education and recreational time?
  - Should we set some goals?

- **Speak up!** If your child is having a problem that the teacher hasn't mentioned—socially or academically—this is the time to bring it up. If the teacher says something you don't quite understand, don't be shy about asking for an explanation.
- **Find out what you can do.** Be sure to ask the teacher for specific suggestions on ways to help your child do well. This is an important part of the meeting. It can become your action plan. If the teacher says something you don't quite understand, don't be shy about asking for an explanation. It's a good idea to end the conference by summing up decisions you've made together. If needed, ask to meet again.

## After the conference . . .

- **Share with your child.** Discuss the conference with your child, including any action plan you have agreed to with the teacher. Make sure your child knows that you and the teacher care about his/her progress. Watch your child's behavior and check your child's classwork and homework.
- **Keep working with the teacher.** Stay in regular touch with the teacher to discuss the progress your child is making. Meeting with your child's teachers should help build strong parent-teacher partnerships—partnerships that are needed if you and your child's teachers are to reach your common goal: helping your child get the best education possible.