

Parent-Teacher Conferences

Tips for Success

Parents have an enormous job. They must set their children on the road to successful happy lives, able to meet the challenges they will face as adults. This great undertaking demands powerful partners. Key partners are your children's teachers. Research has shown that when families¹ and educators join together as partners to support children's education, the children do better and so do the schools.

Before the Conference

A little preparation before the meeting can help you and the teacher make the most of your time together. Here are some ideas:

- Talk with your child about school. Ask about their favorite and least favorite subjects. Ask why. Let your son or daughter know you will be speaking with their teacher. Ask if there is anything they would like you to talk about. Consider including middle and high school students in the conference.
- Be prepared to share information about your child. Think about your hopes and dreams for your child's future. If your child has special needs, make a note of accommodations or approaches that have worked. Note special talents and strengths as well as concerns.
- Review your child's most recent test scores, report cards, or schoolwork that reflect strengths and challenges. If your child has taken the MCAS tests, bring a copy of the "Parent/Guardian MCAS Report," especially if you have any questions about how to read it and what it means. It is a valuable tool to help you and the teacher pinpoint areas where special attention is needed.
- Bring a list of questions you'd like to ask. Since time is limited, put the most important ones first.

- Bring a pen and paper to note contact information for the teacher and any actions you both agree to take.
- Arrange for a translator if you need one. If you have a friend or family member who can translate for you, make every effort to bring that person. If you cannot do this, notify the school in advance that you need a translator. The school must make every effort to provide one for you. It is important that the student not be the translator.

At the Conference

- Start off on a positive note. Be on time—or even early—and arrive with a friendly smile. Even if you have met the teacher before, introduce yourself and say who your child is.
- Assure the teacher that you are deeply interested in your child's academic success, that you appreciate the teacher's work, and that you fully expect to be a partner in your child's education.
- Be sure the teacher knows about any special learning and/or health care needs your child has.
- Ask what the class will be learning over the next grading period.
- Ask for specific ways you can support your son or daughter's learning at home. Ask about the best way to help with homework or how to help organize the school work. Ask for study sheets and other information that can help you help your child.
- Ask how you and the teacher will keep in touch on a regular basis. Ask when you can expect regular progress reports.
- If you do not understand something, ask for an explanation. Being a partner means that you understand what each other is thinking and doing.



Talking with Your Child's Teacher

Being invited to a parent-teacher conference does not mean your child is in trouble! A parent-teacher conference is a meeting between you and your child's teacher to discuss your child's progress in school. Teachers schedule these meetings because they know that parents can help them understand their students' learning strengths and needs. Teachers also know that parents can be valuable partners by supporting their children's education at home. The meeting is an opportunity for you and your child's teacher to share information that will help you work together for your child's success.

As parents, you can request meetings during the year whenever you have questions about your child's schooling. While staying in touch with your child's teacher is a good idea all year long, these individual meetings are an opportunity to deepen your relationship and build a strong alliance with your child's teacher.

¹ In this *Bulletin*, "families" refers to parents, foster parents, or extended family members who serve a care giving role in a child's life.

- If you don't agree with the teacher, talk about why you think the way you do about the issue. Discussing differences of opinion can lead to a better way to help your child.
- Ask the teacher what areas need improvement and if tutoring or other help is needed and available.
- Ask how the teacher prefers to be contacted: e-mail, voice mail, notes, in-person, or another way. Jot down contact information. Some teachers now use Web sites or classroom newsletters.
- Let the teacher know the best way to contact you. If printed material will be sent home, ask how often you can expect it so you can look for it. Tell the teacher if school materials need to be translated into your home language.

After the Conference

- Send a thank-you note to the teacher. During the year, it's good to contact the teacher when you have something positive to say about what your child has learned.
- Include your child as part of the team. Stress that you are all working together. When progress is being made, acknowledge your child and the teacher.
- Middle-school students are starting to take control of their own learning. Support their independence, while still keeping in contact with the teachers. Think ahead to college and life after high school. Ask what courses are crucial now for preparing for college. Help your son or daughter to select as many rigorous courses as possible.

- High school students must pass the 10th grade MCAS tests in reading and math and one high school Science and Technology/Engineering test in order to receive a diploma. If MCAS scores show that your child needs extra help to pass, ask for extra tutoring immediately.
- Check your notes. Start right away to do the things you and the teacher agreed on. Discuss the plans with your child.
- Keep in touch with the teacher to discuss progress and make adjustments as needed.
- If you can't attend a conference at the school, schedule one for another place or time. Find a way that works for you.

PARENTS AND TEACHERS: POWERFUL ALLIES

Each year, most elementary, middle, and high schools sponsor "Parent-Teacher Conferences." Parent-teacher conferences are special times when teachers focus entirely on communicating with parents around an individual student's progress at school.

When parents and teachers join forces, they form a powerful alliance. An "ally" is someone who supports your cause. As allies, parents and teachers begin with a belief that student success is a shared goal. Staying focused on this common cause will empower you and your child's teacher to work through hard times and share the excitement of success. Teachers and parents need each other to succeed.

Parent-teacher conferences are an opportunity to communicate around this common cause. Remember, that you are the expert about your son or daughter. The teacher is the expert on the things students need to learn at their grade level. Tips in this *Bulletin* will help you make the most of your time together.

RESOURCES

"Making Parent-Teacher Conferences Work for Your Child," National PTA Website, www.pta.org.

"Tips for Successful Parent-Teacher Conferences at Your Child's School," Colorín Colorado Website, www.colorincolorado.org.

"Sugerencias para el éxito de las reuniones entre padres y maestros en la escuela de su hijo," Colorín Colorado Web site, www.colorincolorado.org.

"Making the Most of Your Parent-Teacher Conference," and "Planning Form for Parent-Teacher Conferences," Schwab Learning Website, www.schwablearning.org.

Massachusetts PIRC is eager to support families in their efforts to participate in their children's learning. If this *Bulletin* raises questions or you need further information, please contact us by e-mail at pplace@fcsn.org, or by phone, toll free, at our tri-lingual Info Line 1-877-471-0980.

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