

PARENT CONFERENCES

Communication between parents and teachers continues to be an important element in the school/home partnership. It is during the parent conferences that parents and teachers can share information about the student, discuss the student's successes, progress and plan cooperatively for the education of the student.

NOTE: An increasing number of teachers are including students in the conferencing process. Student-led conferences are, as the name implies, conferences led by the students themselves. It is an opportunity for the students to demonstrate their knowledge about their own growth and development. The students show their parents completed projects, review samples of their written work and discuss future goals.

Some suggestions for Student-Led Conferences:

- Help students prepare and practice; possibly emphasize Core Competency focus on Communication
- Once a year in the spring, or twice a year in spring and fall
- One family at a time with teacher actively involved, or up to 4 families at once where teacher facilitates
- If parents aren't available, arrange for older sibling, other relative, family friend, or even staff member
- Be ready to step in for students who are challenged or parents who become too intense
- Send parents away with a Post-Conference Survey

BEFORE THE CONFERENCE

Preparing the Student:

1. Talk with the student about the importance of conferencing with parents.
2. Decide on the role of the teacher and the student on the day of the conference.
3. Have the student select samples of work – completed or in progress.
4. Discuss what information would be important for the parents to know about the work selected.
5. Decide on what future goals are to be shared with the parents.

Preparing the Parent:

1. Send home a short note confirming the appointment and list some ideas that might help guide the conference. Be sure that the parents realize these are only suggestions and they are free to ask questions. On the next page is a suggestion of the type of letter you might send to parents.

Adaptations will need to be made depending on the role of the student during the conference. Your communication will be more effective if you put your own personality into it.

2. Tell parents how much time is allotted for their conference. Assure them that they may use all or part of the time.

Sample Letter

Dear Mr and Mrs..... ,

(name of child) and I are looking forward to our conference on (date) at (time). To help make our conference profitable, here are some ideas you might like to think about before you come.

Do you have any questions about our school program, classes your child is taking, or his/her progress? If so, jot them down and come prepared to ask them. Be as specific as you can. It makes answering them easier.

We may ask questions about your child's health, hobbies, feelings about school, or relationships with others outside of school. We need to know all we can so we can work together better.

If your child is having difficulty in a specific class, feel free to ask how we are helping him/her.

Does your child have questions he/she wants to ask? Encourage him/her to do so. We want to know what he/she is thinking too!

Just a reminder: We are trying to stay on schedule during our conference days. If you think we need more time for your conference, please let us know so we can schedule it. This will help us and will keep other parents from having to wait. If you prefer, we will be glad to schedule another conference at a later date. We feel privileged to join you in helping your child work toward his/her highest potential!

Sincerely,

Preparing Yourself:

1. Organize, prepare, think and plan well in advance. Some parents are uneasy about coming to hear about their child.
2. Prepare a collection folder of each student's work/projects.
3. Jot down a few notes of specific things you wish to mention.

4. Consider playing a recording of the child reading or telling a story at the beginning of the conference. The sound of their child's voice is music to the parents' ears.
5. Plan your schedule so there are at least a few minutes between conferences.
6. Decide where you are going to conduct the conference – in the library corner, at the student's desk or in the student's home. The site is not nearly so important as being close to the parents. Desks can be barriers.
7. If standardized tests were administered, plan to share the testing results.
8. Anticipate questions parents frequently ask such as:
 - a. Why hasn't my child learned to read?
 - b. Why do some teachers assign homework and others don't?
 - c. Why didn't you tell me earlier my child wasn't doing well?
 - d. Do you teach phonics in reading?
 - e. Why don't you correct papers instead of letting children correct their own?
 - f. Why is Peter still in reading readiness and Nancy is reading a book already?
 - g. Why don't teachers supervise recess better?
 - h. Why aren't students required to read from the Bible?
 - i. How does my child compare with the other children in the same grade?
 - j. How does my child get along with other children?
 - k. How can I help my child?

CONDUCTING THE CONFERENCE

(Adapt these suggestions for student-led conferences.)

1. Make the parents feel welcome and at ease. Give parents time to relax. Listen to the recording; talk about the student in general.
2. Begin the conference with encouraging news about the student and then be a good listener.
3. Put yourself in the parents' place. They may have unhappy memories about teachers and associate you with those memories. You're discussing their most precious possession. Be tactful! But be sure your tactfulness is truthful.
4. This is a conference, not just a visit. It is a time to discuss what the student and teacher will be working on during the next few weeks. Set at least one specific goal toward which the student can work.
5. When making suggestions, offer alternatives from which the parents may choose.
6. Use the simplest and clearest words you can find. Avoid educational jargon.

7. You and the student are reporting to the parents about his/her progress. Avoid criticism. So...it's "Jason and I want to talk to you about math. He's having some difficulty with fractions. Here is what we'd like to do." NOT "Jason needs to buckle down in math. He's failing in every assignment in fractions."
8. Explain the achievement test report at your first conference. It provides a summary of the student's achievement in reading, language, mathematics and study skills as compared with national norms. These norms are based on a statistical study of the achievement of students randomly selected throughout Canada. Remember to talk in terms of percentile scores rather than grade equivalents.
9. Encourage parents not to compare one student with another, especially a brother or sister.
10. Be professional at all times. Avoid discussing other teachers or pupils.
11. Accept criticism graciously. Avoid arguments or facial expressions of disapproval or anger. A wince or frown can close the door of communication.
12. Avoid letting the conference deteriorate into a discussion of inconsequential topics.
13. Invite parents to visit your classroom when school is in session and to participate in school functions such as Home and School meetings.
14. End the conference on an encouraging note and, as far as possible, on schedule. Summarize major areas discussed and reaffirm action to be taken. Invite parents to visit the school. Accompany them to the door.

AFTER THE CONFERENCE

1. Summarize the conference briefly. For this purpose, a card file containing the following items for each student may be useful:

Name of Parent _____
Name of Child _____
Date of Conference _____
Discussion _____

Goal _____

2. If a problem was discussed and a goal determined, consult parents within the next three weeks concerning progress.
3. When a goal has been reached, notify the parents, congratulate the student, and establish a new goal.