

Handout

How to Incorporate Family Feedback into Program Planning and Child Assessments

Material taken from <https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/articles/teaching-content/parent-teacher-conferences/>

When the time comes for your first round of parent-teacher conferences, don't worry; the parents and students will probably be more anxious than you are! At the mere mention of a conference, many parents flash back to the conferences their parents attended and the results of those visits. The following are ideas for smoothing the way for successful parent-teacher conferences.

Planning and Preparing for the Conference

- **Decide whether the student will be part of the conference.**
- **Prepare a note to send home inviting parents to meet with you.** State the purpose of the conference, and list potential times and dates for conferences. Remind parents call or send a note reserving a time slot.
- **Have materials handy.** Pull together necessary materials such as a daily schedule of classroom activities, a checklist of skill areas and notes on student progress, sample work, test scores, and reports from other teachers where appropriate
- **Be prepared to take notes.** Ask the school office if official conference forms are available. These are important for recording discussion, and noting the follow up actions to be taken by the parent, teacher, and student. If there are no official forms, keep a class list handy during conferences to make notes related to follow ups. Forgetting follow-up information is easy, especially when conducting several conferences each day.
- **Check parents' names.** Find out parents' names prior to the conferences. Calling a parent by her child's last name only to discover that she has a different last name can be embarrassing.
- **Create a comfortable atmosphere.** Arrange the conference environment so parents can be comfortable. If you teach a primary grade, remember the first-grade chairs are difficult for anyone but first graders to sit on! Keep the setting informal by avoiding physical barriers. If you chose to sit behind your desk, you appear to place yourself in opposition to the parents. Hold conferences at a table, if possible, where you can sit beside the parent.
- **Keep the time in mind.** Place your seat where you can easily glance at a clock.

The Conference

- **Greet parents.** Welcome parents at the door in a positive, confident manner. You have been trained for this job and are well qualified to address your students' progress. Be friendly and put the parents at ease.
- **Conduct the conference.** Walk through the report card and share your questions and concerns before opening up the floor to parents. Show examples of student work. No matter how you structure the conference, be honest, firm, and positive. Refrain from using educational jargon, such as IEP, ESL, or GATE. If we want to enlist parents as partners, make them feel inadequate or uneducated only dampens their desire to be involved in their child's education. It is sometimes tempting to suggest that parents get extra help for their child; however, recommending tutors, learning clinics, counseling, and other services may cause the school or school district to become responsible for program costs.
- **Plan follow-up.** The conference should end with a moment to plan for follow-up or interventions. Both you and the parents should be clear about the goals. Remind parents to sign and return the report cards, if necessary, and invite them to visit with available specialists. Be

aware that student records are legally available to parents. If parents wish to see their child's records, refer them to your administrator.

- **Dealing with challenging situations.** You may have the challenge of dealing with a difficult situation during a conference. Be strong enough to know when you have reached your limits. If you expect that the conference will be difficult based on past encounters with the parent in question, consider requesting that your administrator or a specialist be present. If the conference unexpectedly takes a negative turn, perhaps you could tell the parent that you would like to spend more time than you have available to discuss the situation, then reschedule the conference at a time when the principal can join you. Do not force yourself to stay in a potentially dangerous situation. Extricate yourself as gracefully and professionally as possible.