

Parent-Teacher Conference Tips

By Dr. Felecia Nace, Family and Community Relations, New Jersey Department of Education

Parent-teacher conferences provide families an opportunity to talk with teachers about their child's progress. The parent-teacher conference is a great time to find out what families can do to help children at home, and it is also an opportunity to build a solid relationship with the teacher. Here are some tips on how to get the most out of parent-teacher conferences:

Before you go:

1. Be sure to bring a writing pad or an electronic device to take notes.
2. Write down questions that you want to ask the teacher. Ask your child if he/she has questions or needs clarification from the teacher. Make sure to include your child's concerns on your list. Always include the question: What can I do to help my child at home?
3. Review your child's grade averages and make a note of them to compare to the teacher's notes.
4. Allow yourself plenty of time to arrive for your scheduled appointment. There is usually a lot to discuss in a short period of time, so you will want to get the most out of your conference time.

During the Conference:

1. Be positive when talking to your child's teachers. For example, refer to "failures" as "challenges" (that your child can overcome with the right support and strategies).
2. In the areas in which your child is succeeding, allow time to discuss what the teacher plans to do to continue moving your child toward above average in these areas. Also ask what you can do at home to help your child to continue to excel.
3. Ask to see clear examples of both your child's strengths and weaknesses.
4. At the end of your discussion, review your notes aloud with the teacher. This gives both you and the teacher an opportunity to clarify what you discussed, and ensures that you both leave the conference with the same messages.

Next Steps:

1. While the conference is still fresh in your mind, at some point review your notes and reflect on what you and your child's teacher discussed.
2. Set aside some time to create a plan of action with your child. Review strengths and weaknesses with your child, and create a plan with your child that describes how the two of you will work at home to improve weaknesses and build on strengths.

3. If you discover a strategy at home that works well with your child, share it with the teacher.
4. In between conferences, keep an open line of communication between you and the school. Consistent communication helps to minimize problems.