

# *School* **COMMUNITY NETWORK**

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## **CONNECTION**

Parent–Teacher–Student  
Conferences



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## Parent–Teacher–Student Conferences

Parent–teacher–student conferences can be a very effective means of communication if a few simple principles are followed:

### Principles for Effective Conferences

- The conferences are held at least twice a year;
- The conference follows a standard agenda that all teachers and parents know about in advance;
- The conference includes a discussion of the School Community Compact, homework guidelines, and learning standards;
- Each conference concludes with agreed upon Next Steps for the parent(s), teacher, and student;
- A file of “Next Steps” is kept that passes from conference to conference, teacher to teacher.

Some schools use “student-led” conferences, at which the student leads the discussion, showing a portfolio of work and asking questions of the teacher and parents. This is especially effective in upper grades, and requires preparation for the students beforehand.

Even when the conference is not “student-led,” it is always healthy for the student to be in attendance and able to participate.

Parent–teacher–student conferences are always a good time to encourage parents to participate in courses offered for them by the school and in other key family activities.

## Parent–Teacher–Student Conference

Student's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent(s) Present: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Welcome
2. Review Next Steps from last conference
3. Discuss student's progress in basic skill areas: reading, writing, mathematics
4. Discuss student's progress in teacher's class
5. Discuss student's homework: completion and quality
6. Discuss student's behavior, attitude
7. Next Steps for student, parent(s), teacher

### NEXT STEPS

Student: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Parent(s): \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_

Parents and student keep one copy of this form.

Teacher places one copy in student's file.

Form is reviewed at next parent–student–teacher conference.

File follows student from one school year to the next.

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## Preparing for a Parent–Teacher Conference

### Helpful Tips for Parents/Family Members

To be sure you go away from a parent–teacher conference with all of the information you want, consider the following suggestions:

- **Make a list of questions to ask the teachers:** This is your chance to ask questions of your child’s teacher. Take time before the conference to make a list of questions that you want answered, and take the list to the conference.
- **Talk with your child before the conference:** Discuss what your child has been learning. Find out about recent class activities. See if your child has questions for you to ask the teacher. Is anything bothering your child that the teacher should know about? Has the teacher helped your child in a special way? Does your child report a special interest in a topic? Take a few notes.
- **Be ready to pass on some “good news” to the teacher:** Teachers need and deserve good news. Be ready to let the teacher know when your child has reported good news from school. Remember the special help from the teacher, the words of encouragement, the topics that interested your child.
- **Talk openly and honestly:** Share your frustrations and successes regarding your child’s schooling and home life. A better understanding of your child’s concerns and priorities can help a teacher in relating to your child.
- **Identify ways you can best help your child:** Talk to the teacher about ways you can help your child at home. Maybe it’s providing a regular time and place for study. Maybe it’s talking more with your child about school or listening to your child read aloud. Ask the teacher for suggestions.
- **View your child through the teacher’s eyes:** Some children behave differently in school than at home. Use the conference as a way to learn more about your child, and to help the teacher understand more about him/her, too.
- **Express your concerns:** Don’t be afraid to express your concerns about your child’s performance, the classroom environment, peer pressure, or any other area that may be affecting your child’s education.

## Conference Next Steps

What next steps do you want to take to make conferences work for the benefit of children's learning?

[illegible]



## Resources for Parent–Teacher–Student Conferences

The following information is from *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships*, by Anne T. Henderson, Karen L. Mapp, Vivian R. Johnson, and Don Davies (pp. 293-294).

### Conference Checklist

This checklist was developed by Melissa Whipple, the coordinator of the Parent Academic Liaison (PAL) program in San Diego, as a tool to help teachers prepare for conferences with families.

#### Before the conference

1. Notify parents and students about:
  - ✧ Purpose
  - ✧ Place, time, length of time
  - ✧ Child care arrangements
  - ✧ Parent planning sheet (questions to ask)
2. Prepare:
  - ✧ Review student's folder
  - ✧ Gather samples of work
  - ✧ Gather input from students
  - ✧ Prepare materials
  - ✧ Think about what to say; avoid "educationese"
3. Plan Agenda:
  - ✧ Draw up plan for the conference
  - ✧ Emphasize cooperation—what can both sides do?
4. Arrange environment:
  - ✧ Place seating away from the desk
  - ✧ Make sure there will be privacy
  - ✧ See that things look welcoming and comfortable

#### During the conference

1. **Welcome.** Establish rapport.
2. **Set terms.** State the purpose, mention any time limits, encourage note taking, and mention options for follow-up.
3. **Lead with the positive.** Share what you see as the child's major strengths and unique qualities.
4. **Encourage.** Share information ("What do you think your child does well?") and invite comments and questions ("Do you have any questions for me?").
5. **Show.** Point out areas where there has been academic and social growth.

6. **Listen.** Pause and restate parents' words; look for verbal and nonverbal clues; invite questions.
7. **Develop an action plan.** Choose one or two areas on which to focus.
8. **Summarize.** Review the conversation and plan follow-up to check progress on the action plan.
9. **End on a positive note.** Express confidence in the child's ability to be a successful learner.

#### After the conference

1. **Review** the conference with the child.
2. **Share information** with other school staff, if needed.
3. **Put it in writing**—send a follow-up note or letter.
4. **Mark calendar** for planned follow-up.

Henderson, Anne T., Mapp, Karen L., Johnson, Vivian, R., & Davies, Don. (2007). *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships*. New York, NY: The New Press.



## More Resources for Parent–Teacher–Student Conferences

The following information is from *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships*, by Anne T. Henderson, Karen L. Mapp, Vivian R. Johnson, and Don Davies (pp. 98-101).

### Put Learning at the Center of Parent–Teacher Conferences—and Include Students

For many families, parent–teacher conferences are often their only chance to meet face-to-face with teachers. At their worst, these encounters are formal and awkward, with little real exchange of information. Many teachers dread them as much as parents do. At their best, a conference is one step in an extended conversation between people who know each other well. Both teachers and parents should be prepared and know what to ask each other.

#### *Prepare Parents to Ask About Academics*

A middle school principal offers this advice: “Give parents workshops about asking good questions at conferences and meetings with teachers. Have them practice and do role-plays. They should not be asking ‘How is my child behaving?’ but ‘At what level is he reading?’

“Next, they should ask: ‘Show me level-four work so I can compare it to my child’s work.’ Questions focused on academics – this is what’s going to drive better instruction at the school.”

Develop an education checkup card for parents to bring with them. List questions that parents can ask (and – just as important – questions that teachers are expecting):

- Is my child performing at a proficient level (up to standard) in basic skills? If not, is my child above or below? (If it’s below, ask: What is your plan for helping my child catch up? How can I help?)
- What do my child’s test scores show? What are his/her strengths and weaknesses?
- Can we go over some examples of my child’s work? Will you explain your grading standards?
- Does my child need extra help in any area (including adjusting to school)? What do you recommend? How can we work together to help my child?
- Does my child do all the assigned work, including homework?
- Does my child seem to like school and get along with classmates?
- Have you noticed any changes in my child over the year?

#### *Include Students*

Even though it’s called a parent-teacher conference, the meeting is all about the student. Why should the central person be excluded? Students do better in school when they feel in charge and accountable for the quality of their work. Even in elementary school, students can benefit from being at the conference. In middle and high school, it is essential.

Student-led conferences generally require more preparation, especially by the students. Essentially, the responsibility for doing quality work is transferred from the teacher to the student. Instead of being talked about, students discuss and defend a portfolio of work that demonstrates their progress.

Here is a useful two-part format for a student-led conference. In part one, the student is the presenter. Students begin by assessing their progress and presenting a piece of work as evidence.

Teachers guide the process, encouraging students to stay on task and prompting them if they stumble. Parents are the audience and ask questions, such as: “How do you know this work is up to standard for your grade level? What did you learn from doing this work? Why is it important to learn that? Do you think you did the very best you could? What are you going to work on now?” In part two, teachers share grade and test score information and respond to parents’ questions. The conference ends with a discussion about how to support the student.

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