

## What every member should know about...

### PARENT TEACHER CONFERENCES

#### Meet and Greet

Greet parents warmly and make the environment as welcoming as possible. Have chairs available and make sure there are enough for those parents you are talking with and those that may be waiting. Try not to distance yourself from the parents nor appear or speak condescendingly.

#### Show you care

Start out with something positive about their child. Summarize the student's strengths before discussing any concerns. To help you, particularly in the fall when you may have difficulty visualizing each child, keep an index card on each student and jot down notes prior to conferences.

Get a camera and take a picture of each child to keep in his/her file. These are excellent to use for your seating chart too, particularly at the beginning of the year to help jog your memory.

Never start the conversation with a problem nor insult the parents' parenting skills by opening with a negative behavior or hygiene problem.

#### Dress professionally

Wear attire that communicates that you are a professional. By dressing appropriately you will not only feel more comfortable you will project that you have respect for the parents and show that the meeting is important. By dressing too casually for the occasion you may not have the desired impact nor portray the value of your message.

#### Plan ahead

Prepare what you will do in the conference. Rehearse how you will begin each conference and prepare a checklist. This will achieve two things, one you will be more relaxed because you will not have to adlib and second you will be better able to judge your time and stay on track.

#### Student work folders

Put samples of student work in folders to use for visuals to emphasize what you would like to point out - both positive areas and places where improvements can be made. Have the materials organized in the sequential you wish to show them. Give the contents or the entire folder to the parent. It is important that they leave with something.

#### Body Language

Be conscience of your nonverbal behavior. Listen and maintain good eye contact. Lean in as you speak or wish to make a suggestion. This is particularly important if you are trying to recruit the parents' help or support. Show interest and do not interrupt what the parent has to share with you. There are times however, when it may be wise to redirect the conversation, particularly if it becomes too personal or negative.

#### Work with the parent

Encourage the parent to ask questions and make suggestions. This can lead to engaging the parents in developing a plan to help their child. Allow for think time.

**No buzzwords**

Most parents do not understand teacher talk; therefore speak in clear and descriptive terms that they will relate to. Avoid using education jargon or acronyms. Should you need to use a term that is not used in day-to-day conversation be sure to define what it means. Check for understanding with parents by asking questions.

**Be positive**

End on a positive note with a proactive message of hope. Mention you desire to help, support and are available for follow up conversations. Sometimes it works well to send a follow up note in the next few days following the conference.

Have fun. Enjoy meeting and learning about your students' parents it is a great opportunity to gain insights that will help you later.