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## MAKING THE MOST OF PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES

### *What Families Need to Know*

The Parent–Teacher Conference is one of the best opportunities you have for communicating with your child’s teachers—and helping your child do well in school. It’s an opportunity you won’t want to miss.

### The Importance of the Home–School Connection

Frequent communication between families and schools is one of the keys to student success. Research shows that when families and schools work together and focus on student learning, children benefit in many ways. They earn higher grades and have better attendance records. More of them graduate from high school, attend college, or enroll in continuing education and training.

There are many ways that you can communicate with teachers throughout the school year. Get off to a good start at the beginning of the school year. Write a note to the teacher to introduce yourself and let the teacher know about your child. During the school year, you can e-mail teachers to keep in touch or ask questions about homework assignments. You can get involved in the school community by attending parent association meetings for the latest news about school and community events and issues. You can attend parent workshops that focus on educational programs or community services. Many schools notify parents in their home language about school events by sending home flyers in students’ backpacks—so be sure to check your child’s backpack every day.

The Parent–Teacher Conference is a special opportunity for you to talk with the teacher, with the support of an interpreter, if needed, about your child’s individual progress. Parent–Teacher Conferences give you a chance to:

- Share insights about your child
- Find out about your child’s learning and progress
- Discuss any challenges your child is having—or any of your own concerns
- Ask for extra help for your child, such as tutoring
- Learn about special programs, supplemental services, or outside resources

*Making the Most of Parent–Teacher Conferences: What Families Need to Know* will help you prepare for a positive, two-way conversation with your child’s teacher and school.

#### Brought to you by:

•The New York City Department of Education Office for Family Engagement and Advocacy

•RMC Research Corporation

•THIRTEEN

**More on the next page>**

## Different Types of Parent–Teacher Conferences

### Open School Week

Parent–Teacher Conferences are usually held in the fall and late winter. Your child’s school will invite you to visit, review student work and exhibitions, and speak with your child’s teacher(s). It is important to:

- Attend conferences at every grade level (elementary, middle, and high school)
- Know that the average time to meet with teachers during Open School Week is 15 minutes for elementary school parents and five to eight minutes for high school parents
- Contact the teacher as soon as possible (with a note, e-mail or telephone call) if you cannot attend the scheduled conference and arrange another time for your meeting

Call the school, call 311, or visit [schools.nyc.gov](http://schools.nyc.gov) to get the exact dates for Open School Week or visit your school’s website for school specific dates and times.

### Parent Requested Conference

Open School Week is not the only time you can meet your child’s teacher(s) during the school year. A parent or guardian can request a Parent–Teacher Conference anytime. In fact, you should schedule at least one more conference after Open School Week. And you should schedule a conference *immediately* if:

- You see that your child is having trouble with schoolwork in one or more subjects. Do not wait until you see a low or failing grade during the first marking period to meet with the teacher
- Your child has no homework or is having trouble completing assignments
- Your child is finding classwork boring and finishes assignments too quickly with little or no difficulty--this could mean that he or she needs more challenging work
- Your child does not like the teacher, feels that the teacher does not like him or her, does not get along with classmates, or is generally unhappy and does not want to go to school

### Teacher-Requested Conference

You may be called to come to the school to meet with your child’s teacher anytime during the school year. Don’t panic! There are many reasons teachers ask parents to meet with them. Before you go to the school, talk with your child about any issue he or she may be having. It is also helpful to review homework assignments and tests.

## Before the Conference

- **Log on to ARIS Parent Link.** ([arisparentlink.org](http://arisparentlink.org)) before you meet with your child's teacher. Look at the information available about your child in ARIS Parent Link. You can get a username and password from the parent coordinator at your child's school. Your child's teacher can help you interpret the results available in ARIS Parent Link. You can also look for areas where your child may need additional support, and might be ready for more of a challenge. Ask your child's teacher for recommendations on how you can support your child.
- **Read Great Expectations.** To get a general idea of what your child is learning, review the Great Expectations guide <http://schools.nyc.gov/Academics/Great+Expectations.htm>.
- **Talk to your child.** Ask how things are going in school. Find out if there are any questions or concerns you should address.
- **Take someone with you.** If you are uncomfortable about meeting with the teacher, ask another family member, parent, or trusted friend to go with you. Some community-based programs and services have parent advocates or education specialists who are trained to attend the conferences with you.
- **Translation please!** If you speak little or no English, you might want another adult to attend and translate for you during the conference. Translation services are available through either the parent coordinator, guidance counselor or community coordinator in your school. Arrange for them about a week before the conference. Do not ask your child to attend the conference and translate for you.
- **Prepare a list.** For your first meeting, prepare a list of things you want the teacher to know about your child. Think about your child's moods, likes and dislikes, learning styles, and health. Help the teacher understand your child better and how best to support him or her. If your child has an Individualized Education Program (IEP), review the graduation requirements for students with disabilities on the Department of Education's Web site at <http://schools.nyc.gov/RulesPolicies/GraduationRequirements/default.htm>.

## At the Conference

Once you prepare for your Parent–Teacher Conference, here are important things you can do at the conference to open strong lines of communication:

- **Be on time.** Each parent has a limited amount of time to meet with the teacher during Open School Week. Being late may mean that other parents have to wait longer to meet the teacher after you—or may not have as much time with the teacher.
- **Be positive.** Approach the conference with a positive attitude. Keep in mind that the school and teachers want what’s best for your child. Talk about how you can work together to help your child achieve.
- **Be open.** Don’t be afraid to ask questions. Be open and honest. If you have concerns, talk about them and listen carefully to the teacher’s answers. You may want to take notes to read after the conference.
- **Think ahead.** If your child is not doing well in school, talk about ways you can work with the teacher to turn things around. You will want to schedule another meeting as soon as possible to discuss your child’s progress.
- **Ask for help.** Always ask about additional support or programs that can help your child. If you and the teacher have issues you cannot resolve, ask for assistance from the guidance counselor, parent coordinator, or principal.

## After the Conference

Once the Parent–Teacher Conference is over, the real work begins. Here are important things you can do after the conference:

- **Talk to your child** about what you learned about his or her progress in school. If there are concerns, get your child’s thoughts about what to do. Discuss any plans you and the teacher are considering, such as tutoring, academic enrichment activities, or more reading.
- **Monitor your child’s progress** by reviewing homework and classroom assignments. Ask to see copies of test papers. If you have any questions, contact the teacher. You can keep on top of your child’s progress through ARIS Parent Link ([arisparentlink.org](http://arisparentlink.org)).
- **Keep in touch with the teacher.** Communicate by e-mail, telephone, or at meetings. Don’t hesitate to schedule follow-up meetings with the teacher, guidance counselor, or other staff.

## Asking the Right Questions

### “But I don’t even know the right questions to ask!”

If that is how you feel during the Parent-Teacher Conference, don’t be alarmed. There are no right or wrong questions. It’s a good idea to make a list of questions before the conference. That way, you’ll be prepared and you won’t forget anything. Make sure you ask the most important questions first, just in case you run out of time.

The best questions you can ask are “open-ended” questions—questions that open up a discussion. Open-ended questions invite the teacher to give you a fuller explanation and a clearer picture of how your child is doing in school. Avoid “close-ended” questions, which can be answered with a “yes” or “no” or a short answer.

Some questions to think about are listed here:

- What skills will my child be expected to master this year in math, science, social studies and English Language Arts?
- What types of projects and assignments will my child complete to help him or her learn these skills?
- Are there challenging academic standards in place at this school, and how do they compare with other school districts?
- What information do you use to evaluate and grade students?
- How do you know if they’re academically ready to move on to the next grade?
- What can I do at home to complement learning in the classroom?
- How can I learn about homework assignments?
- What if my child is a slow learner and falls behind, or is a fast learner and is bored?
- Are summer school, tutoring, or other programs available for students who need more help?
- Are children encouraged to think about a wide variety of career interests?

Here are some examples that you can ask, no matter what grade your child is in:

- What are your expectations for my child? What knowledge and skills do you expect him or her to learn this year?
- What are my child’s strengths? Does he or she need help in any areas? Is tutoring available?
- What can we do at home to support schoolwork?
- Is my child performing at grade level? If not, what is your plan of action to get him or her there? How can I help? What can we do to keep my child challenged?

Middle and high school parents can ask a few more questions:

- How is your class preparing my child for college, an apprenticeship, or career after graduation?
- Will my child be expected to complete any major projects or papers this year?
- Are there resources in the school or community that can help?
- Are there any unexplained absences from your class that I should know about?

## Recommended Resources for Families

Visit the SchoolSourceNYC Web site for more information about Parent–Teacher Conferences. You can download videos, PowerPoints and other educational resources for families.

[www.thirteen.org/edonline/schoolsourceny](http://www.thirteen.org/edonline/schoolsourceny).

ARIS Parent Link provides parents increased access to their child's academic information through ARIS Parent Link (APL). APL is an online tool that provides parents with detailed information about their child – including attendance, course grades, and scores on state test and in-class assessments.

<https://arisparentlink.org/parentlink>

Discover what your child will be learning each year in language arts, mathematics, social studies, science and other areas in *Great Expectations: Partnering for Your Child's Future*, available in nine languages. The *Ask Your Child's Teacher* section gives you sample questions to ask when you talk to your child's teacher about his or her academic progress.

<http://schools.nyc.gov/Academics/Great+Expectations.htm>.

For more information about Parent–Teacher Conferences, call your school, call 311, or call the Office for Family Engagement and Advocacy at the New York City Department of Education at (212) 374-2323.



