**Plano High School Guide for Parent Teacher Conferences**

Are you sick of parent teacher conferences where you feel beaten down and unappreciated? Do you feel you don’t have enough experience with conferences? Do you have difficulty getting the support you need from parents? Parents want the best for their children and when children struggle academically, parents are often frustrated and emotional. Following a few guidelines can help you communicate more successfully and positively in parent conferences.

Start by understanding that parents are a little intimidated by you and the school system. If their child is behind, they are most likely upset and wanting some help. They have questions about whether the school program, instruction, and teacher are the best fit for their child's needs. They are worried if they are too aggressive, their child will pay a price in class. If they don't advocate for their child, he might not get the help he needs. Parents sometimes feel trapped and unsure how to relate to you and the school.

The following steps can tone down the emotion of the meeting and structure the conference so everyone feels heard.

**1. Be prepared.** You need to not only know the child's grades (assignments and tests), but you need to know the child. Be sure to have diagnostic testing information ready. What are his independent, instructional, and frustration levels? What are his strengths? What skills and competencies is he missing? What does he like? Does he have friends? Is he confident? Be sure your record keeping is up to date and you can explain your grading system and assignments.

**2. Begin the meeting** by thanking the parent for coming, express concern and love for the child and share a strength you notice about him. (If you can't think of anything, it might be time to consider a different career). This might sound something like: "I'm so glad you took the time to come in. I know how busy you must be. I really love having Johnny in class. He has such a cute personality. Our class is so fun with him here. He is always so kind to other children. I can tell he comes from a great home."

**3. Share information.** Be positive and honest. Don't over-dramatize concerns. While children stand a better chance of reading on grade level if they get intervention by third grade, children can and do get help well past that benchmark. On the other hand, don't underplay concerns. Parents need to know if their child is struggling and they need to know where their child is in relation to expected standards and children his age.

**4. Educate the parents** about your program. Parents need and want to know your philosophy, the program you are using, the resources you have, the standards their child has to meet, and any school policies or procedures that could impact their child (such as retention or referral to Special Education).

**5. Listen.** Ask what questions they have. Write down notes while the parent is talking. This gives you a record and shows the parent you are taking what they say seriously. Ask what their expectations are for the year. Ask what their child responds to. Ask what their concerns are.

**6. Ask for support.** Have something specific you can have them do to reinforce what you are teaching. Reading with their child every night and recording it in a log is great, but parents love it when you give them an outline of the expected standards and ask them to help reinforce them at home. Have your course syllabus ready and use it to explain expectations. Parents really want to do something that will impact their child's learning.

**7. Set up a communication procedure.** Ask how to best get in touch with them. Some parents might like email, some a phone call, some a note. Most parents will give you specific information about the best way and time to contact them.

**8. Thank them profusely and invite them back.** Parents need to know that you value their coming in. You want them to come back and you want them to support you. Recognize that parents are taxpayers and so ultimately our bosses. We want to please them and their children.

**9. Follow-up.** Send a note, or better call and see if they have any questions about the work you are sending home. Let them know if their child is making better progress, or if you still have concerns and need them to come back in.

**10. Keep records.** Keep a file of your parent contacts. It will help you to be equitable with all your students. It will also help you to reflect and understand the child better. If things aren't going well, it will help you think about a different approach or ask for administrative back up.

If you remember that parents want the best for their child, and you do too, most problems can be avoided. Also, try to remember that while you probably have the most expertise when it comes to teaching a child, a parent knows their child best and has the responsibility for advocating for their best interests. We can learn a lot from each other and need to. Many teachers have mastered the parent teacher conference and found a great source of support and satisfaction from appreciative parents.