

HELPFUL TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES

(Developed by the faculty of the Bancroft School)

TIPS FOR PARENTS:

- 1) Be on time for conferences and respect time limits.
- 2) Be honest with teachers, and make your concerns known.
- 3) Show appreciation for teachers.
- 4) Ask in advance who will attend, so you are not surprised.
- 5) Reflect on your child before the conference and try to prepare specific questions to ask specific questions.
- 6) Don't bring your child (unless asked to) or other children to conference.
- 7) Try to remember that your information probably came through a child's perspective.
- 8) Try to be open-minded. Try to listen first, reflect, then act.
- 9) Discuss issues rather than the teachers.
- 10) It is o.k. to feel defensive on behalf of your child, but act as an advocate for your child not as an excuse-maker for your child.
- 11) Try not to put a teacher (or a child, for that matter) in the middle of a family conflict.
- 12) Ask for specific suggestions.
- 13) Remember, it is o.k. to be a real person. It is helpful to let the teacher know that you struggle with parenting, because everyone does. The teacher also struggles with teaching (and may be a parent as well).
- 14) Remember, we're all on the same side.

TIPS FOR TEACHERS:

- 1) Avoid surprises (especially unpleasant surprises) by preparing parents in advance of meetings through letters and phone calls.
- 2) Be prepared, have an agenda for parents and have documented facts available.
- 3) Establish a mutual agenda for the meeting, based on what you wish to cover and by asking the parents what they wish to cover.
- 4) Be honest, especially when you are struggling with a child, and encourage parental honesty.
- 5) Use descriptive language, cite specific examples, avoid judgmental terms.
- 6) Get parents to talk about their hopes, their worries, their expectations for this particular child.
- 7) Be a good listener.
- 8) When possible, hold conference in a comfortable, circular arrangement (no sitting behind a desk). Shake hands, make introductions, get everyone's last name right.
- 9) Recognize your own level of expertise. Don't take on more than your training and level of experience can support.
- 10) Use humor. Let your criticisms be constructive.
- 11) Try to remember that the child's well-being is the purpose of the meeting.
- 12) Know the child, "claim" the child, know his or her interests and personality outside your classroom.
- 13) Don't be afraid to check with parents on the progress of the conference; ask whether it is meeting the parents' hopes and needs.
- 14) End on a positive note.

TIPS FOR ADMINISTRATORS:

- 1) Brief and debrief new faculty before and after parent conferences.
- 2) Ask the admissions office to begin the process of educating parents about the nature of the school and about the expectations of the parent-teacher relationship.
- 3) Request that teachers report complaints about other teachers and make the necessary interventions with parents and colleagues. Don't leave such complaints to teachers to handle.
- 4) "Red flag" chronically angry or critical parents. Have an administrator regularly attend their conferences.
- 5) Educate board members.
- 6) Prepare and rehearse for conferences, especially if past conferences about this particular child have gone badly.
- 7) Educate teachers, parents and administrators about the chain of command and communication. Repeat every year!