SUCCESSFUL PARENT/TEACHER CONFERENCES

25 Tips That Work

1. Begin with anecdotes and/or observations about the student that show you have noticed that the child is, indeed, special and that you care.

2. Start on time and keep a clock or watch handy if you have subsequent conferences. It is important to stick with the schedule. If the conference is a difficult one and requires more time, suggest a follow-up meeting. This will also give you time to gather more data and will allow for a 'cool down' period.

3. If you have difficult information to share, practice your delivery with a colleague beforehand. If you feel the need, make sure an administrator will be present at your meeting.

4. Do your homework. Be prepared with important information.

5. Have samples of the child’s work on hand as clear examples of what you will be covering.

6. Dress professionally. You will set the tone by the way you carry yourself.

7. Avoid talking about/sharing information on other students or teachers.

8. If the child is new to the school, check with the admissions director/division head to find out if there is any information that would be helpful to you in terms of the child’s background.

9. Try, if possible, to meet with both of the parents at the same time. In the case of a divorce, it is important that the parents hear the same message. If, however, the parents are unable to come together in a cooperative fashion, it is best to leave the anger out and meet separately. Make sure to keep careful notes and to cover the same material at both meetings.

10. Use the ‘sandwich approach’. Give a general introduction with positives, then cover areas of concern, and finally summarize with agreed upon goals that will encourage a partnership with the parents.

11. If there are serious concerns, avoid surprises by preparing the parents ahead of time through letters, emails and phone calls.

12. Establish a mutual agenda for the meeting, based on what you wish to cover and by asking what parents would like to discuss.
13. Be sure to write up notes after the conference (or have an assistant teacher keep notes during the meeting). This is most important for your record keeping. You cannot possibly remember what has been said at every meeting!

14. Be honest and encourage parent honesty. You are working together.

15. Use descriptive language, cite specific examples and avoid judgmental terms. No labeling! (i.e. your child is learning disabled!)

16. Be a good listener. Encourage parents to talk about their hopes, worries and expectations for their child. Show sensitivity.

17. Don’t sit behind a desk. Chairs should be placed in a friendly, comfortable arrangement.

18. Recognize your own level of expertise. Don’t take on more than what your training can support.

19. Use humor when appropriate.

20. Remember that you are all there for the good of the child. You are all on the same team.

21. Sometimes it is good to include the student, depending on the issues and the age of the child. A student’s input can often lead to a realistic plan. Success can come if the student has ‘ownership’ of the situation.

22. If you don’t know that answer, don’t make one up! It is fine to get back to parents with specific answers…and remember to do so!

23. End the conference with a plan. Have goals agreed upon and discuss how communication will follow to ensure that the goals are met.

24. After the conference, cover the general substance of the meeting with your division head. You are not alone and administrators are there to support your efforts.

25. Finally… it is OK to be nervous! Most teachers are, particularly, if they have difficult information to share. Even the most experienced educators can feel this way! Show you care, be prepared and have a plan.

Prepared for the Annual ATIS Conference, 2004