Starting Smarter
Parent-Teacher Conferences
Where the Partnership Starts

California State PTA
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When parents and teachers work together as a team, children do better in school. The parent-teacher conference is an ideal time to get the partnership started.

Use the formal teacher-parent conference for a focused, two-way conversation.
- Ask questions about grade level learning goals and your child's progress.
- Discuss any standardized test scores you have received:
  » Are they consistent with the strengths and weaknesses the teacher sees in your child's performance?
  » How will the teacher use them to guide instruction for your child?
  » What can you do to help your child be successful?
- Tell the teacher more about your child so they can do the best job possible.
- If your child is having difficulties in class (either academic or behavioral) discuss them constructively and agree together on an action plan.

Some frequently asked questions about conferences

Q. *What are some specific questions I should ask during the conference?*

A. Questions you ask during the conference can help you express your hopes and concerns for your student. It's a good idea to make a list and ask the most important questions first, in case time runs out. Here are a few examples of questions you could use.

- How are you measuring my child's progress? Through tests? Portfolios? Class participation? Projects?
- What subject does my student like most? Least?
- What can I do to help my child with subjects he finds difficult?
- Is my child trying as hard as he can?
- Does my child participate in class discussions and activities?
- Is my child in different classes or groups for different subjects? Which ones? How are the groups determined?
- How well does my child get along with others?
- Have you noticed changes in the way my child acts? For example, have you noticed squinting, tiredness, or moodiness that might be a sign of physical or other problems?
- What kinds of tests do you give? What do the tests show about my child's progress? How does my child handle taking tests?

Q. *What if our school doesn't schedule parent-teacher conferences?*

A. Whether your child is in elementary, middle, or secondary school, parent-teacher conferences are important. If your school does not schedule regular conferences, you can request them. To set up an appointment, make a phone call or e-mail a quick note to the teacher and let him or her know you'd like to meet.

Q. *What if the teacher says my child is having a problem at school or there is something I'm concerned about?*

A. Parent-teacher conferences are a good time to discuss any difficulties (either academic or behavioral) a child might be having at school. If problems arise, you will want to avoid angry or apologetic reactions.

If you are concerned about something your child has told you or something you've heard, state the concern without assigning blame and ask the teacher to explain. If the teacher raises an issue, ask for examples. Ask what is being done about the problem and what strategies seem to help at school.

If your student needs help with a behavioral or academic issue, you and the teacher should agree on specific plans—that you both will work on—to help your child do better. Set up a way to check on your child's progress at school and at home via phone calls, notes, or additional meetings.

Keep the conversation going.
- Starting with the parent-teacher conference, take time to establish and build rapport by, for example:
  - » When you meet, complimenting something the teacher does well.
  - » After the conference or other meetings, sending a quick thank you.
- Be sure the teacher knows the best way to reach you.
- Find out how the teacher prefers to be contacted by parents (email, text, voicemail).
- Continue to keep in touch with the teacher throughout the school year.

When a child knows parents and teachers are regularly working together, the child will see that education is a high priority, it requires commitment and effort, and that folks both at home and at school have the same expectations.

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