



Prep for Parent Teacher Conferences

By Barbara Resnick, MA, Educational Specialist/School Liaison at RNBC

Most elementary and high schools offer parent/teacher conferences in October and November. Conferences can move very quickly. Often only a short amount of time may be scheduled for each student. The meeting can be more productive and meaningful if parents spend some time preparing beforehand.

Prior to the conference, find a few minutes to talk to your child about his/her school year. Begin by asking which aspects of school are enjoyable. What are some favorite school activities? What assignment or project is he/she especially proud of? Then discuss those things that your child perceives as difficult. Ask what he/she does not like about the school day. Learn what he/she might like to change. Inquire about assignments that may have been challenging or boring. Check your child's assignment notebook and returned work to gain a better understanding of classroom expectations and how your child is meeting these demands.

It may be helpful to prepare a list of questions to help guide the time spent with your child's classroom teacher(s). Below are some suggestions:

- How is my child doing academically? Is he/she finding learning pleasurable or is it a struggle? What subjects appear to be easy? Which are problematic?
- What are you seeing behaviorally? Is my child on task, using time well, following class instructions, understanding classroom expectations?
- Does my child appear happy, comfortable, tired, sad, anxious? Are my child's needs understood?
- How does my child relate to peers? Does he/she work well with a partner or in a group? Is my child involved with peers during both structured and unstructured times? With whom does my child play? Is this other student a good fit for my child? With whom might you recommend I encourage my child to play?
- What appear to be my child's passions or talents? What enrichment opportunities focusing on these areas might you recommend? What is available in the school or the community?
- What is my child's level of independence? How can we foster more independence at home? How can we foster more independence at school?
- What is the nightly homework expectation? How long should students spend doing homework? Should I support my child more or less with homework completion?... *continue to page 2.*



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It is important to trust your child's perception and your instincts. If there are specific issues you would like to discuss, the parent/teacher conference is a good place to begin. If you have received the scores from the performance updates, which all districts are required to complete in the fall, winter and spring, this is a good time to ask questions about the results. If you have not received the scores, you can ask the teacher to share them. These scores will give you an understanding on how your child compares in reading and math to peers within their district and/or school. Depending upon what you learn, these items can be followed up by a meeting with the Principal or the school's Problem Solving Team. If your child presents with academic struggles inquire about what type of supports are available in reading, math or writing through Response to Intervention (RtI). He/she may already be receiving Tier I interventions within the classroom. You may share incidents your child has relayed to you that have made him/her anxious or sad, such as making or maintaining friends, a sense of social isolation, being bullied, or feelings of inadequacy. You might request that your child meet with the school counselor or social worker. Communicate any current stressors at home that might impact day-to-day functioning. Inquire on ways you might support the teachers or school as they work with your child.

If your child already receives services through RtI, a 504 Plan or an IEP, it is important that the teacher understands any classroom accommodations to which your child is entitled. Discuss the types of interventions used and/or the individual goals that have been developed. Be sure to meet with all professionals with whom your child works. This might include the Resource Teacher, Reading Specialist, Speech/Language Pathologist, Social Worker or Occupational Therapist. Ask the classroom teacher to invite these professionals to your conference or schedule separate meetings with each individual. IEP goal updates often are due around conference time. Use this as an opportunity to review progress towards goals and discuss next steps if changes need to be made.

If you feel your conference will take more time than allotted, ask to schedule it at an alternative day or time. Teachers view conferences as an opportunity to touch base with parents, but would prefer to conduct a lengthier discussion when more time is available. The parent/teacher conference is an excellent opportunity to learn a great deal about your child and can be beneficial to both the parent and the school.