

Parent-Teacher Conferences and Parent/Guardian Meetings

Overview

Parent-teacher conferences and meetings, including back-to-school nights or other gatherings of student guardians, provide opportunities for educators to build relationships with parents and families. They also provide an opportunity to communicate school and classroom-related updates and other information about student performance. The COVID-19 pandemic has made it particularly challenging to use traditional methods of relationship-building and communication as schools grapple with ensuring safety during in-person events and engaging parents in a virtual setting.

Considerations and Solutions

The COVID-19 pandemic requires that educators build on best practices that strengthen home-school relationships and communication. These practices include student-centered conversations, flexibility, and cultural competency. Given the current public health crisis, here are some additional factors to consider.

In-Person Parent-Teacher Conferences and Meetings

- Safety Protocols
 - Ensure there is enough space for social distancing.
 - Set up common locations and classrooms to support social distancing (visual prompts, remove seating, traffic flow patterns, etc.).
 - Make masks mandatory and provide masks for those who do not have one.
 - Create hand sanitizer stations.
 - Check temperatures of attendees.
 - Consider outdoor space vs. indoor space.
 - Require sick attendees to stay home.
 - Establish protocols to conduct deep-cleaning before and after the event.
- Scheduling
 - Consider hosting multiple Back-to-School events to reduce the number of attendees.
 - Create a pre-recorded Back-to-School Night video for families who cannot attend.
- Needs of Families
 - Provide childcare that follows recommended CDC [guidelines](#).
 - Points to consider
 - Group size
 - Overall safety protocols
 - Individual activities so that children don't have to share supplies
 - Indoor vs. outdoor space

- Collaboration with community-based organizations that can support child to adult ratios
 - Translate documents for families or provide on-site translation services.
 - Encourage educators to have more expansive conversations with parents that extend beyond academics to deepen understanding of the needs of families, including questions about technology and connectivity.
 - Provide families with information related to the delivery of special education services, 504 plans, wraparound supports, and mental health.
- Relationship Building
 - Ask parents/guardians about their well-being and needs.
 - Listen for key phrases that may indicate a need for assistance like, “staying temporarily”, “staying in someone else’s home”, or “in transition.”
 - If applicable, ask if the family has been able to access school meals.
 - Have a list of resources ready (nutrition assistance, mental health services, housing assistance, etc.) or make note of needs and follow-up with the appropriate referrals.
 - Seek input about the child (observations, highlights, areas of need, etc.).
 - Have asset-based conversations that focus on how the child is developing and progressing.
 - Provide your contact information (email, Google voice, etc.).
 - Share how the school is currently supporting families.

Virtual Parent-Teacher Conferences and Meetings

- Technology
 - Consider parent/guardian access to technology and the internet.
 - Create a low-tech alternative for parents who don’t have accessible or reliable technology, like phone-based conversations.
 - Select popular, user-friendly technology platforms.
 - Choose a platform that parents/guardians may already be familiar with (ex. Google Meet, Zoom).
 - Provide directions for using video-conferencing platforms.
 - Practice using the interface in advance.
 - Be sure educators know how to share their screen, mute all participants, use the hand raising tool, etc.
- Scheduling
 - Offer multiple session timeslots.
 - Create a sign-up schedule.
- Needs of Families
 - Translate documents for families or provide on-site translation services.
 - Ensure that parents/guardians have copies of student IEPs and 504 plans and understand how services will be provided during meetings with teachers.

- Virtual Experience
 - Create an inviting virtual environment.
 - Have a welcome page for participants.
 - Create a virtual background.
 - Ensure your physical background is neat.
 - Use inclusive language and background signage to communicate allyship with [students of color](#), students in the [LGBTQIA+](#) community, and students with disabilities.
 - Pay attention to lighting and how you appear on screen.
 - Maintain a smile and practice eye contact by looking directly at the webcam while speaking.
 - Provide an interactive experience.
 - Ask parents/guardians questions.
 - Invite parents/guardians to share comments using the chat.
 - Use appropriate icebreakers or games.
- Relationship Building
 - Ask parents/guardians about their well-being and needs.
 - Listen for key phrases that may indicate a need for assistance like, “staying temporarily”, “staying in someone else’s home”, or “in transition.”
 - If applicable, ask if the family has been able to access school meals.
 - Have a list of resources ready (nutrition assistance, mental health services, housing assistance, etc.) or make note of needs and follow-up with the appropriate referrals.
 - Seek input about the child (observations, highlights, areas of need, etc.).
 - Have asset-based conversations that focus on how the child is developing and progressing.
 - Provide your contact information (email, Google voice, etc.).
 - Share how the school is currently supporting families.

Additional Points to Consider

- Involve families in the planning process.
- Establish relationships with parents/guardians in advance (phone calls, safe home visits, etc.).
- Provide documents in advance.