



ACPS Parent Council

Discussion to Share: Parent Teacher Conferences

A recent discussion of parent teacher conferences featured a presentation by Gerald Terrell, former Principal at a number of AC schools and currently Executive Vice President at the Core Knowledge Foundation. Mr. Terrell prefaced his remarks by emphasizing the importance of parent teacher conferences:

Empowering *all* parents to participate and engage with the teacher fully can help strengthen the schools for all.

*Each school needs to do what it can to help transform **all** parents into savvy school consumers aware of the importance of the parent teacher conference.*

The parent teacher conference is a snapshot in time – a look at how the student is doing right now. It is also, however, a real opportunity for parents to make a connection with the teacher. Greet the teacher by first name – as a peer. You are both on the same team, working together to support your student’s education.

Do not be concerned by a lack of time – if you need more time, make an appointment before you leave. Exchange contact information.

Parents should enter the room with paper and pen, prepared to ask specific questions. The following questions are offered to assist you in planning for your teacher conference. Sort through them to see which questions might be appropriate for your particular circumstances. Modify them as needed.

What seems to be the cause of my child’s grade in _____? Is the issue daily work? Test scores? Some other factor?

Does my child have the capability to be in this class? Does my child have the basic skills necessary to be successful in this class?

Does my child have the capability to do more advanced work than the other students in this class?

Does he/she ask for help in class? Does he/she appear to be paying attention in class?

Are there circumstances in the class that may be distracting him/her? (For example, does he/she sit next to a best friend?)

Is his/her work turned in on time?

Does my child follow your directions for class activities and written work?

What are your expectations for the children in your class this year?

Do your students typically have time in class to work on homework and other assignments?

Do your students get written instructions for major projects? Do they get guidelines or a rubric for how they will be graded? Are your students reminded of deadlines? How?

Do your students understand how they will be graded overall? What are the criteria for grades? What are the teacher's standards?

What might my child do to improve his/her grades and learning in your class?

What are you teaching my child this year; what is the curriculum? What can I do at home to support you and my child?

What is the homework policy? What is the maximum time my child should spend doing homework? When homework is sent home, what is the role of the parent in assisting, checking, reinforcing, etc.?

How is reading progress reported? What does it mean if reading progress is reported in stages or levels or grade levels?

Should a parent stop reading to a child after a certain age?

What are the behavior expectations for children in the classroom? Is my child following the expectations?

Are there reading or math groups in the classroom?

Is the grade level grouped for instruction?

At the end of the conference:

Indicate that you would like to make a plan for improvement, if needed. Try to determine whether the teacher is willing to participate in developing the plan and monitoring it at school. If the teacher is interested in working with you, make arrangements to meet with the teacher and your child to start developing a team plan.

If the teacher is not interested – most will be, but some may not be – you can still work out a plan. Be aware that this places limitations on follow-through at school. You will need to design the plan so it can be monitored, and the incentives rewarded, within these limitations.

Parent teacher communication is important. Pre-arranged, not spur of the moment, conferences are recommended. Question teachers in private and provide a unified front to the student.

Finally: regular, punctual attendance aids student achievement.