

Educator Reflection— Parent Interviews

One way to establish good communication with families and parents is to think about the conversations that you have with parents during conferences, home visits, “back-to-school” nights, and other interactions. The list below is a checklist of sorts, with issues to think about in preparing for the conversation and conducting the actual discussion.

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

- » **Does the meeting time allow working parents to attend?**
- » **Is the meeting in conflict with religious or cultural events in the community?**
- » **Have I invited the parent to send a representative, such as an older child, if the parent is unable to attend the interview?**
- » **Have I telephoned those people for whom it would be more common to convey messages orally?**
- » **Have I invited translators and cultural interpreters?**
(Cultural interpreters are people who are familiar with the official and unofficial cultures of the school and the cultures of the home. Cultures here include the meanings, values, and practices that are common not only to the ethnic group from which the parent comes but also to their social class.)
- » **Do I attempt to hold some meetings with parents in the school and others in community buildings (i.e., community centers or recreational rooms of apartment buildings).**
- » **Have I ensured that the doors of the building are unlocked so that parents can enter?**
- » **Have I learned the correct last name and pronunciation of the parent’s name?**
- » **Do I have several examples of the students’ work on hand?**
- » **Have I placed signs in appropriate languages, or appointed guides to escort parents to my room?**
- » **Have support staff been made aware that members of the community will be in the school?**

AT THE INTERVIEW

- » **How specific and candid am I in giving a parent information about her child’s performance?**
- » **Do I believe in the student’s ability to learn?**

- » **Am I conveying that confidence to the parent?**
- » **How clear am I at explaining what I am attempting to do in class?**
- » **Am I using the opportunity to learn about the parent's hopes for his/her child?**
- » **Am I using parents' comments to rethink my teaching strategies?**
- » **Am I giving the parent a chance to ask questions?**
- » **Am I listening/Am I paraphrasing and giving back to the parent my understanding of what is being said?**
- » **Am I allowing time for the parent whose mother tongue is not English, or who speaks a variety of English different from mine, to convey her meaning?**
- » **Am I noting the parent's non-verbal cues?**
- » **Am I using the opportunity to learn from the parent about the strategies which work well with the student in the area of work habits and conduct?**
- » **Am I using the opportunity to discover ways in which the parent might contribute to the student's learning and the life of the school?**
- » **Am I open to the fact that the parents' economic / social reality may make it impossible for them to participate in school life in the traditional ways?**
- » **Am I using the occasion to provide a parent with more information about the school and about their rights as parents, in order to empower them to participate significantly in the life of the school?**
- » **Am I inviting parents to express their expectations of the school?**
- » **Am I inviting a parent to express dissatisfactions and explore conflicts which he or she has experienced with the school?**
- » **Am I using the opportunity to explain the school's race relations policy to parents from all cultural and racial backgrounds?**

Irene McGinty and Noni Mendoza-Reis, *Towards Equity: A Guide for Teaching and Learning in a Multicultural Society: Classroom Applications*. (Sacramento: California Department of Education, 1998), 1105-1106.

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