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–Opportunities and Challenges of Parent-Teacher Conferences–

How many opportunities do educators and families have for face-to-face discussions? Unfortunately, it usually only occurs a few times over nine months. Some school districts schedule spring parent-teacher conferences. If your school district does not, ask to set one up. Then consider how both families and educators can make the most of these interactions.

First, parents can talk with their child before the conference (whether or not the child attends the conference) to learn what their child likes about school, teachers, and the classroom curriculum. Would their child like things to be different? Does the child have any specific concerns about schoolwork or relationships with classmates?

Second, we can ask our children to complete their own "report cards." As a teacher, I wanted my students to increase their self-evaluation skills and not rely only on adults' opinions. At first, I thought all the students would give themselves the highest marks possible. However, students were consistently honest about their strengths and areas they wanted to improve. The student-completed report card can be discussed alongside the teacher's report card. As educators or parents, we need to respect and value children's perceptions.

Third, it's important for parents to share the strategies that work at home with their child's teacher, so they could also be used at school. And before the parent-teacher conference, prioritize the topics and questions to be covered. If, at the end of the conference, you still have questions and/or if time ran out to cover everything, schedule a second meeting. Ongoing communication will benefit your child!

Identify your vision: What do you want to accomplish during the parent-teacher conference?

Use your voice: Speak about the student's strengths and your high expectations.

Work together: Honor the spirit of partnership. See the Harvard Family Research Project, <http://www.hfrp.org>, search for parent-teacher conferences.

Please let me know if you're interested in one of my presentations and/or customized consulting and coaching.

What we anticipate, determines what we find!
Charmaine Thaner