

to improve urban school-family partnership

Tool Introductory parent-teacher conference

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Introductory parent-teacher conference

What?

Arrange to meet the parents (or other adult caregivers) of each pupil or student individually early in the school year. This will create the basis for a reciprocal relationship between teacher and parent in both primary and secondary education.

Why?

An introductory meeting allows teachers and parents to get to know each other so that they can guide and coach the pupil/student better. It also ensures that teachers and parents do not meet each other for the first time if problems occur.

How?

Discussion points

Decide on the key discussion points with the teaching staff. These may differ depending on the student's age. Ensure a balanced and focused conversation, and avoid making it feel like an interrogation. Discussion points may include:

- ▶ background and development of the pupil/student (at home, at school and outside school)
- ▶ expectations of parents, teacher and student
- ▶ any topics proposed by parents and pupils/students
- ▶ interests and talents of the student
- ▶ alignment of student guidance at home and at school
- ▶ agreement about communication between teacher and parents (with both parents in case of divorced parents)
- ▶ the position and role of the student in this contact

Manner of conversation

The aim of the introductory meeting is to provide the basis for cooperation between teacher and parent. Therefore it is important that:

- ▶ the tone and message of the school is positive, so that parents experience the meeting as getting to know the teacher and not as control by the teacher
- ▶ parents of all students are invited, also if everything seems to be going well with the student
- ▶ the student is present so that his or her perspective is heard
- ▶ there is an exchange of information and teacher, parent and student have an active role in the conversation

Preparation

- ▶ decide on the discussion points and practise them in a roleplay
- ▶ invite parents early in the school year and welcome them and their child warmly at school.

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www.rotterdamuas.com/toolbox

Variation

Home visit

The introductory conference can also take place at the student's home. The parents may be more comfortable hosting the meeting and a home visit may increase positive attitudes towards school. These visits help teachers demonstrate their interest in students' families and allow them to form a better picture of the student's background and environment. However, home visits are more time consuming. Not all teachers feel at ease visiting parents at their homes, and some parents may feel threatened that teachers want to meddle in the care and upbringing of their children.

Language assistance

The introductory conference can give teachers insight in the support parents can offer their child in their education, for example, in language development (lower grades in primary school). Observe parent-child interaction and ask parents (respectfully) about their own education and school experiences. Discuss how you would like to cooperate with parents on language (for example, in weekly walk-in activities in the classroom) and how you could support the parents.

Introductory conference after school activities

This introductory conference is also important for staff in after school child care and after school activities, such as sports and cultural (music, dance) clubs. Focus on the interests and competencies of the child, not on deficiencies. Discuss mutual expectations (e.g. parents attending sports matches or dance performances, and showing interest in these activities at home) and agree on how contact will be maintained.

Justification

Mariëtte Lusse at Rotterdam University of Applied Science, the Netherlands has conducted extensive PhD research into the parent-teacher introductory conference. The introductory parent-teacher conference was studied in five secondary schools (including schools for students with learning disabilities) in Rotterdam. 97% of the parents attended these introductory conferences. These parents were more satisfied about their relationship with the school, the information provided by the school, and felt more invited by their child to participate in their school life than parents who attended a regular PTA meeting.

The language version of the introductory conference was developed in ongoing PhD research on how to facilitate low-literate parents in guiding their child in language development by Martine van der Pluijm, Rotterdam University of Applied Science, the Netherlands.

Read more?

Lusse, M. (2013). A Matter of Confidence. Design based research on the improvement of school-parent contact in urban pre-vocational education to prevent school drop-out Rotterdam: Hogeschool Rotterdam Uitgeverij.

Several articles in English are being developed. There will be a notification in the toolbox (www.hr.nl/toolbox) when the articles are published.

Factors for success

in well-organised parent-teacher introductory conferences are

Make CONTACT between school and parents

- 1 ✓ ensure positive contact at an early stage
- 2 ✓ gain insight into the child's life at home, at school and outside school
- 3 ✓ meet the parents (or other adult caregiver) of each child under your responsibility

COOPERATE between school, parents and students

- 4 ✓ ensure the pupil/student is present and offer him/her a clear role
- 5 ✓ maintain dialogue and exchange of information with parents
- 6 ✓ focus on the parents' view of his or her child and on how the parents can contribute to the development of the child
- 7 ✓ focus on the positive (i.e. what the student likes and is good at)

Support the student in his/her FUTURE CAREER PROSPECTS

- 8 ✓ discuss hobbies, interests, talents of the pupil/student
- 9 ✓ make agreements about how to maintain contact with the parents
- 10 ✓ discuss disappointments and redirect these to a new perspective

