

Suggestions for Meeting With School Staff

Parents have a right to be fully informed and involved in making decisions about their children's education.

- ▶ It is most beneficial when parents and school representatives work together to ensure that students get a good education and have their needs appropriately addressed.
- ▶ To help make that possible, it can be useful for parents to touch base with their children's teachers and introduce themselves informally at the beginning of the school year. Establishing a positive, friendly relationship will have meaningful benefits for everyone.
- ▶ Working together also sometimes requires formal meetings of parents and school staff, and it can sometimes involve meeting with other professionals and specialists, as well.

Meetings are often very helpful. They can allow parents and relevant education personnel to:

- ▶ get to know one another and build stronger relationships.
- ▶ talk about your child's strengths, learning preferences, and areas for growth and development.
- ▶ discuss your child's progress in school.
- ▶ plan how to maximize your child's success.
- ▶ prepare your child for a transition to a new class or school.
- ▶ resolve any issues or concerns, always with the best interests of your child the priority.

Although they can be useful, meetings can also be intimidating.

Many parents feel nervous when they are meeting with professionals – especially about a subject as important as their child's education!

The following are a few tips to help reduce any uncertainty you might feel about meetings with school staff.

Before the Meeting

- ▶ **Be clear about the purpose of the meeting.**
 - If you ask for a meeting, explain why you want it. That will help ensure the right people attend the meeting. It will also help everyone bring information and materials needed to make the discussions most useful.
 - If someone else has organized the meeting, you can ask: What is the purpose of the meeting? Is there an agenda? What decisions will be made? Do I need to bring any specific information with me?
- ▶ **Feel free to invite someone to come along to support you – perhaps a family member or someone from your community. Sometimes it helps to “have a second set of ears.”**
 - If you do bring someone along, let them know the purpose of the meeting and how they can help you.
- ▶ **Make a list of any questions you have. It is very easy to forget things during a meeting. Bringing notes can help you stay focused on what you want to know.**
- ▶ **Ask in advance who will be attending the meeting and their roles.**
- ▶ **If possible, have both parents attend meetings with school representatives, if relevant for your family. Don't be afraid to ask to meet at a time that is convenient for everyone.**

During the Meeting

- ▶ **Make sure you understand all of the information presented.**
 - Don't hesitate to ask questions. The purpose of the meeting is to inform you about your child's learning.
 - You should not be expected to understand educational jargon. If people are using unfamiliar terms, do not feel embarrassed to ask what the terms mean.
- ▶ **Try to have patience, but be assertive and firm about what you think. You do not have to agree with what is being proposed. You know your child best. What you have to say is important.**
- ▶ **Seek solutions to challenges. Do not focus on what you don't want; focus on what you do want.**
- ▶ **Review any decisions made before leaving the meeting.**
 - What are the next steps? Who is responsible for any required follow-up?

- ▶ **Do not agree to anything you are not sure about.**
 - Take extra time if you need it. Agree to meet again, if necessary.
 - Do not feel rushed. Make sure you feel ready before signing any documents.
- ▶ **If someone else has taken minutes of the meeting, ask for a copy.**
- ▶ **Take your own notes, or ask someone to come with you to help take notes.**
- ▶ **Do not hesitate to ask about the school's privacy policy and procedures if you have questions. You have a right to expect that your family's personal information will be kept confidential.**

After the Meeting

- ▶ **Think about whether you are satisfied with the information you received and any decisions made.**
 - Check how you are feeling. If you are not feeling good after the meeting, try talking to a support person about your uncertainties or concerns.
 - Follow up to get more information if that will be helpful.
- ▶ **Review your notes of the meeting.**
 - If there is anything you don't understand, call someone who was at the meeting and ask them to explain it again.
 - If you are not sure what to expect next, call and ask for clarification.
- ▶ **Send an email to the people who were at the meeting.**
 - Describe your understanding of the priority issues and next steps.
 - Outline what decisions you believe were made.
 - State who you think is responsible for follow-up.
 - Keep a copy of the email.
 - Get help from a support person to assist you with follow-up if it will make you more comfortable.

Most importantly: ask as many questions as needed – before, during, and after the meeting. Make sure you have adequate information. And remember ... agree to decisions only when you feel ready to do so.

